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Cultural Content in the Widely Used ELT Method *Stepping Stones*: An Analysis of VMBO Textbooks

BA Thesis

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Preface

This year, I started the pre-master of the 'Intercultural Communication' course of study at the University of Utrecht. Prior to this, I studied 'Communications Management,' where I dealt with many different topics ranging from intercultural communication, non-verbal and verbal forms of communication, to the management of communication within companies, as well as the basics of journalism. After four years of classes and projects, I finished my Bachelor's Thesis in Sicily. During this experience, my already held conviction that the intercultural aspect of communication was of most interest to me in my research grew yet stronger. Over time, various cultures and languages have blended and played a role in many aspects of human life such as food, music, communication, business, and literature. Because of the rise of the English language, the English culture has become to play a very significant role in the world culture. This can be seen, for example, in the development of English Language Teaching (ELT) textbooks. English is used by millions of people all over the world for many different reasons, aims and occasions, within various intercultural contexts. The English language binds people from different cultures, with different first languages. In many countries, English is taught at school as a primary foreign language, adapted to the national curricula. According to Lund (2006), from the 1960s onwards, culture teaching has been intrinsically linked with foreign language teaching, and the communicative approach has gained more attention in the latter. Since the 1980s, the term *intercultural* has been used more and more extensively, especially in the discussion on the principles and procedures in foreign language education (Lund, 2006). In particular, "the term has been used in phrases like *intercultural communication*, *intercultural competence*, and *intercultural understanding"* (p. 60). Alongside with the increasing influence of intercultural communication studies, these developments, according to Lund (2006), have raised more questions about the culture content in foreign language textbooks. In the 1980s, as suggested by Stern (1983), culture was

still most commonly taught separately from language, and recent studies indicate a generic cultural layer in many ELT textbooks, as is claimed by, among others, Baker (2012). The aim of the present study is to examine the ways in which cultural aspects are integrated into contemporary ELT textbooks such as those of the fourth edition of *Stepping Stones* for VMBO (Pre- Vocational Secondary Education). This specific case study will focus on the widely-used teaching method *Stepping Stones* that will be closely analysed. Pupils should learn about English, its status in the world, and the existence of the many different varieties of English in an context that is adjusted to 21st century developments and competences.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Nowadays, learners' needs occupy a more central position in ELT than before, which is reflected, for example, in the increased importance of the communicative approach. Many methods support this approach alongside with the recognition of the importance of raising intercultural awareness: an important factor in ELT as stated in, for example, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) by the Language Policy Unit (n.d.). Pursuing intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence in class can result in two key competences which are highlighted in the latest CEFR publication: plurilingual competence and pluricultural competence. Related to these competences, and also mentioned in the CEFR publication, are sociocultural knowledge and pragmatic skills that have recently gained more attention, as students need to be prepared for real-life intercultural communication in the target language and should be made aware of the intercultural context and consequences of intercultural communication. Therefore, the CEFR has also emphasized the importance of intercultural values such as openness and tolerance for others. Alongside with the intercultural awareness and (intercultural) communicative competence, other important skills are developed through discussion of culture content such as critical analysis and problem solving (Voogt & Smith, 2010). These skills, among other things such as social and cultural skills, reflect the concept of 21st century learning, which focuses on the learners' needs and competences. These skills are also called *lifelong learning competences,* as they do not only apply to foreign language learning, but also to many other life situations. The concept of 21st century learning, and skills adjusted to the 21st century are explained in the Theoretical framework on p. 12. Although culture has been included in curricula such as described in the CEFR, suggested by the Dutch National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO), and in various frameworks for conceptualizing 21st century skills (Voogt & Pareja Roblin, 2010), previous studies point out that the cultural content in contemporary

ELT materials still frequently reflects a simplified picture of the English language in the world, the various interlocutors of English, and the cultural context involved (see, e.g., Baker 2012; Bieswanger 2008). However, this approach is in contrast with the national and European ELT curricula. This contrast between ELT materials and the ELT curricular developments is a major reason for a more accurate and critical analysis of ELT textbooks, including the investigation of the extent to which culture content is included in ELT materials and the way this has been accomplished. This, to examine the development of ELT materials adjusted to curricular developments and contemporary competences, such as the 21st century competences as described by Voogt and Pareja Roblin (2010, pp. 16-17).

On the level of VMBO, the timeframe is shorter than with other forms of secondary education in the Netherlands. Furthermore, the level of education is lower than other secondary education variants such as HAVO (Senior General Secondary Education) or VWO (Pre- University Secondary Education). These facts make it interesting to see to what extent culture has been included in ELT materials for a VMBO level of study. Together with textbook analysis that has been undertaken in the present paper, two teachers were asked for their opinion on the teaching of culture at the level of VMBO. Van den Bos provided the following answer concerning the presentation of overgeneralized culture content in ELT books: "On VMBO level, I don't really feel the urge to change their perspective" (personal communication, April 16, 2014). By contrast, Prins provided an opposite view, namely: "I would like to teach my students the kind of 'realistic' English which will help them everywhere around the world" (personal communication, May 14, 2014). Here, 'realistic' refers to the type of English that is actually used in the world, i.e. as an international language (see also the Appendix on p. 79 for the completed questionnaires). Even now, textbooks often present only very little and simplified cultural content on, among other things, different varieties of English, the learners' native culture, and culture comparisons. When culture

content is discussed in class, it frequently results in a national approach and perspective. In view of this, an international perspective or even a 'culture-free' perspective has been proposed (see, e.g., Lund 2006, pp. 36-38) to avoid overgeneralization and to create a realistic view on the English language, culture and the English varieties. This approach can prevent simplification of the role of English in the world.

Approximately a decade ago, the present author used the *Stepping Stones* method herself. At that time, it hardly included any culture-specific and sociocultural content, nor did it create an awareness of the existence of different varieties of English. In this study, the present researcher aims to demonstrate the way that *Stepping Stones* currently conveys culture in its textbooks, to examine whether this reflects recent developments in ELT, and develops competences adjusted to the 21st century.

The results of this investigation will give an answer to the following research question:

How has cultural content been included in the fourth edition of Stepping Stones textbooks for VMBO; do the cultural frameworks apply to countries only within the inner circle of English or alternatively also to those in the outer circle, expanding circle varieties, and to general intercultural values?

This research question should not lead to the expectation that the culture content included in the research materials relates to all three circles of English as explained by Kachru & Smith (2008), but only suggests areas to which included culture content could relate. This research question has been chosen because, as current methods and ELT curricula indicate, the cultural content in ELT books should prepare students for intercultural encounters and real-life intercultural communication, which makes an appropriate introduction to the existence of different varieties of English essential. Moreover, it is interesting to see in what ways and in which context cultural content has been included and discussed in this period of time. The

three circles of English, which are referred to in the research question, are explained in the

Theoretical framework (p. 9).

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

Within the context of its theoretical framework, the subject of this study will be discussed from a broad perspective. The information has been collected from previous studies in the field, so it appears relevant to narrow down the focus to the aspects that are most relevant for the present study. Various claims and study results that have been found are surveyed in this chapter, organized by different topics. These topics include: ELT methods for VMBO; national curricula as regards VMBO; developments in the field of ELT; communicative competence and intercultural awareness; textbook analysis; varieties of English; stereotyping and overgeneralization; and teachers' input and importance.

2.1 ELT methods for VMBO

The present study is based on the fourth edition of *Stepping Stones* textbooks intended for pupils of lower-vocational school. According to the official website, the *Stepping Stones* method offers "inspirational and curriculum covering material for teachers and students". These materials can be accessed both online and in books. The back-cover of the fourth edition of the book introduces the method as learner-centered and communicative. This communicative aspect has been included in 'the stones' in the textbooks, which include communicative exercises, the speech cards in the books, as well as in online materials. As compared to the previous edition, the fourth edition is supplemented with the component *Countries and Cultures.* This component contains information about countries and their peoples, but has been made available only online. In addition, as compared to previous editions, more interactive tasks have been included. The overall focus on grammar and vocabulary is also more pronounced than in previous editions. In addition, guidelines and tools designed to facilitate and improve the teaching process have been made available for teachers. This teachers' package enables teachers to collect all materials in one place, to add materials, and to link the materials to the books and the CEFR criteria (in Dutch: ERK)

explained below. What particularly stands out in the content on the website is that *Stepping Stones* positions itself as a suitable method for any student. Moreover, the method values the communicative aspect of ELT which, for example, takes the form of tasks offered within a communicative context. Throughout the books, the CEFR criteria are considered to be important, and this is also made clear on the website. The CEFR signs are noticeable throughout the *Stepping Stones* books at the end of each page, accompanied by the tasks representing the CEFR criteria. These criteria and other information about the method, as well as its relation to these criteria can be retrieved from the official *Stepping Stones* website (http://www.noordhoffuitgevers.nl/wps/portal/vo/steppingstones). One of these criteria relates to intercultural context and reads: "the student learns about the role that English plays in various international contacts". The CEFR is used for comparing language levels; the gradation is as follows: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2, where A1 indicates a starters' level and C2 an advanced proficiency level of competence.

In order to compare different ELT methods in the Netherlands, the websites of *All right![1]*, and *Up Beat[2]*, and *Next Move[3]* have been investigated. On the website of *All right!* it is indicated that the method offers similar lessons to those used by *Stepping Stones.* Moreover, in this program, the lessons and tasks are also connected to the CEFR criteria. In addition, the program is described as "an adventurous trip around the world," which seemingly refers to an international context. According to the website, the ELT method *Next Move* focuses on functional communicative skills, critical analysis, intercultural awareness raising, and providing a different view on the world. Additionally, its materials have been adjusted to the level and age of the students. As with the *Next Move* method, the *Up Beat* method highly values the 21st century approach to learning, which is illustrated in several

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[1] http://www.malmberg.nl/Voortgezet-onderwijs/Methodes/Talen/Engels/All-right onderbouw/All-Right-onderbouw.htm
[2] http://www.vo-engels.nl/vmbo-methoden/
[3] http://www.vo-engels.nl/vmbo-methoden/

videos on the website. What is made explicit in these video clips is that the 21st century educational environment is represented by a learner-based approach, rather than by a teacher-based approach. Moreover, more input and involvement of both teachers and students is required than before, and deeper reflection and self-assessment is expected on students' part. This also accounts for the cross-curricular methods currently used, as compared to those used previously. These methods include, e.g., sharing expertise and working in teams. The characters presented in the books are genuine, ordinary characters rather than celebrities only. A sentence on the website reads: "We meet people from all over the world now, so we cannot afford ourselves any cultural misunderstandings". Reflections on the culture of the speaker, as well as the comparison with other cultures, are conveyed on the website as being an integral part of the language learning process. The context where English is taught by means of the *Up Beat* and the *Next Move* methods is positioned as student-friendly, interesting, intercultural, and adjusted to the students' level. Lastly, according to the 21st century learning as described on the website of *Up Beat,* ELT should be interesting and motivating, because boredom distracts students from developing their language skills. This could be avoided by, among other aspects, including familiar characters and situations in the books and lessons, interaction in class, and providing more cultural content; students appear to have a natural curiosity for the ways in which people from other cultures live their daily lives. The concept of 21st century learning is extensively discussed by Voogt and Pareja Roblin (2010), regarding various frameworks in which social and/or cultural skills and communication skills, among other skills, are emphasized. 21st century learning is adjusted to the changing environment, especially concerning Information and Communication Technology (ICT), and aims to develop skills which are also adjusted to these environmental developments.

2.2 ELT materials

Alongside with the different methods which can be used, there are various kinds of ELT materials which are described by McKay (2003) as follows:

> Source culture materials that draw on the learners' own culture as content; target culture materials that use the culture of a country where English is spoken as a first language; International target culture materials that use a great variety of cultures in English- and non-English speaking- countries around the world. (p. 9)

As described by McKay (2003), some textbooks start with a focus on the learner's native culture before the focus shifts towards the target culture, which demonstrates a learner- rather than a teacher-centred- approach. This approach recommends an initial focus on the learner's culture, followed by a second focus on the other culture, and, finally, a focus on cultural comparisons. According to the previously discussed description of the 21st century learning, most materials should engage with this kind of culture content, as it stresses the students' cultural development as distinct from their linguistic development. For example, the *Up Beat* method offers this kind of cultural material. Then, there are locally-produced textbooks written by non-native authors or in cooperation with non-native-speaking authors: "being written by local authors, they tend to introduce the target culture from local perspective and usually also include some aspects of the local culture" (Skopinskaja, as cited in Vrbová, 2006). McKay (2003) clearly expresses her preference for source culture materials and international target culture materials. The first type of materials makes students learn more about their own culture, which could be motivating and useful when comparing their own culture with other cultures. The second type of materials includes cross-cultural encounters, and this aspect illustrates how English serves a great variety of international purposes in all kinds of contexts in the learning environment of today. On the other hand, target culture

materials can be irrelevant, uninteresting, and confusing for students as this kind of material does not illustrate the context of the current use of English.

The way in which cultural content can be discussed in class depends on the way in which it is offered in books and on the input and involvement of the teacher. In her article, McKay (2003) cites Nunan (1991) who describes one set of criteria by which Culture Language Teaching (CLT) can be defined:

1. an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language;
2. the introduction of authentic texts into learning situations;
3. the provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language, but also on the learning process itself;
4. an enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning;
5. an attempt to link classroom language learning with language activation outside of the classroom. (p. 40)

According to this description, CLT coheres rather well with the concept of the 21st century learning, since the communicative aspect, authentic materials, sharing, and interaction are seen as important factors in the language development process. Additionally, Vrbová (2006) designates several content categories applicable to many ELT textbooks. To analyse textbooks, it could be useful to know the structure and components of the method. With regard to the content, ELT textbooks can contain many different kinds of cultural information, which itself can be divided into several distinct categories, namely:

- Linguistic: e.g., conventions of politeness;
- Geographical: e.g., information on different countries, flags, capitals;
- Historical: e.g., information on historical events;
- Festivals: e.g., information on Easter;
- Illustrations: e.g.,, information conveyed through illustrations;
- Everyday life: e.g., information on shops and shopping, meal times;

- Citizenship-related issues: e.g., tolerance;
- Songs, music and rhymes: e.g., many traditional songs and rhymes link well to stories and provide authentic examples of children's lore. (p. 37)

The content categories cover both 'small c' and 'big C' culture contents. Byram and Morgan (as cited in Lund, 2006, p. 78) also describe several content categories, but they also indicate that only extensive ELT courses would cover all suggested areas. The categories described above could be perceived to be more representative, as regards the series of *Stepping Stones* textbooks for VMBO, than the ones by Byram and Morgan (1994).

2.3 ELT curricula for VMBO

Textbook developers and teachers are bound to certain curricular prescriptions. Whether or not culture is included in ELT materials and in class partially depends on the national curricula. The website of the National Institute for Curriculum Development (SLO) offers a PDF document by Trimbos (2007) in which the core objectives of teaching English in the Netherlands are explained (see Works cited on p. 56 for the link to this document). Among these core objectives only one objective reads; 'the students learn about the role that English plays in the various international contacts'. The website of the Language Policy Unit directs to this same document. The objective above appears to be the only one containing a certain intercultural context; all other objectives are all related to the linguistic part of the English language learning process. However, current publications by the Language Policy Unit such as the *Common European Framework of Reference for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment*, and the PDF document referred to above do reflect the important cultural aspects of ELT more extensively than stated in the core objectives. Plurilingual and pluricultural competences are highly appreciated in this latter document, and the overall intercultural awareness and competence should be pursued in class in order to create these competences. These two competences are interconnected in a way that plurilingualism always occurs in a

pluricultural context. The two concepts promote the development of intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence and focus on the sociocultural knowledge and pragmatic skills. The competences prepare students for intercultural communicative challenges and stimulate know-how and knowledge of the other. Additionally, the Council of Europe promotes general intercultural values, such as openness and tolerance for other cultures, the avoidance of cultural bias, and the stimulation of international contacts. ELT lessons should be adjusted to the students' personal context and language learners should be prepared for intercultural encounters by means of discussion of various texts, exercises, characters, and locations which occur in different learning domains, both personal and public. The information published by the Language Policy Unit in the CEFR, and by the SLO shows that the international status and value of the English language and its cultural context are acknowledged in national ELT curricula; however, as previously mentioned, culture has at the same time barely been included in the core objectives for the English language learning in the Netherlands.

Byram (1997) describes the two concepts which have been generally discussed above: intercultural communicative competence and (inter)cultural awareness. Intercultural communicative competence can be explained as the ability to communicate with members of other cultures in a foreign language (Byram, 1997).This requires intercultural awareness which could be defined as "a conscious understanding of the role culture plays in language learning and communication in both first and foreign languages" (Baker, p. 65). Furthermore, it concerns, for example, the awareness of the existence of many different varieties of English, and the fact that communication with other cultures could lead to miscommunication. The intercultural communicative competence and intercultural awareness should successfully prepare students for intercultural communication. In his article, Baker (2012) discusses key

components of (inter)cultural awareness, alongside with the relevance to ELT practices. He proposes a three-level process of awareness resulting from ELT, namely:

- Basic cultural awareness;
- Advanced cultural awareness;
- Intercultural awareness (p. 66)

Basic cultural awareness entails that the learner is aware of the following aspects:

- culture as a set of shared behaviors, beliefs, and values;
- the role culture and context play in any interpretation of meaning;
- our own culturally-induced behavior, values, and beliefs, as well as the ability to articulate this;
- others' culturally-induced behavior, values, and beliefs, and the ability to compare this with our own culturally-induced behavior, values, and beliefs (p. 66)

The other two levels supplement this interpretation with the relativity of cultural norms and perspectives; the common ground between different cultures; the existence of cultural bias; and stereotyping.

2.4 Developments in the field of ELT

The reason for the increased importance of the ELT textbook analysis is the fast development of English as a world language and the changes brought about by this phenomenon. The questions like 'which topics to choose?' and 'which countries to focus on?' (Lund, 2006) have gained in importance, as the textbook can ultimately be interpreted as a guide through the teaching and learning process. Additionally, it is interesting to investigate to what extent culture is presented in books; in what way, from what perspective, and which varieties are accounted for. Information on different varieties of English could be presented, for example, in a simplified and stereotyped way. The context in which the 21st century learning, as described earlier in this section, reflects the current situation in which learners of English find themselves. Nowadays, we do meet people from all over the world, and it has become quite

easy to obtain and maintain international contacts. In his article, Baker (2012) claims the following:

> The use of English as the global lingua franca highlights the need for an understanding of cultural context and communicative practices to successfully communicate across diverse cultures. It also raises the problem of naively associating the English language with a specific culture or nation. (p. 69)

He also claims that the wide use of English in the world, by both native and non-native speakers, also known as '*lingua franca* English,' forces us to go beyond this perspective of naively associating English with a specific culture or nation. According to several experts, English has become a language with an international status which does not belong to a specific culture or nation, but has been recreated by many different countries and cultures. Particularly in the previous century, intercultural context has become important in ELT textbooks. Other aspects that have gained in attention are intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. Awareness accounts, for example, for the fact that there are various countries where English is spoken as a first (or foreign) language, apart from the United Kingdom and the USA, and that miscommunication can occur when communicating with people from other English-speaking cultures. On the other hand, it refers to the fact that there are shared values and beliefs and that English is spoken among native as well as non-native speakers all over the world. Intercultural communicative competence results from (inter)cultural awareness and aims at preparing language learners for intercultural communication. These are the two factors that are evident in, for example, the description of the *Up Beat* and *Next Move* methods. *Stepping Stones* clearly supports the communicative competence as well.

Another development, as suggested by Lund (2006) in her study of culture in Norwegian textbooks, is the shift from an approach to teaching English from a national

perspective to the one with an international perspective to create a broad and realistic view of the English language, the way it is used by speakers all over the world, its culture, and its varieties. An international perspective could prevent the simplified reflection of the value of English in the world in, for example, ELT textbooks. Even a culture-free perspective has been proposed in order to avoid overgeneralization of the English use and its context (Lund, 2006, p. 36-38). Finally, together with the perspective from which English should or should not be taught, the learner-based approach, rather than the teacher-based approach, has recently gained in popularity. This orientation requires a more intensive input of teachers than was previously expected; teachers have to teach from a broader perspective on cultural topics. This point is mentioned by McKay (2003, pp. 41-45) concerning ELT materials: the target culture materials focus specifically on the target culture, most frequently, only on the countries within the inner circle, which forces teachers to teach from a perspective that could make them feel quite uncomfortable. Teachers are expected to be able to motivate, stimulate, and teach their students by means of the book; however, they should also possess a broad range of knowledge of the culture, the language, communication practices, and the learning process itself (Sercu, 2005). Additionally, teachers could feel uncomfortable when teaching about a specific country or nation in relation to English (McKay, 2003). This uncomfortable feeling might not occur when English is taught from an international perspective (Lund, 2006), because all kinds of varieties and cultures are discussed then, which could also lead to intercultural discussion and story-sharing in class.

According to Vrbová (2006), alongside with the 'big C' culture content such as significant historical events or general cultural information, the 'small c' culture content has also gained in importance. This latter type of culture content includes, for example, content on everyday life customs, traditions, and practices within the other culture. These two terms are also known as 'little c' culture and 'big C' culture, and are explained by an expert instructor

on the website of *Foreign Language Teaching Methods*, offering professional development modules for foreign language instruction at the high-school and college levels. Other acronyms are 'upper-case C' culture and 'lower-case c' culture, as is exampled on the website of *Intercultural Resources Collaborative*, which offers multimedia products and on-site training services to facilitate communication and develop intercultural competence in international settings and diverse workplaces (see Works cited on p. 56 for the references to these websites). In this current paper, the terms 'small c' and 'big C' culture, as both Vrbová (2006) and Lund (2006) introduce them in their papers, are used. As claimed by Sercu (2005), the 'small c' culture content is the type of content that has been experienced by teachers as more difficult than the 'big C' culture content to put their finger on, and thus to teach about. This kind of information is still frequently missing in current ELT textbooks, and should thus be included more extensively in books and class activities as it prepares students to real-life communication situation (Lund, 2006). In this way, a more profound cultural perspective on both the English language and culture in general can be produced in class. Among other things, this would require additional time, which some teachers claim not to have; specifically, in the interviews published on the website of the *Stepping Stones* method, teachers claim to often suffer from a lack of time to deal with all the linguistic content, which results in even less time to spend on the cultural content.

2.5 English-speaking countries and varieties of English

Alongside with the information on salient intercultural values, culture content can contain information about the different varieties of English and different cultures where English is spoken as the first, or an important foreign language. These different varieties of English can be divided into three circles which have been described by Kachru and Smith (2008), namely: the 'inner circle'; 'outer circle'; and the 'expanding circle'. The inner circle refers to the bases of English; the regions where it is the official first language, such as the United Kingdom,

the United States of America, Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, and Canada (Ibid., p. 4). Varieties within the outer circle are the result of earlier phases of the spread of English and its institutionalization in non- native contexts. These varieties have arisen by means of political, linguistic, and sociocultural aspects and have remained, among others, a first language in these areas with an important status. An example of this is Indian English. Other countries which belong to this circle are Nigeria, the Philippines, and Singapore (Kachru & Smith, 2008, p. 4). The varieties within the expanding circle are not necessarily the result of historical events like colonization. Within these countries or nations, English is acknowledged as a world language over other languages like French. This circle is expanding rapidly and has resulted in numerous performance varieties of English, which are used in different international contexts. Countries that belong to the expanding circle include China, the countries of the EU, Middle-East countries, Korea, and Japan (Ibid., p. 4). The fact that English has gained an important status in many more countries over time again indicates the importance of producing a realistic view of the language, its use and users, as well as the related cultures.

Since 2003, issues concerning the inclusion of different varieties of English have come into the focus of attention in the ELT literature. According to several scholars, ELT's predominant focus on inner circle varieties and providing students only with general, 'universally valid' (Lund, 2006) information was considered inappropriate. The question of the specific cultural context in ELT was therefore raised, and this issue is still debated in relation to today's textbooks. Students need to be prepared for encounters with different varieties of English and various discourse systems. The ideal environment for teaching English would be one which enables class discussions of all varieties of English, several contextual situations, and socio- cultural issues. However, this has been perceived as an elusive objective according to Lund (2006). The idea of providing students with one or two

examples (including inner and outer/expanding circle) that are used as references to other cultures and situations was proposed many years ago (see, e.g., Byram, 1997). As stated in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment,* this perspective is also supported by the European Council. To approach this overall view, students should be able to critically analyse the content of ELT textbooks, accompanied by the teachers' input and influence.

2.6 Overgeneralization, simplification, and stereotyping

In curricula, teachers are perceived as an important factor in the foreign language learning process. Among other things, their essential role is seen as helping to create perspective, to motivate, to produce a realistic idea of intercultural situations, and to develop — together with the students — their practical skills (Language Policy Unit, n.d.). A realistic view of these intercultural encounters and issues, like different varieties of English and potential miscommunication, has frequently not been sufficiently covered in ELT books. Most textbooks discuss only inner circle varieties of English, i.e. those which have been mentioned above and which most of the time relate to the most commonly-known English-speaking countries like the United Kingdom or the United States of America. This could be illustrative of the aim to exemplify different cultural contexts and encounters by means of one or two specific countries and their cultures. However, the English language and culture are often oversimplified in ELT books and, therefore, the latter do not reflect reality sufficiently well. Another common issue in ELT is the inclusion of cultural biases as claimed by Sercu (2005). Gray (2000) claims that, in order to encourage an intercultural point of view, materials should treat culture themes from at least two contrastive perspectives, or dimensions. Unfortunately, in practice, the one-dimensional point of view is still more common than the two-dimensional one, as it is very hard for textbooks writers to avoid culture-bound ideas. This again results in another requirement for teachers, besides their cultural knowledge and their

ability to motivate students. According to Gray (2000), teachers often do not follow the textbook scripts, but reshape the content, change it together with the students during classroom activities and interaction. The discussion of cultural biases, stereotyped and overgeneralized content depends on the teacher's approach. Teacher respondents in Gray's (2000) study claimed to adjust stereotyped or overgeneralized content, because they did not want their students to become stereotype-thinkers. Other ways of dealing with this kind of content could be laughing about it, making it a point of discussion, asking for students' opinion, or just simply ignoring it. Besides the teachers' inputs, the effect of this kind of content in textbooks depends on the critical analysis of the students themselves. Parmenter (as cited in Vrbová, 2006) describes critical analysis which should be encouraged by all teachers, as follows:

> An ability to identify and interpret values in another culture, the ability to critically analyse and evaluate cultural practices or products from another culture and the ability to interact and mediate in intercultural exchanges, drawing on one's knowledge, skills and attitudes. (p. 20)

Gray (2000) claims that there is often little space for the students to respond to or challenge the information provided in textbooks. They are not triggered by the methods, which is where the teacher steps forward. Marking comparisons between the culture in the book and the learner's own culture has been recently strongly encouraged by the Council of Europe's Educational Committee (Gray, 2000). To encourage the reader to read critically would stimulate greater engagement than when the reader has just to find the right answer, shifting thus from a perspective of comprehension to the one of 'why is this topic introduced, how to write about this topic in a different way, what do I like about it and what don't I?' In this way, the global coursebook can become a tool for provoking cultural debate and learning. Another significant factor that comes along with the teachers' input is perception that the students gain from their teachers, the textbook, and the implicitly or explicitly stated perception conveyed

through textbooks. Qualities like openness and flexibility to others play an important role in the development of cultural awareness. Vrbová (2006, p. 29) states that "teachers help learners to express and respond to their cultural learning experiences".

Gray (2000) is quite negative about the content in ELT textbooks, as was made apparent above. He describes current ELT textbooks as an emissary of the source culture for a one way flow of information. A contradictive approach to this source culture basis is offered by McKay (2003), who states that this is not necessarily a negative thing; she claims that there are clear advantages to the use of source culture content; specifically, "it minimizes the potential of marginalizing the values and lived experiences of the learners" (Ibid., p. 44). The source culture content can also encourage learners to gain a deeper understanding of their own culture which, in turn, results in sharing insights when using English as an International Language (EIL) with individuals from different cultures. Lastly, the source culture content does not place local teachers in the difficult position of trying to teach someone else's culture. Baker (2012) provides more information about the source culture basis in ELT textbooks by mentioning that the fact that intercultural information in textbooks is often offered from a national conception could result in overgeneralization and stereotyping of the English language and culture. When discussing the cultural content in ELT books in an international conception, overgeneralization and stereotyping would be less expected to occur. Finally, Prodromou (1988) puts forward another perspective, namely, that it is not really possible to teach a language without embedding it in its cultural background. He argues that such a process inevitably forces learners to express themselves within a culture of which they have hardly any experience, and suggests that this may result in alienation and stereotyping. Additionally, other articles have also highlighted that in some proponents of authentic classroom language models, the problems with many textbooks are not necessarily a matter of

cultural or social bias, but rather of a too contrived and artificial presentation of the target language. Similarly, there are many other perspectives derived from this field of study.

The importance of textbook evaluation is important to, among others things, indicate the inclusion of stereotyping and overgeneralization. It should be ensured that a careful selection has been undertaken regarding the cultural content. Besides cultural stereotypes and biases, the content on different varieties of English, as suggested by Bieswanger (2008), has rarely been included. He mentions that the vast majority of verbal exchanges in exercises do not include native speakers whatsoever (Bieswanger, 2008). Seeing the fact that the curricula tend to focus more on the communicative competence than previously, the opinion has emerged that English learners should be able to communicate with both native and non-native speakers. The fact that English is spoken by many different people all over the world should be emphasized to a greater extent. Now, not many varieties other than British or American English are extensively covered in ELT methods. In his paper, Bieswanger (2008) shows the complaints of students that tried to practise their English abroad but did not succeed because of the 'strange English' of the others and the 'standardized' English of the students themselves. According to Bieswanger (2008), this shows a significant lack of awareness and competence resulting in a communicative failure in real-life confrontations. Communicative competence has been an aim since 1970 and, as it appears now, there are still students that do not profit from it but rather fail because of the cultural layer that has been denied in ELT textbooks or not been well taught by teachers. These kinds of cultural miscommunications only emphasize the importance of rethinking about a set of new parameters for redeveloping of ELT materials. The discussion of the different varieties of English seems to be a most suitable and promising way to create intercultural communicative competence and awareness in class. In case of a situation where there might be insufficient time to teach about cultural aspects, at least the awareness of the existence of different varieties of English should be

raised. Moreover, according to Bieswanger (2008), an opportunity should be provided to teachers to spend time on it. This could be established through, for example, the inclusion of cultural core objectives into the national school curricula.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Materials

This study contains the analysis of *Stepping Stones'* fourth edition of textbooks for VMBO.

The series of books that has been taken into account for this study includes the following:

- 1 VMBO textbook
- 1 VMBO activity book A
- 1 VMBO activity book B
- 2 VMBO textbook
- 2 VMBO activity book A
- 2 VMBO activity book B

The two textbooks have been closely examined regarding their explicit and implicit integrated cultural content. The online materials, such as the audio and video fragments, have been intentionally omitted because of their inaccessibility; they were not accessible for people other than students and teachers. However, the texts introducing them have been included into the analysis. The present study focuses entirely on the paper series of books. From the activity books, exercises have been considered in the analysis. Moreover, examples have been taken from the activity books to support the textbooks' analysis. This was done because the content in the activity books mainly supplements the information in the textbooks. The examples from the textbooks have been processed in content schemes (see Appendix on p. 58). The motivations for selecting the series of books for VMBO have been specified in the Introduction (p. 6).

3.2 Method

The analysis of the textbooks has been executed on the basis of the expectation of contemporary ELT textbooks, developed as a result of the information in the Theoretical framework; the way *Stepping Stones* positions itself, the way other methods position

themselves, ELT curricula, and the latest developments. In the Theoretical framework, some articles have been discussed where authors have expressed their ideals regarding ELT. An example of this is Bieswanger (2008), whose ideal ELT situation would be the one in which all varieties of English are discussed separately to create a realistic view of English in the world, which would produce, among other things; intercultural awareness. This could be perceived as an ideal situation, rather than a realistic expectation. The expectations which have been established for the cultural findings in the *Stepping Stones* books are based on realism rather than on idealism; ELT curricula and results of previous studies for example. The expectations for the cultural findings for textbook 1 and 2 are described in one section, while the findings for textbooks 1 and 2 are described separately. The findings for textbook 2, are described additionally to textbook 1 to avoid duplicate information. The expectations are outlined in the Results chapter (p. 31).

In addition to the analysis of the textbooks, in response to the fact that teachers play an important role in the foreign language development process, two teachers currently using the *Stepping Stones* books for VMBO were asked to answer some questions. After establishing the Theoretical framework of the present study, some questions regarding the teachers' input and attitude towards culture teaching and the *Stepping Stones* method remained. Based on these questions, the teachers were asked to answer questions concerning the use of *Stepping Stones* in class, their input and own personal supplementation to the cultural materials, their attitude in view of culture teaching and the role of the teachers' package. This was done in order to obtain complementary insight from teachers' side. The teachers were approached via e-mail; the eight formulated questions were answered in English (see Appendix on p. 79 for the questionnaires). Given the number of respondents and the length of the answers, these questionnaires have served a complementary role; the answers are not decisive but do provide interesting insights and raise questions for further research.

The findings that have been analyzed based on expectations, have been processed in several evaluative categories. As emphasized in the outline of the Theoretical framework, these categories reflect the most frequently discussed and significant concepts in ELT (textbook analysis). These evaluative categories are described below, supported by exemplary questions.

- **Cultural content and context**

  — Does the content reflect the description of *Stepping Stones* and the 21st century skills as described by Voogt and Pareja Roblin (2010)?

  — Does the content reflect the cultural aspects and objective as described in the CEFR?

  — Is the content offered in various culturally related situational contexts?

- **English-speaking countries and varieties of English**

  — Is the learner made aware of the existence of different varieties of English?

  — Is the cultural content offered regarding the countries from the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle?

  — Are certain particular varieties emphasized?

- **Intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence**

  — Are pupils made aware of the consequences which could occur in real-life cultural encounters?

  — Are Baker's (2012) features of basic cultural awareness detectable in the books?

  — Are significant general intercultural values, as described in the CEFR, discussed in the books?

  — Are students prepared for intercultural encounters in English?

- **Overgeneralization and stereotyping**

    — Are any stereotypes included or could the content lead to cultural bias?

    — Are students stimulated to critically discuss the content?

    — Is the content offered in a national or international conception?

Chapter 4: Results

4.1 Expectations

The first general expectation was that, as derived from the information on the official website of *Stepping Stones* and the description on the cover of the book, the general content of the textbooks would be varied, playful, stimulating, effective, focused on communicative competence, and adjusted to the students' context. Apart from this, the emphasis was expected to be on the linguistic part of the language learning process, i.e. on grammar and vocabulary, rather than on the culture part, since the method supports this orientation. Therefore, cultural content was expected to be presented on the basic level, which thus reflects the concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism as described by the CEFR. This implies that the aspects of those competences might be noticeable throughout the books, but are not completely integrated throughout. The *Stepping Stones* method, alongside with other considered methods, indicates the importance of the communicative competence, so the books were expected to contain many communicative exercises and tasks stimulating interaction in classroom. The other considered methods also emphasize the functional communication, which reflects the learner-centred approach. According to the website, this approach is also supported by *Stepping Stones,* and includes interactive learning and a practical approach. Additionally, McKay (2003) claims that this approach is conveyed by the first focus on the learner's native culture, then on the other culture, and ends with relating and comparing all of these. This has led to another expectation regarding the structure of the culture content; the 21st century learning which highlights sociocultural skills and communicative skills has led to the expectation of a global context with real-life situations and characters. This, to familiarize students with the way English is spoken in the world; as an international language. In order to stimulate students, the source culture content and familiar aspects were expected to have been integrated; the other purpose was to intensify the engagement with the learner's native culture

and to enable them to compare this more easily with other cultures. Culture content was expected to occur in all kinds of topics such as food, literature, and behaviours. This was expected to have been presented in mainly the target culture content, but also, additionally, in the source cultural content. Moreover, in general terms, intercultural values were expected to have been included. The international target culture materials, as described by McKay (2003), might be an overly ambitious target, at least in view of the CEFR core objectives for ELT and the still-developing concept of culture teaching. Moreover, based on the CEFR publications, the content was expected to include various locations, situations, interlocutors, texts, exercises, and events that reflect different learning domains specified in the CEFR. Additionally, the content domains described by Vrbová (2006), were expected to cover all culture content in the books because of their general character. Finally, seeing the fact that the books provide students with an introduction to English and culture, the context was expected to reflect the main concepts highlighted in the CEFR, namely, plurilingualism and pluriculturalism. International and intercultural contexts were expected to be conveyed from a national perspective, as it is a still developing and highly discussed matter. Overall, looking at the curricular documents, the status of English and the value of intercultural values and competence has been acknowledged, but not included in the core objectives; therefore, the culture content in the books was not expected to be integrated throughout.

Expectations regarding the different included English-speaking countries and varieties of English were based on the documents of the Council of Europe. At least one country from the inner circle and one variety from the expanding circle were expected to have been included and discussed, in view of sociocultural aspects, its accent, and the connection to the English language. This, in order to exemplify different accents and users of English, occasions, and situations in which the language is spoken. This way of exemplifying would give students an idea of the various roles English plays and the consequences of intercultural

communication, as well as support the concept of pluriculturalism, the importance of which is highlighted in the CEFR. Additionally, the Council of Europe also favours an overall focus, which was expected to be British English and the British culture, because this has been the focus for many years to date. Because of this historical approach, it can lead to the impression that it would not shift easily to, for example, the United States or Australia. According to Bieswanger (2008), the notion of the existence of different varieties of English is assumed to be important in producing intercultural communicative competence and intercultural awareness, which is thus expected to be mentioned.

Intercultural awareness raising content was expected to occur, at the very least, on the level of basic cultural awareness, as Baker (2012) has noted, and this is because of the significance of the concept expressed in the CEFR by the Council of Europe, as well as by prior researchers. The CLT criteria, as described by Vrbová (2006), seem to apply to an introductive level of study, and basic ELT materials, since these criteria do not include critical analysis or the investigation of the similarities and differences of different cultures; these were expected to be noticeable too. Moreover, intercultural values such as openness and tolerance for other cultures were expected to be noticeable in the books. Intercultural awareness is a good basis for developing intercultural communicative competence. The latter was expected to be promoted by means of different situational contexts, communicative tasks, various interlocutors with different cultural backgrounds, and the notion and discussion of consequences of cultural encounters such as miscommunication. The concept of 21st century learning indicates the importance of students' critical analysis, which is expected to be stimulated to at least some extent by the exercises in the books.

Critical analysis of the cultural content is also important with regard to the discussion of overgeneralized content or stereotyping. Because of the caution surrounding the subject, stereotyping was not expected to be included in the books. On the other hand, based on the

expectation regarding the source culture content and target culture content, the fact that the books serve to introduce the English language and culture, the emphasis on the linguistic content, and the expectation of a local perspective could lead to overgeneralization, simplification of the cultural content, and even to the emergence of a cultural bias. Although sociocultural aspects, deemed significant in ELT, would avoid overgeneralization of cultures, they were not expected to occur intensively. This is because of the lack of time experienced by many teachers, and the introductive level on which English has been presented. Moreover, the 'small c' culture content which is explained by Vrbová (2006) requires more teachers' knowledge and input than before and appears harder for them to determine. Additionally, according to previous studies, cultural simplification and overgeneralization in order to introduce another culture is still very common in ELT textbooks (Gray, 2000). In order for pupils and teachers to enrich the cultural layer with their own experiences and information, sufficient interaction exercises were expected to be integrated together with the sufficient space for pupils to discuss the content in the books. This also reflects the 21st century learning environment and the learner-centred approach.

4.2 Content and Context

4.2.1 Findings in textbook 1

To start with the type of content that is offered in the books, the findings suggest that, in agreement with the expectation, the said content appears to be varied, playful, and stimulating. Illustrations are provided and motivating content, such as poetry, familiar topics, and stories, is also integrated throughout the book. Additionally, regarding some aspects, the books' content also appears to support the concept of 21st century learning. This type of learning supports the learner-centred approach favouring, among other things, interactive and communicative tasks, self-assessment, and development of competences that prepare students

for real-life intercultural communication. The content of the first book is distributed over different competency categories: Listening, Sounds and Spelling, Speaking and Writing, and Reading. Moreover, each chapter has a section in which a particular topic is highlighted, and at the end of each chapter a TaskCard containing an activity is included. At the end of the textbook, sections on grammar, vocabulary, and yellow pages are presented. On these pages, it is explained in which way the method can most effectively be used. This creates awareness of the students' learning process. The activity book includes a section *Talking matters,* which emphasizes, as in the entire textbook as well, communicative competence. The activity books contain a section *Test yourself*, which also supports the idea of the 21st century learning, since it stimulates self-assessment. Generally speaking, the content appears to have been adjusted to the learners' context, since it includes topics such as animals, teenage issues, heroes, celebrities, and school life. However, all aspects as described above seem to mainly account for the linguistic part of the language learning and, to a less extent, for the cultural part; the content does not appear to prepare students for intercultural encounters and intercultural communication, which could potentially occur in different situational contexts. Overall, while the cultural context and content lag behind, the linguistic part of the language development process is clearly emphasized. In general, the cultural content that has been found has not been made explicit and conveyed as being such, since it does not come with extensive descriptive texts. Therefore, mainly in the first textbook, the culture content appears to be quite general and sometimes even somewhat superficial. The characters in the illustrations seem to represent different places in the world. However, from the texts it appears that the storytellers and interlocutors originate mainly from English-speaking countries of the inner circle, with a specific focus on Great Britain. Some topics are highlighted concerning the culture content, including: British school uniforms, historical and sociocultural information on England, American cheerleader culture (illustrated to introduce chapter 7), and several kinds

of sports such as American football, curling, lacrosse, and the Scottish highland games. Each aspect originates from a different English-speaking country. These examples reflect the type of culture content that is included in the first textbook, which is often not described as being related to a specific country and culture, neither to the English language. The target culture content is mainly focused on Britain and the source culture materials only occur in terms of city names: specifically, locations. The content in which culture-related information is offered is covered by the categories proposed by Vrbová (2006), and is structured as follows: first, the self and the other have been introduced, but not culturally related. Then, the focus moves to Britain in particular. Regarding Britain, besides the 'Big C' culture content, also 'small c' culture content such as sociocultural aspects, is discussed in chapter 6 of the book. In the rest of the book, the 'small c' culture content does not appear. However, culture indicators are presented in various topics such as famous places, British websites, TV channels, food, sports, and brands. Profound reengagement with the learner's native culture is not encouraged in the book, so only the school menu and school outfits in Britain are compared to those in the Netherlands. This points out that, according to the theory of McKay (2003), the method does not present the aspects of a contemporary learner-centred approach which promote critical discussion and intercultural comparisons. The overall intercultural value of openness and tolerance of others is emphasized in a few sentences such as "I want to meet people from all over the world" and "I want to have friends all over the world". This already reflects the context conveyed in the book. Despite the focus on Great Britain and the British culture, the content also has an international atmosphere. International contacts are promoted in exercises and texts which show pen pals from different countries and visits to other countries. Additionally, English as a world language is discussed in two exercises: one discusses the adoption of English words in other cultures, while the other discusses the occasions when English is spoken. In addition, the illustrations reflect an international context as well.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in the Appendix (p. 58).

4.2.2 Findings in textbook 2

The second textbook has been described with respect to the findings in the first textbook. What appeared most obvious in this analysis is that the second book possesses a different atmosphere compared to the first one. Various kinds of target culture content are included, and even the source culture content is represented in a text about ice-skating. As in the first textbook, the content appears to be related to all kinds of topics, such as food, famous places, traditions, TV channels, and money, and concerns countries other than England, which are highlighted. The weather and food as topics are even compared regarding different cultures and countries; however, this is not done extensively: England is related to high tea and fish and chips, and India is related to curry. In addition, British uniforms are highlighted again. Supplementary to the first textbook, the second book appears to represent a focus on the entire EU more than on only the Netherlands or the English-speaking countries. This is noticeable in, among other things, the poem exemplified in the content scheme. Additionally, this focus is noticeable in the various cultural backgrounds of the interlocutors and storytellers and the wide range of included countries. The same focus is apparent in the spelling of words since, for example, American spelling is included in addition to the British spelling: e.g., *Mom* alongside with *Mum*. Besides these content issues, the context seems to be more serious and genuine compared to the first book, since real-life situations such as natural disasters, eBay, and airport news are presented. In contrast to this adjusted context, the illustrations represent more Western characters in the second book compared to the first one. Overall, the information is still frequently not conveyed and explained as being culture content; students are not being made aware of their cultural learning process, up until the last chapter, which will be explained below. Overall, the content is still focused on Britain, but is also clearly

supplemented with a greater number of interlocutors from different countries than in the first book. This creates a shift to a more international and intercultural focus and context. The overall value of international contacts, common ground, and cultural differences are emphasized. This is presented mainly in the last chapter, which is entirely and explicitly devoted to culture. This chapter contains exercises which discuss and compare different cultures and traditions. Notwithstanding, the culture content on different varieties of English, various discourse systems, and situational cultural contexts lag behind.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in the Appendix (p. 61).

4.3 English-speaking countries and varieties of English

4.3.1 Findings in textbook 1

The first lesson in the book includes exercises where students are asked to think of occasions when English is spoken and the countries where it is spoken. This, to start with, creates a certain awareness of the use of English and the variety of countries that use the language. As might have become clear in the description of the content and context of the first book, mainly countries from the inner circle of English are included. The overall focus in the book is set on Britain, since most of the locations are British and chapter 6 is devoted entirely to the British culture, which is the only culture that is highlighted in terms of both 'small c' and 'big C' culture content. Moreover, the use of words such as *Mum* instead of *Mom* indicates a preference for the British spelling over the American one. The book features different interlocutors, originating mainly from the Netherlands or Great Britain. Different illustrations and interlocutors serve as characters which convey stories and messages, but do not particularly deliver the idea that English is an international language spoken by many different people, native and non-native speakers alike. English-speaking countries that stand

out in the first textbook are: Australia, as regards animals, and Britain, which is mentioned and discussed most frequently, whereas other countries are mentioned sporadically, without too much supportive text and illustrations. Another English-speaking country mentioned as the location in a story is Scotland. However, only the name of the country is mentioned, supported with a few sentences such as "we live in Scotland and it's cold most of the times". Moreover, the Scottish highland games are mentioned, but again these not explained in detail; thus, the extent to which the content in the books is discussed depends on the teachers' input. Other included countries are: the United States of America, Canada, Spain, Holland, Ireland, Kenya, Mexico, Norway, Sweden, Brazil, France, Germany, Japan, Belgium, and Italy. The references to these countries are made either in texts or illustrations in the textbook or the activity books. The countries that have been included in listening or watching exercises are Australia, the USA, and the UK. This could lead to a more profound awareness of the varieties of English, in view of the fact that the different accents are presented in these audio and video fragments. The findings do not support the CEFR publications, which suggests that one inner circle variety and one variety of outside the inner circle should be extensively discussed and serve to exemplify all kinds of intercultural encounters and situations to convey the status of English as an international language.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in Appendix (p. 65).

4.3.2 Findings in textbook 2

In comparison with the first textbook, the second one includes more different countries from Europe from the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle of English and from outside the circles. Apart from this, more parts of the world apart from Britain are highlighted regarding certain aspects, such as traditions or tourist hot spots. British English still seems to be the main focus, which is noticeable in spelling and words like 'wobbly' and 'wicked,' but,

in general, more diversity and comparison has been stimulated in this book. Specifically the last chapter discusses the fact that different English-speaking countries have their own accents. Moreover, information about English-speaking countries is collected in this chapter and different cultures are compared in an exercise entitled 'culture- eggheads,' as referred to in the content scheme. Native and non- native English-speaking countries included in this second textbook are as follows: Spain, Norway, UK, Scotland, Africa, Poland, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, France, G-B, Belgium, Holland, Siberia, US, Antarctica, China, Mexico, Jamaica, India, Russia, Sweden, Ireland, Canada, New- Zealand, Welsh, and Greece. Some of these countries are only mentioned, while others are discussed briefly as regards a specific cultural aspect or topic. This creates an awareness of the existence of different English-speaking countries and underlines the status of English as an international language. This book appears to have a less national perspective and a more international one. However, if viewed from a practical perspective, students are not made aware of different discourse systems, for example.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in Appendix (p. 68).

4.4 Intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence

4.4.1 Findings in textbook 1

In the first book and the additional activity books, illustrations show a great variety of characters from all over the world. There are some sentences alluding to intercultural values such as 'tolerance' and 'openness'. These establish a positive attitude towards other cultures and highlight the intercultural context. Another example which contributes to general (intercultural) values and awareness is the exercise where the fact that, all over the world, people wear different clothes and have different ideas is conveyed. Moreover, British schools are compared with Dutch ones as concerns food and outfits and Kenya is discussed in terms

of the lack of welfare, which could also contribute to intercultural awareness. On a smaller scale, it was expected that cultures were compared and related to the learner's native culture, because, among other things, it would develop awareness of the consequences of cultural encounters, such as miscommunication and cultural misunderstanding. This awareness would enhance intercultural communicative competence. The content sometimes gives the impetus to lead to this comparison, as with the title of the chapter *Me, Myself, and you*, which contains an introduction of the self and the other; however, it does not include the cultural aspect properly. Furthermore, some topics are discussed by characters from different countries, but again, not in a comparative way. The content does not stimulate learners to involve more deeply in the learners' native cultures or to discover the similarities and differences between other cultures. Different situational contexts in which students would be stimulated to analyse cultural situations are not included in the books. Communicative tasks are integrated throughout the book, but do not stimulate intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. The development of the intercultural competence lags behind; for example, different accents and situational contexts are not discussed in any detail. When analysing the content on the features of basic cultural awareness suggested by Baker (2012), it appears to be the case that none of them are stressed clearly, because the cultural content in the book is not made explicit to the reader and does not empower engagement to the learner's native culture, nor does it explore other cultures. The CEFR, to which the method connects, emphasizes the value of English as a world language. In the textbook, this thought is supported by the CEFR signs and logos, and several sentences such as: "I can talk to people from all over the world". However, this is not explained or discussed in any chapter or exercise, except for once in activity book A. Here, the learners are asked to write down the countries and parts of the world where English is spoken and to think of the ways in which English is used and conveyed in the Netherlands.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in Appendix (p. 70).

4.4.2 Findings in textbook 2

Compared to the first book, Europe is emphasized more in the second textbook; more countries are included, more interlocutors with different cultural backgrounds share their stories . Certain aspects of several countries such as airports, birthdays, music styles, artists, and newspapers are compared or mentioned together. Chapter eight, *Crossing borders,* contains a reading part in which different people share their feelings about their own country. Moreover, cultural aspects of birthday celebrations and wedding customs are discussed. The last chapter contains the content that meets the features of basic cultural awareness and, as a result, also partly develops intercultural communicative competence. Partly due to the fact that the content is not optimally discovered, relatedness and interaction among different cultures is not discussed. Additionally, this results in the fact that development of the intercultural communicative competence lags behind with respect to the intercultural awareness raising. With regard to the intercultural values, such as openness and tolerance, the second book, as compared to the first one, appears to contain more texts and exercises which convey these values. An example of this is provided below, in which two pen pals coming from the UK and the Netherlands chat on the Internet.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in Appendix (p. 72).

4.5 Overgeneralization and stereotyping

4.5.1 Findings in textbook 1

In congruence with the expectation, no stereotyping was noticed in the first textbook. The cultural content, however, is overgeneralized and is sometimes somewhat superficial. The

culture content is not elaborated on at all, except for the content on the British culture. The British culture is elaborated in chapter 6, but still on a generic level, discussing the most common things like dos and don'ts and tourist information. These dos and don'ts, however, could equally apply to other cultures. The content appears to be generic, because both the 'small c' and the 'big C' culture contents are not discussed extensively. Moreover, the characters presented in the texts and exercises of this chapter could be perceived as 'typical' Western types, rather than characters with different cultural backgrounds, which would better reflect the authentic, real-life situation. The content appears to aim for a very general introduction only of Britain. The most common and standard topics are touched upon which could be expected, as an introduction often includes most common aspects of culture and language. However, it could have been conveyed in a somewhat more profound and interesting way. Some illustrations could lead to cultural bias, such as the example of the school menu, which is included in the content scheme. However, in view of the fact that these illustrations are not conveyed as culture content, it is hard to determine whether they could lead to a cultural bias. Other examples of simplified connections are England and fish and chips and a school menu with salad, burgers, and chips. As claimed by Prodromou (1988), it appears to be rather overgeneralized than stereotyped. Lastly, various communicative, interactive tasks are integrated throughout the book, in which students are asked to voice their opinions, but not concerning culture content. Additionally, they are not stimulated to critically approach and discuss the content, and more specifically, sociocultural aspects and cultural encounters, which means that the content is not representing a two-dimensional approach.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in the Appendix (p. 75).

4.5.2 Findings in textbook 2

The content in the second book appears to be less generic and more detailed, especially in the last chapter, *Crossing borders.* Apart from the fact that cultural content is presented extensively here, cultural aspects are also compared in this chapter, for instance, as is being presented in the examples in the content scheme. Both 'small c' and the 'big C' culture contents are included in the book which makes the cultural layer more visible. In the example of the wedding and birthday customs as presented in the content scheme, a tradition is discussed from a wider range of perspectives. This book thus conveys a two-dimensional approach, which occurs more often in this second book, for example, regarding experiences of pupils in other countries. It stimulates discussion, a more critical approach, and it avoids cultural bias. American and UK food, again, has been overgeneralized in terms of fish and chips, coke and burgers related to the target culture. Moreover, a title which could lead to cultural bias is: 'weird customs,' which represents the text where different customs of a number of countries are discussed. The illustrations in this textbook contain mainly white, Western-looking characters contrary to the characters in the first book, which could be perceived as unrealistic and Western- focused. However, this is not supported by any text.

Examples of this part of the analysis can be found in the content scheme in the content scheme in Appendix (p. 76).

4.6 Additional questionnaires

Besides the analysis of the series of *Stepping Stones books,* the results of the questionnaires show some interesting similarities and contradictions when it comes to teachers' attitude about CLT. What stood out, for example, was that both teachers have a different perspective as regards CLT on a VMBO level, and culture teaching in general. Both teachers also confirm the importance of their input for establishing effect and discussion and they claim that recognition and a realistic, authentic content stimulate their students. This latter supports the

ELT curricula and previous study results. The teachers' package does not add something in view of the cultural aspect.

The questionnaires can be found in the Appendix (p. 79).

Chapter 5: Discussion and recommendations

5.1 Implicit and introductive cultural layer

The analysis that has been executed concerns the cultural content presented in the books of the fourth edition of *Stepping Stones* for VMBO. Despite the fact that the books contain varied, playful, and motivating content, which is covered by the content categories described by Vrbová (2006), and is distributed over various (communicative) exercises and tasks, which supports the concept of 21st century learning (Voogt & Pareja Roblin, 2010), the cultural part of the development is overall not emphasized. The content of the books have been perceived as being quite generic and introductive. The culture content could have been extended and integrated in a more profound way, which would offer the learners more knowledge and intercultural communicative competence. It would prepare students for real-life communication in English at least on the level of awareness, regardless of specific locations and situations. The pragmatic skills and socio-cultural knowledge as emphasized on, e.g., websites of other methods like *Up Beat* and *Next Move,* the CEFR publications, and in previous studies like Lund's (2006), are integrated to the least extent, while 'Small c' culture content stimulates more intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence than 'big C' culture content as described by Vrbová (2006). These latter concepts reflect the pluricultural competence which is highlighted by the Language Policy Unit in the CEFR. However, the fact that the content is not being presented as cultural content could also be attributed to the fact that these books should introduce the learner to the target language and culture on A1 level of proficiency. The latter, combined with the fact that *Stepping Stones* emphasizes the linguistic part of the language learning process instead of the cultural aspect, partly relativizes the lack of profound culture content in this series of books. The second book contains more culture content, but the profound cultural content in which the learner's own culture is discussed and compared to other cultures is essentially missing. This way of

including culture content, according to McKay (2003), reflects a learner- centred approach. It would also promote a deeper understanding of the own culture, which would stimulate pupils to communicate with others about their native culture and would thereby stimulate out class communication (McKay, 2003). The culture content in the second book, occurs on a basic level of cultural awareness as explained by Baker (2012), and applies as well to the features of CLT as described by Mckay (2003). The scarcely presented cultural layer has sometimes made it problematic to analyse the explicit materials and to avoid assumptions or conclusions which learners might or might not draw as a result of the presented culture content. Culture content stimulates pupils in general, and also promotes critical analysis, discussion, and interaction in class. Included aspects, such as various communicative tasks, self-assessment, and e-learning, all reflect 21st century learning. Additionally, a two- dimensional approach of culture content would be appropriate in this 21st century context as it reflect critical analysis, but this is only promoted scarcely in the second textbook. This thus applies to a higher level of cultural awareness, as it includes comparison of cultures, which refers to features of a higher level of awareness, according to Baker (2012). A two- dimensional approach is a good way to overcome cultural biases according to Gray (2000). According to Gray (2000), a critical approach to culture content, and enough space for pupils to discuss or respond to the content, is often not promoted in textbooks; this requires more input of teachers. The second textbook already shows a somewhat larger amount of culture content, which leads to the expectation that subsequent series of textbooks might provide learners with a less generic and introductive cultural layer than presented in the second textbook. Instead, as compared to the analysed series, the next series of textbooks might emphasize more on the cultural comparison and critical analysis. The culture content might be discussed more extensively online, but the online part appears to serve an additional role when using the textbooks, as for the fact that there is only sometimes being referred to materials online. The attention paid to cultural

content in, for example, the publication of the CEFR by the Language Policy Unit (n.d.), is not reflected in the core objectives, nor in the textbooks. A solution for spending more time on culture teaching, according to Bieswanger (2008), would be to include culture more in national core objectives. According to the information on the website of *Up Beat,* culture content stimulates and motivates, which is acknowledged to be important in ELT. According to Prodomou (1988), it is hard to introduce a culture without embedding it in its own cultural base; this would explain the focus on inner circle varieties, as those refer to the bases of English. The book, however, does show an increasing line in the second textbook compared to the first textbook, when it comes to the culture content. An international perspective, as Lund(2006) describes it and international target culture materials as described by McKay (2003), are reflected by the presentation of different interlocutors and countries. This is noticeable in the illustrations and texts, in spite of the focus on Britain. Britain is, e.g., discussed most extensively concerning cultural aspects, and the spelling appears to be mainly British. This focus on Britain could be perceived as a negative presentation of English language and culture. However, in case there are other extensive examples of varieties of English given, and sufficient countries included, this British focus might as well be acceptable, as along with this, a realistic view on English in the world would be created, in spite of the British focus. A realistic view on the status of English as an international language also highlights the ELT core objective as described in the CEFR.

5.2 Crucial importance of teachers' input

The lack of explanation, discussion, and interconnection of the culture content in especially the first textbook leads to an increased importance of the teacher as regards culture language learning. The teacher's role gains more significance regarding supplemental cultural information on the varieties of English, consequences of intercultural communication, avoidance of cultural bias, comparing and relating cultures to one another, and analyzing and

discussing the presented content. City names and typical dishes can be presented in stories or exercises; however, without any explanation or comparison, they might not be interpreted in the adequate cultural context related to the target language. The way in which the culture content is presented in the books, would only result into optimal intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence with quite some guidance and supplemental information from the teacher. As the Language Policy Unit (n.d.) claims in the CEFR, general intercultural values are important to convey; these are conveyed implicitly. The concept of pluriculturalism results from intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence. Bieswanger (2008) claims that intercultural awareness is developed through, among other things, the awareness of the existence of the different varieties of English. Another aspect of this is the awareness of the possibility of miscommunication (Byram, 1997). According to Lund (2006), it is an illusional situation to discuss all varieties of English, but at least a couple examples could be discussed. These again, could serve for exemplifying the various varieties of English and the many situational contexts in which English is spoken. This idea has been promoted by, among others, the Language Policy Unit (n.d.) and is shared in the recent CEFR publications. In the books, only three inner circle varieties are included in listening exercises: Australia, the UK, and the USA. The existence of different accents and various English speaking countries, is mentioned in the books. According to Bieswanger (2008), the vast majority of textbooks do not include native speakers in the verbal exercises, which does not apply to these books. The lack of small c culture content, which includes sociocultural information and results in pragmatic skills, results in more requirements towards teachers and more input of them (Lund, 2006). They are expected to teach from a broader perspective, and to possess cultural knowledge apart from the linguistic knowledge as 'small c' culture content appears to be more difficult to teach on (Sercu, 2005).

5.3 Lack of awareness of the cultural learning process

Alongside with the fact that the Language Policy Unit proposes can-do statements and language portfolios, and that yellow pages are included in the books in order to help learners study more effectively, students are not made sufficiently aware of their cultural learning process, apart from the linguistic learning process. Awareness of this might stimulate students to discover the cultural aspect of ELT themselves. According to McKay (2003), first introducing the own culture, then exploring other cultures, and finally comparing those to one another would stress the cultural development process apart from the linguistic development process.

5.4 Additional questionnaires

Some insight has been gained as concerns the actual use of the method in class, the attitude of teachers about culture teaching on VMBO level, the cultural layer in the *Stepping Stones* books, and the function of the teachers' package. Two teachers who currently use the *Stepping Stones* method were approached and questioned. The results of the questionnaires, however, can be perceived as merely anecdotal for the fact that there were only two teachers questioned. Nevertheless, the results do raise curiosity and questions for further research. The answers of Prins (personal communication, April 16, 2014), also point out that she is willing to spend more time on teaching about culture content, which supports the results of Sercu's (2005) study.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The two textbooks of the fourth edition of *Stepping Stones* books, and the additional activity books have been closely analysed regarding the included cultural content. The content has been investigated by means of a qualitative approach regarding four aspects, namely: content and context, English-speaking countries and varieties of English, overgeneralization and stereotyping, and intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence.

Overall, the series of textbooks *Stepping Stones* for VMBO appears to be a fun, motivating, and dynamic method to use for ELT. The content is distributed over many different topics, which reflect the students' context, such as introduction of the self and others, animals, and mobile phones in the first textbook, and natural disasters, airports, and the weather in the second textbook. Additionally, motivating materials, such as stories, songs and illustrations, are included. The method is linked to CEFR criteria and, according to the official website and books, highlights the importance of communicative development: all kinds of communicative, interactive tasks are presented in the books, which stimulate students to speak English. Many aspects of the 21st century learning approach, and ELT curricula, are reflected in the books, although these do apply more to the linguistic part of the book than the cultural part. The books appear to represent a very basic and introductive level of ELT, whereby CLT comes secondly with respect to teaching about grammar- and vocabulary. As regards the culture content, the two textbooks show some interesting differences in terms of included content and context. In the current section, the most significant findings will be discussed which provides an answer to the following research question:

> *How has cultural content been included in the fourth edition of Stepping Stones textbooks for VMBO; do the cultural frameworks apply to countries only within the inner circle of English or alternatively also to those in the outer circle, expanding circle varieties, and to general intercultural values?*

6.1 Cultural findings textbook 1 and 2

The most significant similarities and differences between the first and second textbook have been found in both content and context. The culture content in both books consists of mainly loose sentences or words like 'Amsterdam,' which serve as the location in a story, and "in English, you can talk to people from all over the world," which emphasizes the status of English as a world language. In addition, pupils are also asked to think of English speaking countries and occasions in which English is spoken, but this applies to only one exercise. Most of the content in both books is not supported by descriptive text, which results in the fact that the cultural indicators, might not be perceived as being cultural content. The source culture content lacks entirely in the first book, except for Dutch city names, which serve as location as mentioned above. The target culture content in both books is included in all kinds of materials and topics: poems, stories, TV channels, sports, animals, traditions and the weather. These topics are more genuine and serious in the second book than in the first textbook. The characters in the first textbook presents interlocutors from countries mainly within the inner circle of English, while the second textbooks present more countries from the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle, and even from outside the circles of English. In addition, the second textbook introduces a wider range of countries in general. On the other hand, the second textbook seems to present more Western-looking characters in the illustrations, as opposed to those in the first textbook. Both textbooks appear to present British English spelling and a focus on Britain and the British culture. In the second textbook, the focus shifts from Britain to a wider range of countries in the EU which are discussed in a more profound way regarding a certain topic or aspect. This creates a more real-life and global context. Both textbooks lack pragmatic, socio-cultural information and the information on different varieties of English, which, alternatively would prepare pupils for intercultural communication in the target language. In the second textbook, cultures are

compared to one another and cultural stories are shared by different interlocutors. The latter is discussed in the last chapter, which is entirely devoted to culture. Besides this, both 'small c' and 'big C' culture content is included, while the first textbook only shares these types of content in a quite generic way as regards Britain and its culture. The culture content in the second book, compared to the culture content in the first book, appears to develop more intercultural awareness and some intercultural communicative competence as result of this. The audio and video fragments which come with the method, have not been investigated, but appear to exemplify some different accents, which could lead to the development of the intercultural communicative competence. Furthermore, the culture content appears to reflect the features of basic cultural awareness as described by Baker (2012) and also applies to the evaluation criteria of Vrbová (2006). The culture content is offered, in some cases, from different perspectives which, according to Gray (2000) and the many aspects of 21st century learning, indicates a two-dimensional approach. Other examples of noticeable 21st century learning aspects are self- assessment and cultural comparisons. However, critical analysis of the content is not stimulated by the content in both books. Critical awareness is important to create different perspectives, but also to avoid cultural bias or to deal with stereotypes. Fortunately, despite the overgeneralized culture content, no stereotyping has been observed in either one of the books. Critical awareness, along with the socio- cultural information as regards English speaking countries, the relation between various countries and the English language, more profound information on the different varieties of English, and more critical analysis of the cultural content should be promoted in the subsequent series of textbooks. This current series of textbooks provides students with very general and introductive culture content as regards English as a world language, which does not reflect the two concepts of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism, described in the CEFR. well

Various examples from the textbooks and activity books, which support the results and conclusions, can be found in the Appendix (p. 58).

6.2 Importance of teachers' input

As result of the analysis, the method appears to offer multidimensional and stimulating material, when it comes to the linguistic content. As concerns the cultural layer, there are some gaps to fill in by teachers. Culture teaching requires more input and knowledge of teachers. As Lund (2006) mentions, teachers should use the book as a guideline, but should possess at the same time a broad package of communicative, linguistic and (inter)cultural knowledge themselves to supplement the content that is given in the books. In order to stimulate a profound discussion of the content and development of intercultural knowledge and communicative competence, which are not stimulated optimally by the content in the books, the cultural content should be extensively clarified and discussed. Critical analysis of the content, as described by Parmenter (2003), has been considered an important part of the cultural learning process in several previous studies; it stimulates students to become more involved with the content. Moreover, several varieties of English should be discussed and students should be aware of the miscommunications that could occur in real- life situations. Besides of this, to create an authentic view on English in the world, the students should be made more aware of the different occasions in which English is spoken nowadays. Lastly, to stimulate intercultural development, students should be made more aware of their culture learning process. Students are stimulated to speak in English through the content in the books, but are not made aware of the intercultural context where English as an international language is spoken. Teachers should relate and critically discuss the culture content in the books and explore intercultural issues and situations with the students, wherever the books do not offer this opportunity.

6.3 Limitations of the study

As mentioned earlier in this paper, audio and video fragments have not been taken into account, neither have the online materials. This could be a limitation of the present research because of the lack of knowledge regarding the content that has been offered online. However, it is still interesting to see to what extent culture content is included in the textbooks, as for the fact that if the textbooks are used in class instead of the online version of the materials, the online content appears to be used only additionally. Another limitation would be lack of knowledge concerning the input of teachers who use this method for ELT, since the teachers' input appears to be of a great importance in relation to culture teaching via this method, and in general. This leads to questions for future research.

6.4 Further research

As a result of the answers given in the questionnaires, a suggestion for further research would be an extensive study on the input of teachers who use these *Stepping Stones* textbooks for VMBO, to see how they contribute to the culture language teaching and fill the gaps that the books show when it comes to the cultural content. Moreover, it would be interesting to see how teachers in the Netherlands currently think of culture language teaching on a VMBO level, and how they already execute this in class. These questionnaires can be found in the Appendix (p. 79). It would also be interesting to investigate the attitude of students, which is also a significant factor in the development process. Another aspect which would be interesting to investigate is the supplemental value of the online materials when it comes to the culture learning. Lastly, the subsequent series of *Stepping Stones* textbooks for VMBO could be investigated on its cultural content to see whether there is a continuous, and increasing line in the included cultural content.

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Appendices

A. Content scheme: Cultural content & Context

Textbook 1

Type of content	Example of	Description	Book & Page
illustrations	Variety of cultures	Illustrations seem to represent a cultural layer, since different cultures appear to have been introduced.	Textbook 1, p. 4
Illustration	Highlighted American cheerleader culture	The illustrations which introduce chapter 7, convey the American cheerleader culture. This is one of the cultural aspects, which are not explained, but are indicated.	Textbook 1, p.101
Reading exercise	Highlighted Scottish tradition	In this text, among other things, the Scottish Highland games, are introduces to the reader. This is one of the few traditions, which are explained in the book.	Textbook 1, p. 110

Various exercises	Introduction of self and other	The self and the other are introduced, but not in an (inter)cultural context	Textbook 1, p. 6-9 Activity book 1A, p. 9-16.
Watching exercise	Focus on British culture	After the introduction of the self and other, the focus shifts to British culture. The focus, in general, remains set on the British culture.	Textbook 1, p. 16
TaskCard	Source culture materials	Throughout the books, Dutch words, only used as locations, are included as for instance in this example where the self is being introduced.	Textbook 1, p. 17
Reading exercise	'Small c' culture content	Many introductive, generic content on for example, sports, animals and school are presented. On Britain, however, 'small c' culture content such as dos and don'ts are presented as well.	Textbook 1, p. 88 Activity book 1B, p. 40
Illustrations and texts	Big C culture content	A lot of generic information regarding	Textbook, p. 90 Activity book 1B, p. 35

		several topics is included, like tourist information regarding London.	
Various texts and exercises	Authentic target culture materials	Poems, TV channels, websites and celebrities are present authentic content.	Textbook 1, p. 21 Poem Textbook 1, p. 28 BBC Textbook 1, p. Textbook 1, p.72 School Textbook 1, p. 110 Website Activity book 1B, p. 88 Queen Elizabeth
TaskCard	International context	In this TaskCard, pupils are asked to create a brochure with information for foreign visitors.	Textbook 1, p. 97
First lesson	International context	In this exercise, pupils are asked to think of English speaking countries and occasions in which English in spoken.	Activity book 1A, p. 6

Textbook 2

Type of content	Example of	Short description	Book & page
Reading: story	More serious, real-life settings	In the second textbook, more real-life situations seem to be presented in stories and texts, which creates a more serious and authentic context than in the first textbook.	Textbook 2, p. 83 Airport trouble Textbook 2, p. 49 *I survived a tornado!* Activity book 2A, p. 38 Facts Activity book 2A, p. 78 News facts
Illustrations	Western characters	In the second textbook, more western characters seem be included than in the first textbook. The illustration are less varied in this textbook.	Textbook 2, p. 54, 60, 73, 107
Various texts	Big C culture content	In the first example, several famous artists from Sweden, Canada, England and America and their	Textbook 2, p. 98 Artists Textbook 2, p. 80 *Space trip* Textbook 2, p. 80

		albums are discussed. In the second example, a story is told about a rich American business man that joins a Russian trip into space. The third example contains information about the grand central.	*Grand Central* Activity book 2A, p. 33 History
Reading	'Small c' culture content	In the first example, various people explain why they are proud or their country. They mention football teams, music bands, nature, sense of humor, wealth, language and culture. In the second example, Woollies and the fact that they	Textbook 2, p. 127 Textbook 2, p. 110 Activity book 2A, p. 74 weather conditions Activity book 2B, p. 95 Weird customs

		offer the possibility to create your own school uniform, is discussed.	
Songs	Motivating materials	Some poems at the beginning of each chapter, are replaced by a stanza of a song.	Textbook 2, p. 55 The Judds Textbook 2, p. 89 Madonna
Various texts	Target culture material	The first example contains a story which tells the history of the romans in Britain, well supported by illustrations. The second example contains text about the MTV awards. The third example shows an illustration on which two newspapers are presented; The telegraph and the	Textbook 2, p. 14. Textbook 2, p. 90 Textbook 2, p. 39 Activity book 2B, p. 48 Songs

		Daily Newspaper.	
Various texts	The only text which indicates empowerment of the source culture.	The first example contains a text which concerns the inventor of dry-land roller skates back in the early years of 1700 in the Netherlands. The second example shows a combination of target and source culture materials: different artists are mentioned.	Textbook 2, p. 12 Textbook 2, p. 93
Various texts	Repeated materials	Some topics that are presented in the first textbook, are repeated and discussed differently in the second.	Textbook 2, p. 110 School uniforms Textbook 2, p. 46 BBC shows and tours Activity book 2A, p.73 BBC
TaskCard	Better correspondence between text and illustrations	In the taskCard, the learner is asked to write a holiday postcard. The example comes from	Textbook 2, p. 17

		Scotland and is supported by an illustration of a typical Scottish setting and a man wearing a kilt.	
Illustrations	Focus on EU	These pages show the weather as regards various European countries. This information is used for comparison in other exercises.	Textbook 2, p. 44-45

B. Content scheme: English speaking countries & varieties of English

Textbook 1

Type of content	Example of	Description	Book & Page
Various texts and exercises	Australia, Scotland	Those countries, where English plays an important role, are mentioned more obviously than most other mentioned countries. However, they are not related	Textbook 1, p. 28 Australia Textbook 1, p. 56 Scotland

		to the English language.	
Various texts and exercises.	Ireland, America, Canada, Kenya	Those countries are, among others, mentioned discretely.	Textbook 1, p. 65 Ireland Textbook 1, p. 107 America Textbook 1, p. 137 Canada Textbook 1, p. 79 Kenya
TaskCard	CEFR signs	Throughout the book, there are references to the CEFR criteria.	Textbook 1, p. 49 Activity book 1A, p. 58
Reading exercise	British focus	The presentation and use of English is focussed mainly on British English. Like the examples show English uniforms at an English school, pounds, mum instead of mom(Mum in Britain and mom in America) and tourist information on	Textbook 1, p. 46 Mum Textbook 1, p. 72 Pembroke High, uniforms Textbook 1, p. 77 Pounds Textbook 1, p. 90 & Activity book 1B, p. 49 Tourist information London Activity book 1B, p.

		London.	35 England quiz
Listening exercise	Australian accent	This example contains a listening exercise in which the learners listen to a tour through the Australian outback. They will possibly be introduced to the Australian accent. This has not been investigated because the exercise can only be accessed by pupils and teachers.	Textbook 1, p. 28
First lesson	English as an international language	In this exercise, pupils are asked to think of English speaking countries and occasions in which English in spoken.	Activity book 1A, p. 6
Sounds and Spelling	Pronunciation	Each chapter, words	Textbook 1, p. 102

| | | are introduced and discussed according to the pronunciation and spelling. The focus is set on British- English. | Activity book 1B, p. 62 |

Textbook 2

Type of content	Example of	Short description	Book & Page
Reading	Different varieties included	People with a different cultural background explain why they are proud of their country. Additionally, it is mentioned that they have their own language.	Textbook 2, p. 127
TaskCard	Sentence which explicitly reads that there are many countries in which people speak English.	In the TaskCard, the learner is asked to choose one of the proposed English speaking countries and collect information.	Textbook 2, p. 131

TaskCard and Stones	Communicative competence	In this second textbook, learners are more stimulated to practise their English, among other things, in the TaskCards and the stones.	Textbook 2, p. 33 TaskCard Textbook 2, p. 51 TaskCard Textbook 2, p. 57 Stones Activity book 2B, p. 94 Talk to a classmate
Sounds and Spelling	Pronunciation	The sounds and Spelling exercises are more profound and extended than they are in the first textbook. The number of words is larger and they are discussed according to various aspects.	Textbook 2, p. 40 Textbook 2, p. 56 Activity book 2A, p. 61
Various texts	Focus on British	It is still noticeable that the focus of the language usage is set on British, also in this textbook. The content on Britain	Textbook 2, p. 100 Wicked Textbook 2, p. 63 Mum Textbook 2, p.21 Wobbly

		dominates and there are many 'typical' English words such as 'wicked' and 'mum'.	
Reading exercises	Stories told by native speakers	Throughout the book, the stories are told by native speakers that originate from mainly Britain instead of other countries from the inner, outer or expanding circles.	Textbook 2, p. 8 Textbook 2, p. 49 Textbook 2, p. 65
Stones	Useful sentences to ease the communication in the target language	In the book, useful sentences are shared which will ease the communication in English.	Textbook 2, p. 75 Activity book 2B, p. 8,9

C. Content scheme: Intercultural awareness and intercultural communicative competence

Textbook 1

Type of text	Example of	Description	Book & Page
Reading exercise:	Intercultural values	By means of	Textbook 1, p. 15

story		sentences such as "with English you can talk to people from all over the world!" English as an international language is acknowledged but it also implies openness and tolerance for other cultures and others in general.	Textbook 1, p. 63
Reading exercise	Various characters/interlocutors with different cultural backgrounds	Throughout the book, different interlocutors from different countries are introduced, but not related or compared.	Textbook 1,p. 46
Various exercises and texts	Chapter 1: *Me, myself and you*	Throughout the whole chapter, the self and other are introduced, but not in (inter)cultural	Textbook 1, p. 5-18 Activity book 1A, p. 7-34

		context.	
Reading exercise	Difference in Kenya	In this exercise and the supplemental text, pupils are made aware of the intercultural differences between the own native culture and Kenya.	Activity book 1B, p. 22
Reading and listening exercise	Comparison between British and Dutch school menu	In this exercises, pupils are asked to compare lunch at school in Holland and Britain.	Activity book 1B, p. 7
Story	Intercultural value of openness and respect and tolerance towards others.	The story indicates that among cultures and between cultures, everyone for example, dresses differently.	Activity book 1A, p. 62

Textbook 2

Type of content	Example of	Short description	Book & Page
Texts	Intercultural values	The first example is taken from a poem	Textbook 2, p. 73 Textbook 2, p. 5

		and reads: 'I want to travel around the world' and ' I want to visit other countries'. The second example is taken from a poem and reads: 'I dream of the beach in sunny Spain, where I met Juanita far away from the rain'.	
Topics	Comparison of weather conditions regarding several countries	Here, the typical weather conditions of Finland, Norway, Denmark, Poland, Germany, Italy, Spain, France, GB, Belgium and the Netherlands are discussed. Moreover, the countries and their position on the map are shown.	Textbook 2, p. 44,45 Activity book 2A, p. 72

Listening	Culture eggheads	This listening exercise contains information about a TV show in which two teams have to answer questions about the cultures of different countries.	Textbook 2, p. 126 Activity book 2B, p. 91
Reading text	Are you proud of your country?	In this text, people from Wales, England, Ireland, America, Spain and New Zealand, share their feelings about their country.	Textbook 2, p. 127 Activity book 2B, p.
Reading text	Customs compared	In this text, birthday customs and wedding customs are discussed regarding Ireland, Scotland, India and Canada.	Textbook 2, p. 128 Activity book 2B, p. 95,96
Reading text	'Welcome' in Swedish	This story is about the Ice Hotel in Sweden. The last sentence of the story	Textbook 2, p. 82

		says: 'You are always Welcome! In Sweden we say: 'välkommen!'	

D. Content scheme: Overgeneralization & stereotyping

Textbook 1

Type of text	Example of	Description	Book & Page
Various texts and exercises	Chapter 6: *So British!*	This is a whole chapter devoted to Britain. Besides this, Britain stands out in other chapters as well.	Textbook 1, p. 85-101 Activity book 1B, p. 34-60
Listening exercise: illustration	School menu	This illustration could be perceived as stereotypical because it contains 'lovely salad' and 'burger and chips' on a board in the school canteen. It could also be perceived as overgeneralized, simplified.	Textbook 1, p. 70 Activity book 1B, p. 7

| Watching exercise: text | 'Typical' British words | The exercise description says: 'What is typically British?' and 'Are all British that polite or does it only seem this way?' A overgeneralized statement is made here, but another perspective is being offered at the same time. | Textbook 1, p. 16 |

Textbook 2

Type of content	Example of	Short description	Book & Page
Reading text	Two-dimensional approach	Experiences are shared a lot in this second textbook, so are stories from different tellers. This way, a topic is always discussed from different point of views.	Textbook 2, p. 15

		(culturally related or not)	
Illustrations	Overgeneralized content	The illustration shows an Englishman in a suit, with an umbrella and a laptop, surrounded by a thermometer, boots, and Britain on a map on the background. This illustration could be perceived as being overgeneralized content.	
Reading text and Illustrations	Overgeneralized content	In this text, four options are given for eating out. The English teahouse offers typical food such as scones, pastries, sandwiches, fruit tart, salads and other things that often come with high	Textbook 2, p. 58 Activity book 2A, p. 96 Illustrations

		tea. Another English pub offers burgers and Fish& Chips.	
Story	Cultural bias	The title of this text, in which customs regarding various cultures are compared, is 'weird customs'. This could lead to a cultural bias.	Textbook 2, p. 128

Evelien van den Bos- Hogeland College Amersfoort

What do you think of culture teaching?

"I think culture teaching is an important part of the foreign language learning process. Not only when it comes to a specific country or culture, but also concerning general intercultural values which are important for students to know and discuss. Although, I must say that the extent to which culture teaching really affects students, depends on the level on which it is taught, the interest of the students themselves."

To what extent, according to you, is cultural content integrated throughout the *Stepping Stones* books? Is the cultural content conveyed realistically or superficially in your opinion?

"I think that by means of TV and films, students know more about America than they know about England. For me, it's quite the opposite, as I'm focussing more on England. Last year, in New York, I made pictures which I selected afterwards and brought to class to discuss. The students loved it!

Whether cultural content is integrated well in the method or not I don't know. At least some cultural information is shared in the books, which is already something. In general, the attention is spread over most of the common wealth countries."

To what extent do you supplement the materials from the textbooks with own information?

"I mainly do this with the C&C (Country and Culture) parts, but also more generally. Whenever I can tell something or show something on the E-board. I often show supportive pictures and illustrations."

Have you come across any stereotypical information? If so, in what way have you dealt with it?

"Yes, Australian people are too much regarded as 'Aussie'. It doesn't bother me because my students watch a lot of films where this is displayed the same way. On VMBO level, I don't really feel the urge to change their perspective."

To what extent do you stimulate discussion of the materials in class?

"Every now and then, when it accidentally occurs. My students don't like to discuss things that much."

Would you prefer an emphasis on the linguistic part or the cultural part of the language learning process or both equal?

"In my opinion, the emphasis should be on the linguistic part of the language learning process. In the end, the aim is to teach the students English. The cultural aspect is additional. "

Do you use the teachers package? If so, what does it add to your (culture) teaching?

"I sometimes use the tools that the teachers package offers. The cultural materials, I provide myself; from the internet, holidays, or just own knowledge."

To what extent, in your opinion, is intercultural awareness created based on the *Stepping Stones* method? By intercultural awareness I mean having an idea of the value of English as a world language, the diversity of accents and varieties and the possibility of miscommunications.

"Most of it is a bridge too far for my students. With good TL students, I sometimes notice signs of recognition of jokes and puns."

What do you think of culture teaching?

"As presented in the *Stepping Stones* books, it has hardly integrated and seems to be very western- oriented most of the times. Immigrant students will not recognize themselves in the cultural descriptions and their autochthonous classmates do not learn anything about their cultural background."

To what extent, according to you, is cultural content integrated throughout the *Stepping Stones* books? Is the cultural content conveyed realistically or superficially in your opinion?

"See previous answer."

To what extent do you supplement the cultural content from the textbooks with own information?

"Sometimes, when I happen to know more about it."

Have you come across any stereotypical information? If so, in what way have you dealt with it?

"Barely. Very superficially presented in terms of, for example, food."

To what extent do you stimulate discussion of the materials in class?

"A bit. Increasingly from class 1MH to class 4M."

Would you prefer an emphasis on the linguistic part or the cultural part of the language learning process or both equal?

"I prefer an emphasis on the cultural aspect. I would like to teach my students the kind of 'realistic' English which will help them everywhere around the world."

Do you use the teachers package? If so, what does it add to your (culture) teaching?

"Yes, but it does not add anything when it comes to culture teaching."

To what extent, in your opinion, is intercultural awareness created by means of the *Stepping Stones* method? By intercultural awareness I mean for example: having an idea of the value of English as a world language, the diversity of accents and varieties and the possibility of miscommunications.

"To a certain extent, but it depends on the teacher's input."