Using A Thousand Splendid Suns and Remember The Titans for a discussion of gender equality and racism in an ESL classroom

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Abstract

This essay’s aim is to show how literature and film can be used in teaching English as a second language. The primary source material used in this essay is the novel, *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the motion picture *Remember the Titans*. The starting point and basis of this essay is how the chosen materials can be used in an ESL classroom raising issues such as gender equality and racism by using a Content-Based and Multicultural approach. Moreover it is a discussion of the importance of embedding the democratic values expressed in the Swedish school’s curriculum in classroom teaching and how this can be done by using literature and film. The themes discussed are gender equality and racism. This essay concludes that it is possible to teach ESL and at the same time embed basic democratic values by using Content-Based and multicultural approach to teaching.
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1. Introduction

The Swedish school system aims to do many things and has many goals. The most important mission that schools in Sweden have is to create functioning, contributing and democratic members of society. Swedish school’s set of democratic values are to be embedded in the classroom teaching and they are:

- The inviolability of human life
- The freedom and integrity of all individuals
- The equality of all humans
- Equality between women and men
- Solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (lgr11, 31)

Today’s multicultural society has its problems and difficulties that Swedish schools might encounter. Aspects of society such as segregation, marginalization, racism and inequality between the genders are all mirrored in school. Therefore they are of great importance for all teachers and need to be highlighted in education. It is the teacher’s responsibility to promote gender equality and the equality of all humans in order for students to become functioning democratic citizens in a democratic society.

Furthermore the Swedish school’s curriculum articulates goals concerning knowledge and abilities that students are expected to acquire during their time in school. These are some of the abilities that are to be acquired in the subject of English in Swedish upper secondary school:

- Be able, in different contexts, to initiate and actively participate in oral communication of varying types and using the English language flexibly and effectively in both formal and informal contexts
- Be able to provide information orally in a structured way
- Be able to read literature from different eras and different genres and to be able, in reading, to reflect on textual contents and form from different perspectives
- Be familiar with developments in one or more areas as politics, society, religion, literature, film, art or music in an English speaking country (lgr11)
Thus, the purpose of this essay is to discuss the importance of gender equality and racism and embedding basic democratic values in teaching as well as to give examples of how this can be done in an ESL-classroom through multicultural- and content-based teaching by using fiction and film. The primary sources that will be analyzed are *A Thousand Splendid Suns* by Khaled Hosseini and the motion picture *Remember The Titans* which is based on a screenplay written by Gregory Allen Howard and directed by Boaz Yakin.

### 1.1 Literature Overview

*A Thousand Splendid Suns* is written by the bestselling author Khaled Hosseini, who was born in Kabul, Afghanistan and moved to the United States in 1980. The novel is written in relatively simple English which makes it straightforward and able to attract a diverse range of readers. However it contains many Farsi words that some readers may find troublesome.

The novel is set in Afghanistan, initially in the 1970s and ending in the early 21st century. The main characters of the story are two Afghan women named Mariam and Laila. Mariam is an illiterate woman pushed into the periphery of society for being a harami, a child born outside the sanctity of marriage. She struggles to find her own identity and to take control of her own life. Laila, who is much younger than Mariam is thrown into a life she never expected because of the ever-changing political and religious landscape of Afghanistan. War and a society where women have very little value brought them together thus begins a long and deep friendship between them.

The film *Remember the Titans* was directed by Boaz Yakin and based on a screenplay written by Gregory Allen Howard. It is a story about the Titans, a high school football team in 1970’s Virginia. It is a vivid depiction of that time’s racial prejudice and how the team overcomes the prejudice enforced by a segregated society. The movie portrays an important era in United States history, a time where segregation had to make way for integration between white and black people. Moreover, the story is about friendship, struggle and brotherly love in a segregated society where the color of a person’s skin created great boundaries between people.

The main characters of the movie are the African American coach Herman Boone, his counterpart the white coach Bill Yoast. They are both bound by the rules of society which initially made their relationship a power struggle; however they are later on brought together by their love for the game and the will to win against all odds. Aside from the two coaches there are two other main characters, Julius Campbell, a black teenager and Gerry Bertier his white counterpart in the sense that they are both born leaders. Their relationship mirrors the
race issue of that time which was presupposed ideas of the antagonist. This meaning the unwillingness to get to know the “other side” and letting go of the presupposed ideas they both had about each other despite the fact that they are very much alike. However after Julius, Gerry, the coaches and the rest of the team confront their own prejudices, they see that they are more similar than they have been told all their lives. Friendship flourish, games are won and brotherly love becomes a lifelong bond for the team, the Titans.

The reason for choosing *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and *Remember the Titans* as the objects of study in this essay is that they both bring to light the three themes discussed in this essay which are gender inequality, racism and alienation. *A Thousand Splendid Suns* is a novel that portrays the situation of women in a patriarchal society. It tells the story of how women are marginalized, abused and sentenced to a life in the periphery of a society where men rule and women are ruled. The movie *Remember the Titans*, on the other hand, portrays a society where instead the color of one’s skin is the main reason for marginalization. It is an institutionalized oppression that is built into the system of the society. Instead of men oppressing women whites are oppressing blacks. Furthermore it is the result of marginalization that brings the two primary sources together, which is alienation. Wherever there is an oppressor and an oppressed there is also alienation. It is an inevitable result of marginalization of any group to also alienate them. Thus the two in combination make a great starting point for the main themes of this essay: gender inequality, racism and finally alienation.

Finally, the use of a novel and a movie are purely pedagogical for it creates an opportunity to practice both reading and listening. It also creates an opportunity for discussion in the classroom because they bring to light themes that are important in any multicultural society which are racism, gender inequality and most importantly alienation. They also provide content that creates possibilities for the teacher to work with content-based and multicultural teaching.

### 2. Method

In this essay two methods will be advocated, they are the content-based and multicultural approach to teaching. The multicultural & content-based approach to teaching share ideas, thus it is inevitable to create a constructive atmosphere of learning if one does not
combine the two approaches, at least not in a hetero-cultural classroom that houses many different cultures and individuals. Multicultural teaching does this exactly for it concerns teaching in a context that houses many different cultures. This is consequently the reality of many, if not most, of the world’s countries as borders are fading and the world is becoming more and more like one single place.

The content based approach to teaching is useful because it creates opportunity for teachers to use fiction and even, in this case, motion pictures. The reason for that is that the content-based approach could be explained as “learning about something, rather than learning about language” according to Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada, *How languages are learned* (67). Students are presented with a subject matter from fiction which in turn makes it easier for them to make a real life connection.

2.1 Multicultural teaching

Multicultural teaching is, according to Lucia Buttaro, a pedagogical way to help students develop sensitivity to the many and diverse cultures, heritages and backgrounds and to help them create a personal conception of who they are themselves. Thus making it to a matter of acceptance of what differentiate us in order to grow as persons (15). Understanding and accepting others is a vital part of education and the major goal of multicultural teaching is, aside from understanding and accepting the differences among people, to actually understand knowledge as a social construction.

The main goal with multicultural teaching is that by learning from each other we can grow as human beings and the key to achieve this goal is by communication and interaction that take place in the social processes between people.

2.2 Content-based teaching

Content-based teaching according to Patsy M. Lightbown and Nina Spada, refers to second language programs where the organization of lessons are based around a subject matter rather than language points (197). Language points refer to traditional ways of teaching ESL such as working only with grammar and writing. The content based approach to teaching seeks to create a genuine need and motivation among students to acquire language and communicate in order to comprehend and understand the content (159).

Lightbown and Spada describe the content based instruction methods as a “two for one” approach to teaching for it creates an opportunity for language to be learned by teaching subject matter via interaction. It is the idea that language can be learned through, not by
learning about language itself, but through interaction with each other using specific content (155).

3. Theory

3.1 Sociocultural perspective
A view of knowledge as something that is created between people and consequently something to be achieved through communication is crucial to this essay. Roger Säljö’s discussion that the language could be viewed as an intellectual tool that is used to gain knowledge (30) strengthens the importance of having a communicative approach to teaching. Furthermore it vitalizes the idea and importance of acquiring a language in order to learn content.

Roger Säljö argues that the socio-cultural perspective (226) brings forward the student’s own experiences to light in the classroom. He means that the fundamental attribute that humans have is their ability to communicate and find meaning in what they hear, see and do. This is something that Lucia Buttaro stresses as well by saying, “We need to see the cultural experiences of students as valid and valuable connectors to bridge the gap between what students already know and what we would like them to learn” (16) it is therefore fundamentally important to use these attributes as a teacher in the classroom and to do so in a way that is meaningful and leaves an opportunity for the student’s to use their own experiences.

3.2 Gender Equality & feminism

According to Marilyn Friedman teaching feminism is, or should be one of the components when having a multicultural approach to teaching (61). The reason for her argument is that multicultural teaching has two aims; the first is to promote diversity and appreciation of other cultures then the one of the majority in teaching and the second being to challenge systems that enhance subordination and oppression.

Furthermore, Bell Hooks argues that by understanding in what way male domination and sexism is expressed in everyday life, an awareness is created of how women are
victimized, exploited and in many cases even oppressed (7) thus creating an awareness of feminism by challenging the patriarchal system is a concern of everyone, not only teachers.

3.3 White privilege & racism

Robert William Jensen is professor of journalism at the University of Texas at the Austin College of Communication and a well-known spokesman on the subject of racism. In his book The heart of whiteness, confronting race, racism and white privilege he discusses the topics of racism, white privilege and white supremacy.

Jensen argues that the norm in today’s western society is whiteness and that this fact makes it a racist a society, a supremacist society for it excludes all that is not white. Furthermore Jensen argues that just by being white you are by definition racist, even if you do not consider yourself a racist, hate non-white people or take part in any bigotry, you still benefit from a society that benefits white people more than others. Being racist is therefore according to Jensen is to not recognize this fact. In a hierarchy that is defined by color being white automatically puts you on top whereas being black puts you on the bottom. Being racist is therefore, according to Jensen, not only about hating black people or having the belief that being white is far better than being black. Racism is not acknowledging the fact that being white you are privileged and others unprivileged (56).

According to Jensen racism can be distinguished from plain prejudice in terms of power where prejudice in this sense could be described as a negative or hostile attitude toward a specific group that is based on some shared trait. This mere prejudice can only become racism when a group that has the power to take from another group or groups rights that they have in a systematical manner (16). This way of viewing racism is very similar to what took place in Nazi Germany and other European countries during the nineteen thirties where people’s basic rights were systematically taken away.

Also, Jensen argues that race, as a biological concept is not more than a fiction, however if it is viewed as a social concept it is indeed very real. It is used as a mean to include as well as to exclude people from different social groups. Furthermore the concept of race is socially and historically created which makes the meaning of it completely dynamic (16-17). The concept of race therefore means whatever is decided that it should mean by the individuals or group in power position in the western world, and they are predominantly white. The norm is thereby set by those in power and in a western context this norm is set by white people.
4. Analysis

In this section of the essay an analysis of the primary sources will be presented. The primary sources are the novel *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and the motion picture *Remember the Titans*. The novel will be analyzed from a feminist point of view to illuminate topics such as the oppression and alienation of women. The motion picture is analyzed to illuminate topics such as racism and white supremacy.

4.1 Gender inequality and oppression in A Thousand Splendid Suns

Firstly and most importantly this novel portrays the strength of women and their struggles in a society that views them as second class citizens. Furthermore, it is precisely the struggles and heartaches of a society in turmoil that brings the two main characters, Mariam and Laila, together.

Inequality between genders is portrayed lucidly in a scene where Mariam has a discussion with Rasheed about him marrying Laila after the tragic loss of her family. Mariam who has been married to Rasheed for more than twenty years does not want him to take another wife and tries to convince him not to marry Laila for fear of being alienated which is something she had been the larger parts of her life being a *harami*. In this scene they have a discussion about the matter, after Rasheed expresses his plans to Mariam she says, “I…I don’t want this” with Rasheed replying, “It’s not your decision. It’s hers and mine”. This shows that Mariam does not have a say in this matter and also, as the discussion continues, that neither did Laila. After arguing some more Rasheed finally ends the discussion by saying:

“I knew you wouldn’t take this well. I don’t really blame you. But this is for the best. You’ll see. Think of it this way, Mariam. I’m giving you help around the house and her a sanctuary a home and a husband. These days, times being what they are, a woman needs a husband. Haven’t you noticed all the widows sleeping on the streets? They would kill for this chance. In fact, this is…Well, I’d say this is downright charitable of me.” (192-93)

This scene shows both how easily a man, such as Rasheed, could take advantage of Laila’s situation and the reasons why he can do so. Rasheed speaks of widows sleeping in the streets
and brothels where business is booming. This shows to what extent a woman needs a man to survive in this society. Furthermore it shows the lack of options a woman has got in a patriarchal society where she is viewed as nothing more than someone who takes care of the cleaning and cooking in the household. Having a profession or working to support yourself is not an option for women in this society.

Another scene that portrays the inequality between genders in the novel is the scene where Mariam meets the Taliban judge to have her trial after killing Rasheed to save Laila from a certain death to Rasheed’s hands. Mariam did not commit murder for it is in defense of herself and Laila from their raging, abusive husband. In the room where the “trial” takes place there is the judge, an old and tired man, and a younger man. Mariam declines her right to witnesses for the only witness was Laila, another woman, and has no legal counseling as well as there is no cross examining of evidence and no appeals. Thus Mariam is left all alone to receive her verdict when the judge says:

“I believe you when say that your husband was a man of disagreeable temperament [...] I am tired, and I want to be merciful. I want to forgive you. But when God summons me and says, but it wasn’t for you to forgive, mullah, what shall I say?”

(325)

This scene speaks of the inequalities women suffer even before a court of law fueled, in this case, by religious beliefs. Mariam’s trial only took fifteen minutes and she was not entitled to the most basic rights. She was a woman that had killed a man and nothing else. Obvious facts such as the act being committed in self-defense and that her husband had abused her for twenty seven years was not even considered. The scene is a lucid representation of what the systematic oppression of women in a patriarchal society looks like. In the same scene the younger one turns to Mariam and says:

“I wonder, God has made us differently, you women and us men. Our brains are different. You are not able to think like we can. Western doctors and their science have proven this. This is why we require only one male witness but two female ones.” (324)

This is a dramatic example of how in this specific case Mariam is being victimized and oppressed in the patriarchal society which is the Taliban’s Afghanistan. The Taliban man actually believed that women and men were different to an extent that women could not be
trusted in court and that their voices were of less value than a man’s. According to Amnesty International the Taliban Regime committed terrible violations of the human rights during their rule of Afghanistan. Furthermore according to Amnesty International the Taliban regime systematically targeted women by enforcing rules and laws that oppressed women in the country. Laws such as girls not being allowed to go to school or for women to work outside the home, wearing make-up and not being allowed to make themselves visible from the windows of their home (2-4).

Another example from this scene is when Mariam is asked if she admits to killing Rasheed she says, “I admit to what I did brother [...] but if I hadn’t, he would have killed her, he was strangling her” and one of the men answers, “so you say. But, then, women swear to all sorts of things all the time” (327). The man’s words strengthens the conclusion that women in Afghanistan are marginalized and viewed as being different to an extent that is both repulsive and inhuman.

What happened to Mariam in that courtroom is an apparent example of the cornerstone in any patriarchal society, which is the belief that women and men are different.

In a western society the subordination of women is expressed, according to Marilyn Friedman, by what she calls care ethics, which are the values that are traditionally associated with women, such as caring and nurturing. These values, she argues, enhances the conceived idea of what is viewed as being the social role of women (57). Women are in this sense different from men because they have attributes that make them socially bound to specific roles such as mothers and housewives.

Bell Hook’s discussion on the importance of raising consciousness on feminism she highlights the weight of learning about patriarchy as a system of domination and how it became institutionalized and how it is perpetuated and maintained (27). This is expressed throughout large parts of the novel and especially in the part where the Taliban come to power in Afghanistan. Women could no longer move freely and had to have a male relative with them when leaving the house. In addition it is expressed even before the Taliban came to power how the women felt about the patriarchal and oppressive society of Afghanistan. The Taliban rule meant that the situation for women worsened and the laws that were enforced by the Taliban made the marginalization of women a fact. However women were marginalized before the Taliban rule and this is portrayed in what Mariam’s mother tells her on several occasions, “Like a compass needle that points north, a man’s accusing finger always finds a woman. Always. You remember that, Mariam.” (323) which shows that the inequalities that women suffer have been going on for generations.
4.2 White Supremacy in \textit{Remember the Titans}

The matter of race is of great interest for it is often by race that people are categorized and given a brand and attributes attached to their race like in the case of women that have been described above.

In \textit{Remember the Titans} racism is portrayed vividly and in a time of turmoil and change. One scene that portrays this is when the members of the team are celebrating that they had won a game. In this scene three members of the team are walking in front of the others when Ronnie “sunshine” Bass, a white team member, invites two black team members, Petey Jones and Earl Portier into a bar to continue celebrating. The two black boys look the bar and understand right away that they will not be welcome there and try to explain to Ronnie, who is from San Francisco, that this is Virginia and that it will not be such a good idea to walk in to a bar in that neighborhood. Ronnie however manages to talk them into walking in whereas the owner of the bar comes up to them right away and says, “We’re full tonight, boys”, Ronnie answers, obviously chocked, “What?! There’s tables all over the place man! What are you talking about?” the owner then looks at Ronnie, never at the other two, and says:

“Well, this is my establishment and I reserve the right to refuse to serve anybody.
Yeah, that means you too hippie boy. Now, if ya’ll want something to eat you can take these boys out back and pick it up from the kitchen”.

One has to keep in mind that this happened during a time where black people were being integrated into the white society and thus it was not a de facto segregation in society but rather the form of segregation expressed in the form of “mere” racism. This meaning that the segregation no longer was official but rather unofficial. People were no longer segregated by law but the ideas and prejudice that before helped to uphold the segregation continued.
However the type of racism expressed by the owner of the bar speaks of a society that does systematically segregate another social group even despite the fact that it was forbidden to do so according to law. Furthermore this scene speaks of the frustration that comes with the challenging of a well anchored norm such as whiteness which is something Monika I. Hogan illustrates thusly:
“I believe that the category whiteness derives its exclusionary power by projecting the associations that our culture finds threatening […] Since we are all embodied, mortal, and historically situated, there is no way to actually achieve the pure, uncontaminated status attached to whiteness.” (355)

The white norm is in this sense unachievable and also destructive in the way it tends to exclude rather than include others. Robert Jensen discusses anger but from a different perspective saying that white people do need anger (67). However, it is not the kind of anger that helps maintain a white supremacist society but a righteous anger that helps shed people’s fears and let go of their unproductive guilt. An anger rooted in a will to do right and create a righteous society where no one is marginalized (58). This anger is expressed throughout the whole film along with the kind of anger that helps maintain the injustice of a supremacist society. People’s unwillingness to accept that black people were being integrated into society and especially when the, initially, all white team received the news of the integration of the team and that the new coach was black as well. Furthermore it was not only the team but almost all the white population in town wanted to boycott the team.

A scene five minutes into the motion picture that clearly portrays how deeply rooted the racism was and also the anger it generates when challenged is when coach Boone meets coach Yoast, assistant coach Tyrell, Bertier and some of the white team members. The first thing one hears when they enter the room where Boone was waiting is Bertier talking to Coach Tyrell saying, “I never want to play with those animals”. The scene starts by Tyrell asking who Boone was and Boone explaining to them that he was the new assistant coach. There are loud screams and chants coming from outside the school where the meeting took place because of the ongoing integration process of the school. Tyrell then responds Boone by saying, “Well, from the looks of things I’d say we’ve got all the help we need around here. Why ain’t you outside there with all your little friends hollerin?” Coach Yoast then enters the ongoing dialogue and explains that he did not hire Boone and that he is there against everyone’s will. Boone then says that he is there against his will and that he too did not ask for any of this and continues by saying, “So I guess we’re both in a situation we don’t want to be in”.

This scene is interesting mainly for two reasons. Firstly it depicts the turmoil a white supremacist society goes through, the anger and unwillingness to change the norm. In this case the norm is segregation, division of human beings. On one side there are the privileged white population and on the other the unprivileged and marginalized black population. Both
populations are forced to interact in an integration process after a decision made by white politicians after hundreds of years of segregation. Secondly, and this is something that permeates the whole film, is that people seem to react the way they do, with anger and unwillingness, in an instinctive manner. Not only the white population but also the black. Both populations show this anger even if one side is privileged and the other is not. This is made very clear in what Boone says and it shows that the people on the other side of the segregation does not want to be integrated either. Evidently this means that when the norm is challenged it is challenged both ways.

In addition this is a good example of a society that struggles with the “mere” prejudice which is the biggest obstacle in the way of overcoming racism. It is not the systematic deprivation of rights, for in most western countries of today that kind of racism does not exist. It is the latent prejudice that helps maintain a norm that excludes and alienates members of society rather than the systematic deprivation of a group’s rights as humans and citizens. Moreover one of them could not exist without the other.

5. Pedagogical focus

In this section of the essay a plan will be presented on how topics raised in the primary sources can be used to teach ESL. The base of this study has been the socio-cultural perspective and the methods Content-Based teaching and multi-cultural teaching.

The Content-Based approach to teaching could be explained as learning about something, rather than learning about language. This means that learning a language can be achieved by studying subject matter, in this case it is the novel “A Thousand Splendid Suns” and the motion picture “Remember the Titans”. The topics that has been brought to light in this essay will be the subject matter used in order to teach English.

The second method, multicultural teaching, focuses on the exchange of knowledge between human beings in a communicative manner. The main aim is to use what differentiate us as people and use it in order for learning to take place, in short to learn from each other. Furthermore it aims to undermine things that enhance the gap between us such as racism and inequality between genders thus making it harder to learn from each other.

Also, the aim of this essay has been to stress the importance of the democratic values presented in the Swedish school’s curriculum as well as teaching ESL. The democratic values presented are:
The inviolability of human life
· The freedom and integrity of all individuals
· The equality of all humans
· Equality between women and men
· Solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (Igr11, 31)

The Swedish curriculum states that one of the goals teachers are supposed to achieve with their teaching as well as teaching English as a second language is to embed basic democratic values in their teaching with the aim to make students become functioning and contributing members of society. Therefore the two methods chosen in this essay are an effective way to teach both subject matter as well as the second language, which in this case is English.

With this in mind A Thousand Splendid Suns could be used to teach English as a second language because it concerns issues such as gender inequality. It is an aspect of today’s society that is of great importance as well as being a part of the basic democratic values that are expressed in the curriculum.

The oppression of women that is portrayed in A Thousand Splendid Suns, differ from how the same inequality is embodied in real life in western countries. However the fact that women have extremely little or no stake at all in society is vividly portrayed in the novel and it could, in this sense, be used to provide the subject matter for teaching in the classroom to be discussed and worked with. In addition it provides the material and subject matter to raise topics such as feminism and also undemocratic values in society. One such example where the undemocratic structure is vividly presented in the novel, is during Mariam’s legal proceeding. The scene provides great content for discussion that could be used in teaching concerning many of the Swedish school’s democratic values such as the inviolability of human life, the equality of all humans and equality between women and men.

In a classroom situation a general discussion about inequality between genders would be the starting point for the students along with a presentation of feminism made by the teacher. The presentation would be an overview of what feminism is and historical background as well as the aims of the movement. The students would then make a mind map of things they associate with the topic before the actual discussion. The second step is the actual discussion that takes place in the classroom. The students are allowed to discuss the topic freely amongst each other. The reason behind letting the students discuss freely is to try and bring their own ideas, thoughts and experiences to light. This is one of the most important
aims of multicultural teaching to let students learn from each other and that their ideas and thoughts might be the same but also, and more importantly, that they might differ. The teacher then provides the different media, in this case the same excerpts from the novel that are used in this study, Mariam’s trial. The different media is then discussed in smaller groups whereas here the students do not discuss freely. The focus of the discussion is now these questions:

1) Is Mariam’s trial democratic or not, why/why not?
2) Is the fact that she is a woman affects the outcome of the trial?
3) Could a woman have an unfair trial in a western society today just because she is a woman?

The vividly portrayed injustice in the excerpts from the novel regarding Mariam’s trial are used here to chock the students. Oppression of women and the undemocratic inequalities that exist between genders might not be as obvious in a modern western society as they are portrayed in the novel. Here it is used as a spark to get the students to feel and think thus creating a good starting point to reproduce language in writing.

So far there has been a lot of discussion where the students do not only share thoughts and ideas but also speaking and reading English is being practiced. The final step would therefore be expressing their thoughts and ideas on the subject matter in writing, this ties it all together. The written assignment would involve writing a text on how inequality between genders is expressed in the society in which they live and compare it to how it is expressed in the novel. The students have now not only by discussing and sharing ideas with each other shed light on important issue of society but also practiced vital aspects of learning a language. This is an example of how content-based teaching as well as multicultural teaching could be implemented in a classroom situation by using the student’s own thoughts and ideas as the starting point of the assignment and letting them learn from each other as well as the different media produce language. The students are learning language by learning about something rather than learning about language itself which is the main aim of Content-based teaching. Furthermore an important topic is being discussed as well as democratic values being embedded in teaching, which is one of the main aims of multi-cultural teaching.

However, multi-cultural teaching has its challenges and downsides as well. According to Lucia Buttaro the greatest challenge of multi-cultural teaching is how we choose to view it. Whether we view that the students’ experiences or lack of them that they carry with them into the classroom is our greatest challenge (16). We can either choose to see their experiences as
an obstacle in the way of teaching or as a possible bridge that helps learning to take place. The greatest challenge therefore lies within ourselves and the way we value the experiences and differences of other people. Our experiences not being the same, since we are all unique is also an important aspect of multi-cultural teaching. Learning that we are different individuals with different cultures, views, ideas, thoughts and backgrounds helps undermine undemocratic structures in society as well as creating opportunities for learning.

By allowing students to freely discuss a subject from their own point of view, rather than information provided to them by their teacher, the students will develop their existing knowledge by analyzing each other’s ideas and thoughts.

When working with Content-Based and multicultural teaching approaches the same plan could be used when working with, not only literature, but motion pictures as well. The reason for this is that the subject matter does not have to change when using a different media whereas different media requires a different approach for example rather than reading and speaking students would have to listen and watch.

The topic that will now be raised in the classroom is racism and the subject matter is the motion picture *Remember the Titans*. In this motion picture a time of integration of the black and white communities is being portrayed and the frustration that follows the motion picture follows a football team during this integration process.

When working with this subject matter the students get to watch this motion picture and afterwards it is discussed from a racial point of view. Before watching the motion picture the teacher would present the students with analytical questions on the subject matter followed by a discussion of the actual questions. The question would be:

1) What is Racism?

2) In what way is racism expressed in the motion picture?

3) What is it that makes racism possible in the motion picture?

4) Explain who is to blame for the segregation, the white population, the black population or both?

After watching the motion picture these questions would then be discussed in smaller groups and the answers would be written down to be used in the writing task which will be to analyze a character of the student’s own choice. The analysis that the students write of their character of choice would focus on the segregation portrayed in the motion picture and how the student
thinks that character is affected by it and how he or she shows it. The student would have to give examples from the motion picture as well as refer to the questions discussed earlier.

This is done so that the starting point of any assignment is the students’ own experiences and shared knowledge. Monika L. Hogan stresses this by saying that having a multicultural and content based approach to teaching one cannot view students’ experiences as an obstacle in the way of teaching for it is in their shared individual and shared experiences that knowledge and opportunities for learning is created (33). In order to create these opportunities one should, as a teacher, aim to present students with content that stimulates their communicative attributes, which in this case is *Remember the Titans* and *A Thousand Splendid Suns* and even more importantly to have a follow up to the content used, in order to strengthen language abilities as well as embedding democratic values.

All this is possible because of the way we create text based and virtual realities through for example movies or literature and use them later on in life according to Roger Säljö (227). This meaning that by having a communicative approach to teaching and using the language as well as all the shared experiences of the participants it not only creates opportunities for learning and embedding basic democratic values with the aim to make students functioning democratic citizens. By presenting relevant content and discussing it, all of this becomes possible as well as it becomes easier for the teacher to follow the student’s development concerning language as well as how they understand the content presented and how it affects them. By having the student’s own shared experiences, thoughts and ideas on topics that are relevant to society as a whole as a starting point it becomes easier for the teacher to adapt what is taught and make it relevant to students. The teacher is, by having a multi-cultural and Content-based approach, highly involved in the thought process of the students. Since the students themselves are always the starting point of the assignments and not only what the teacher says these opportunities are created.

By having this approach to teaching a teacher is doing what the Swedish curriculum clearly states which is to create understanding among students of the differences amongst people sharing their society and also the world as a whole, and that being different should be viewed as a strength, we are all equal, and it is our obligation to strive for equality and understanding and the starting point for it all is the students themselves.
6. Conclusion

Raising the issue of inequality between genders and racism is something that every teacher should bring to light with his or her students. They are topics that in many ways summarize what the Swedish school’s curriculum says about embedding democratic values with the goal to make students become functioning and contributing members of a democratic society. These values, that every teacher is supposed to embed in their teaching, are the inviolability of human life, the freedom and integrity of all individuals, the equality of all humans, equality between women and men and finally solidarity with the weak and vulnerable (Igr11, 33).

In my opinion these democratic goals that are expressed in the Swedish curriculum are the most important to achieve as a teacher besides from teaching, in this case, the English language itself. However it is not completely correct to put it in those exact words because it should rather be that one should function as a condition for the other. This meaning that in order to embed these values in students learning they need to achieve a certain level of language skill.

The starting point of this essay has been a multicultural approach to the topics that have been brought to light such as gender inequality and racism. Furthermore the content based teaching method was presented and combined with the multicultural approach in order to create the best possible opportunity for learning the democratic values as well as language. In addition the discussion in this essay has been based on a socio-cultural perspective on knowledge and learning, which is ultimately the basis of content based teaching as well as the multicultural approach. It is of great importance in today’s society to have a multicultural approach to teaching because it is not homogenous society but in every way heterogeneous. This reality makes it vital to adapt teaching in a way that students do not feel marginalized or that their experiences and backgrounds has little stake in the classroom and society as a whole.

By using materials such as the novel A Thousand Splendid Suns, a vivid depiction of the alienation and systematic oppression of women and the movie Remember the Titans which is a vivid portrayal of racism and oppression of black people one has a good basis and content to work with in the classroom. The main idea was to use materials that provided such good content so that students can feel stimulated enough to talk about and discuss the content presented.
The focus of this essay has been how the novel and the motion picture can be used in a classroom situation and what goals can be achieved with using them. In the analysis of the novels my main focus was on how the inequality between genders and racism are expressed and how the chosen materials can be used to bring forward the students’ own experiences to light. I think that all of this could be achieved by having a socio-cultural approach to teaching which means that it is the shared experiences that in the end create knowledge and opportunities for learning. In my opinion the best way for these opportunities to be created is by discussing the content presented orally as well as analyzing it in writing. By using literature and motion picture and approach the teaching with Content-Based and multi-cultural teaching students not only practice listening, reading, speaking and writing but also important topics are being raised. Furthermore the starting point is always the students’ own experiences and shared knowledge is the starting point and catalyst. By doing so the individual and shared experiences of the students are illuminated in the classroom as well as creating the opportunity for them to learn from each other, it also becomes easier for the teacher to follow the development of the students as well as take part in their thought process and get to know them better.

Finally these arguments are strengthened by the Swedish curriculum itself for if one has a look at some of the goals that were presented earlier in this essay one realizes that they are based on verbal communication and content-understanding. Some of the goals that students are supposed to achieve language-wise at the C level in upper secondary school are:

- Be able to provide information orally in a structured way
- Be able to read literature from different eras and different genres and to be able, in reading, to reflect on textual contents and form from different perspectives
- Be familiar with developments in one or more areas as politics, society, religion, literature, film, art or music in an English speaking country

Evidently and finally it is by using the language in all its forms that these goals can be achieved which means to speak, listen and write. By having a communicative approach where everyone feels like they are participating actively in the process of learning. This is the goal with multicultural teaching and it could be done with great results by using content based methods. In conclusion literature and even movies can provide the right content in order to create opportunities for learning. In these opportunities, it is not only language that can be taught but values as well.
7. Works cited

Primary sources:


Secondary sources:


