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In Pursuit of an Intercultural Dimension in EFL-Teaching

Exploring Cognitions among Finland-Swedish Comprehensive School Teachers

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Abstract

This thesis is about the educational purpose of foreign language teaching (FLT) in an increasingly internationalised world. The past 20-30 years have witnessed a fundamental rethinking of the aims of FLT, entailing a shift in emphasis from linguistic competence over communicative competence to intercultural competence. The growing emphasis on cultural issues, called for by research and international curricular documents, places new demands on language teachers.

The overall aim of this study is to deepen the knowledge about the attitudes of teachers at the upper level of the Finland-Swedish comprehensive school towards the treatment of culture in English foreign language (EFL) teaching. The questions in focus are: 1) How do teachers interpret the concept "culture" in EFL-teaching?, 2) How do they specify the cultural objectives of their teaching? and 3) What do they do to attain these objectives? The thesis strives to reveal whether or not language teaching today can be described as intercultural, in the sense that culture is taught with the aim of promoting intercultural understanding, tolerance and empathy.

This abductive and largely exploratory study is placed within a constructivist and sociocultural framework, and is inspired by both phenomenography and hermeneutics. It takes its starting-point in language didactics, and can also be regarded as a contribution to teacher cognition research. The empirical data consists of verbatim transcribed interviews with 13 Finland-Swedish teachers of English at grades 7-9.

The findings are presented according to three orientations and reviewed with reference to the 2004 Finnish National Framework Curriculum. Within the cognitive orientation, "culture" is perceived as factual knowledge, and the teaching of culture is defined in terms of the transmission of knowledge, especially about Britain and the USA (*Pedagogy of Information*). Within the action-related orientation, "culture" is seen as skills of a social and socio-linguistic nature, and the teaching aims at preparing the students for contacts with people from the target language areas (*Pedagogy of Preparation*). Within the affective orientation, which takes a more holistic approach, "culture" is seen as a bi-directional perspective. Students are encouraged to look at their own familiar culture from another perspective, and learn to empathise with and show respect

for otherness in general, not just concerning representatives of English-speaking countries (*Pedagogy of Encounter).* Very few of the interviewed teachers represent the third approach, which is the one that can be characterised as truly *inter*cultural.

The study indicates that many teachers feel unsure about how to teach culture in an appropriate and up-to-date manner. This is attributed to, among other things, lack of teacher insights as well as lack of time and adequate material. The thesis ends with a set of recommendations as to how EFL could be developed in a more intercultural direction.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, culture, intercultural competence, curriculum, teacher cognition, phenomenography, hermeneutics

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Writing a thesis, as I see it, is a very personal undertaking. At times it can also be quite lonely, especially if you are used to being surrounded by tens of colleagues and hundreds of teenagers in your daily work! Several people have contributed to the fact that I will be able to look back at this period in my life with joy and gratitude.

First of all, I wish to thank my supervisor, Professor *Kaj Sjöholm*, for his support, encouragement and never-ending faith in me and my project. My sincere thanks also go to Professors *Sauli Takala* and *Pauli Kaikkonen* for making valuable comments on my typescript. I would also like to express my great appreciation of the courses on research methodology given by Professor *Sven-Erik Hansén*. His words of wisdom regarding how to produce coherent scientific texts have been my lodestar through much of the writing process.

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I dedicate this thesis to my father.

Pargas, 28 October 2005

Eva Larzén

Contents

1 Introduction **13**
1.1 Background 13
1.2 Research problem and general aim of the study 14
1.3 Outline of the thesis 16

2 The Theoretical Framework of the Study **19**
2.1 The intercultural dimension in foreign language teaching 19
2.1.1 The need for intercultural education 19
2.1.2 Culture and language teaching 23
2.1.2.1 Conceptions of culture 23
2.1.2.2 The relationship between language and culture 27
2.1.2.3 The development of aims within foreign language teaching 32
2.1.3 Intercultural foreign language teaching – potentials and challenges 39
2.1.3.1 The potential of foreign language teaching in general and the teaching of English in particular 39
2.1.3.2 Some current challenges faced by contemporary language teachers 42
2.2 Teacher cognition 45
2.2.1 Some characteristics of teacher cognition 45
2.2.2 Overview of research on language teacher cognition 51
2.3 Integrating the intercultural dimension and language teacher cognition 54
2.3.1 International research 54
2.3.2 Nordic research 57
2.3.3 The present study – specification of research questions (RQ1-RQ3) 60

3 The Setting of the Study **63**
3.1 The Finland-Swedish context 63
3.2 Comprehensive education in Finland 63
3.2.1 Organisation and principles of today's comprehensive education 63
3.2.2 The 2004 National Framework Curriculum 65
3.2.3 Curricular guidelines for the teaching of English 68

4 Methodological Considerations **73**
4.1 The position of the study in a qualitative research paradigm 73
4.1.1 Guidelines for choice of approach 73
4.1.2 The phenomenographic interview 77

4.1.3 Hermeneutical analysis 79
4.2 The implementation of the empirical study 80
4.2.1 The selection of informants 80
4.2.2 The personal meeting 83
4.2.3 Analysis of the material 86
4.2.4 Validity and reliability aspects 90
4.2.5 Ethical aspects 94

5 Presentation and interpretation of results 97

5.1 Approaching the field of interest 97
5.2 Preview of three orientations: the cognitive, the action-related and the affective 100
5.3 The intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching as perceived by Finland-Swedish teachers of English 102
5.3.1 Teachers' conceptions of culture (RQ1) 102
5.3.1.1 Factual knowledge 103
5.3.1.2 Skills 106
5.3.1.3 Bi-directional perspective 108
5.3.2 Teachers' beliefs about cultural objectives (RQ2) 110
5.3.2.1 Providing general background information 111
5.3.2.2 Preparing for future intercultural encounters 112
5.3.2.3 Promoting tolerance and empathy 114
5.3.3 Teachers' descriptions of their classroom practice (RQ3) 116
5.3.3.1 Pedagogy of Information 117
5.3.3.2 Pedagogy of Preparation 119
5.3.3.3 Pedagogy of Encounter 121
5.3.4 Teachers' views on the results and constraints of culture teaching 127
5.3.4.1 Assessment 127
5.3.4.2 Ambitions and obstacles 131
5.4 Review of the results from three perspectives 140

6 Concluding Remarks 145

6.1 Summary 145
6.2 The contribution of the study 146
6.3 Analysis of the methodological approach of the study 149
6.4 Suggestions for further research 149

References 151

Appendices 163

List of Abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the thesis. The meanings listed on the right are the ones appearing in the literature consulted for the theoretical framework of this study. Some abbreviations I myself have introduced specifically for this study.

C1	The learner’s own culture, or the familiar culture
C2	The foreign culture
CC	Communicative Competence
CEF	Common European Framework of Reference
IC	Intercultural Competence
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
ILT	Intercultural Language Teaching
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
EIL	English as an International Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
FLT	Foreign Language Teaching
L1	First Language; the language acquired as a mother tongue
L2	Second Language
LC	Linguistic Competence
LWC	Language of Wider Communication
NFC	National Framework Curriculum
TC	Target Culture
TL	Target Language

List of Charts

Chart 1. Key terms in teacher cognition research 48

List of Figures

Figure 1. The design of the study 16

Figure 2. Clarification of key concepts 20

Figure 3. Byram's five *savoirs*, components in intercultural competence (2003, 62) 35

Figure 4. Byram's comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence (1997, 73) 37

Figure 5. The development of aims in foreign language teaching 38

Figure 6. Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice, according to Borg (2003) 47

Figure 7. Conscious and unconscious teacher knowledge, according to Kohonen (2001) 51

Figure 8. The intercultural dimension as perceived in this study 61

Figure 9. The selection of informants 82

Figure 10. Teachers' conceptions of the intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching 102

Figure 11. Culture as factual knowledge 103

Figure 12. Culture as skills 106

Figure 13. Culture as a bi-directional perspective 108

Figure 14. Illustration of the difference between three conceptions of culture 110

Figure 15. The cultural objective perceived as providing general background information 111

Figure 16. The cultural objective perceived as preparing for future intercultural encounters 112

Figure 17. The cultural objective perceived as promoting tolerance and empathy 114

Figure 18. Illustration of the cumulative character of three cultural objectives 116

Figure 19. Classroom practice influenced by Pedagogy of Information 118

Figure 20. Classroom practice influenced by Pedagogy of Preparation 120

Figure 21. Classroom practice influenced by Pedagogy of Encounter 122

Figure 22. Factors perceived as obstructing the teaching of culture 132

1 Introduction

1.1 Background

The importance of the intercultural dimension of foreign language teaching (FLT) as a research field is now internationally recognised. Language teaching has been focussed for the last two or three decades on improving methods for teaching linguistic competence. It has now turned to the question of what the intercultural dimension should be, given the increase in international interaction both real and virtual, and the continuing question of what the educational purpose of language teaching should be.

However, intercultural understanding and intercultural competence are concepts that are frequently but sometimes light-heartedly used in today's pedagogical discussions, not the least in curricular contexts. Lundgren (2001, 2002) and Tornberg (2000), who have both studied conceptions of culture, are surprised by the fact that these terms are seldom problematised nor clearly defined in educational debates in Sweden. Their research also points to the fact that both the teachers themselves and the textbooks used there tend to represent an old-fashioned view of culture as something static that can be transmitted to the pupils through teacher-centred education. Gagnestam's (2003) recent doctoral thesis indicates that many language teachers in Swedish upper secondary schools feel unsure about how to deal with culture in language teaching. She refers to a lack of tools that both teachers and student teachers feel they need, in order to be able to carry out well-thought-out and up-to-date teaching about culture. According to Byram et al. (1991a, 3), the lack of definition of what is to be taught and the problem of what to select from the seemingly endless phenomena of culture may easily lead to dissatisfaction and a return to the priority of language teaching.

My own interest in this field has aroused through my work as a comprehensive school teacher of English and German in the Swedish-speaking parts of southern and south-western Finland. Since I started my teaching career about ten years ago, much has changed in Finnish society and in the world at large. Political and social developments, such as new information technology, the European integration processes, globalisation, multiculturalism and the increased mobility of the work force, students and specialists, naturally place new demands on education. It is obvious that the school is part of the surrounding society, sharing its values and practices and thus reflecting the prevailing culture. However, according to Benner (1991), the school should not only prepare the students for the existing society but also give them the readiness and the tools to surpass it and maybe one day change it for the better[1]. For me personally, this has made

[1] Also see Bruner (1996, ix-x) for a discussion about the role of education and school learning in their situated, cultural context.

me reconsider my mission as a FL teacher, and led me to re-evaluate the type of knowledge and skills I strive to convey to my 13- to 15-year old students. I have also become increasingly aware of the growing importance of English as an international language spoken worldwide, as opposed to German, which is still to be seen as a native language spoken primarily in three European countries.

In recent years I have thus begun to recognise the need to broaden my students' horizon beyond the purely linguistic aspects by placing greater weight on the cultural background of the target language (TL) countries, and trying to raise some kind of intercultural awareness[2]. From my students' part, these endeavours have often been met by either scepticism towards learning things they feel do not belong to language studies at all, or enthusiasm at the realisation that the very purpose of learning a foreign language is to be able to understand people who are different from us. In the process, the word *understand* has come to take on a new meaning, way beyond the semantics and the grammar.

In scientific circles, intercultural language teaching (ILT), a term that will be elaborated on in Chapter 2.1.3, has indeed been widely debated. However, among practitioners it has attracted surprisingly little attention. Informal discussions with colleagues in both Finland-Swedish and Finnish schools have indicated that many professional teachers in our country also lack a clear notion of what can and should be dealt with within the framework of "culture." This fact has now turned into a current dilemma due to the new National Framework Curriculum (NFC), which was released by the Finnish Board of Education in the spring of 2004. The teachers in our schools are currently facing the challenging task of specifying the cultural aspects discussed in the NFC in their local school curricula, and will subsequently implement them in their own teaching.

In view of teacher training and the development of relevant teaching aids in the future, it is therefore of vital importance to increase the knowledge of how teachers think and talk about their own work, with special focus on cultural aspects. As I see it, this is important both in a wider context, where we need more understanding of teachers' thinking on the cultural dimension, as well as in both the national and regional context due to the reform of the curriculum.

1.2 Research problem and general aim of the study

The overall aim of this study is hence to deepen the knowledge on how teachers think about the teaching of culture. I hope to be able to identify patterns in teachers' conceptions about culture in EFL-teaching, and to describe the objectives they set up for their teaching as well as the methodology applied to attain those objectives. I have approached teachers working at the upper comprehensive school level (grades 7–9), since this is the level that I myself am

[2] Following Risager (2005, viii), I use the adjective *cultural* to describe aspects related to specific cultural areas, such as that associated with (one of) the target language countries, whereas *intercultural* is used to describe the interface between several cultures, including the students' own culture, the target culture(s) and other cultures in general. As I see it, *intercultural* implies a process, the crossing of boundaries as well as interaction and reciprocity.

most familiar with. Furthermore, I consider the theme of my study especially relevant to the interests and needs of comprehensive-school teachers.

Extensive research has been conducted concerning the *hows* of FLT, whereas the *whats* and *whys* are seldom addressed (Tornberg 2000, 15). For this reason the focus of my study will be on how teachers perceive the very content of the teaching of English, and the underlying aims and motivations. However, purely methodological aspects will also be discussed to give the study a more concrete link to what is going on in the classrooms of today. Starting out from this overall aim, my intention is to find out firstly, what meanings teachers in the Finland-Swedish comprehensive schools attribute to the concept "culture" in FLT; secondly, why they think culture should be taught; and thirdly, how they themselves teach culture.

My study thus takes its starting-point in language didactics, which is an orientation within the discipline of education. In didactics, theory is associated with practice. *What*, *why* and *how* are classical didactic questions, through which teachers may reflect upon contents and ways of working in their teaching. My study may be regarded as a contribution to a still fairly undeveloped field of research known as *Teacher cognition*, since I am interested in shedding light on the thoughts and reflections teachers have concerning language teaching in general, and cultural aspects in language teaching in particular.

I have used a qualitative approach to find the answers to my key questions, more precisely semi-structured in-depth interviews inspired by both phenomenography and hermeneutics. Phenomenographers try to capture the qualitatively different ways in which certain individuals understand and interpret a particular phenomenon (Marton 1978, 20). In other words, one is interested in mapping out people's conceptions or ways of experiencing the world. The hermeneutical tradition is concerned with interpreting, trying to understand meanings as well as creating relations between meanings. This is done through a dialectic process where the parts and the whole are seen as mutually influencing each other.

Kvale (1996, 3-5) describes the role of the interviewer in terms of two contrasting metaphors: a traveller on a journey that leads to a tale to be told on returning home, or a miner looking for a valuable metal to be unearthed. I recognise myself in both characterisations. I am a traveller in the sense that I have set off on an exploratory journey into the cognitions of language teachers, open and curious about what conceptions, beliefs and views I will come across. I am a miner in the sense that I hope my wanderings through the cultural dimension of EFL-teaching will reveal whether the work described by the teachers I encounter can be characterised as truly *inter*cultural.

Methodologically, I regard my empirical study as abductive, which can be seen as a combination of inductive and deductive methods. I will start off from my own empirical material, taking certain theoretical assumptions into consideration and developing a pre-understanding of the phenomenon. However, no hypotheses are formulated. An abductive approach is also characteristic of the actual research process, where theory and practice have mutually influenced and supported each other.

The general outline of my study can be summarised in the following figure:

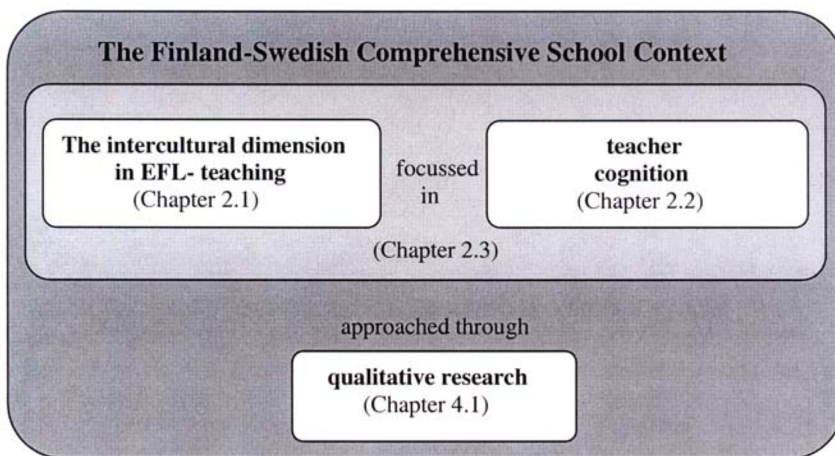

Figure 1. The design of the study

1.3 Outline of the thesis

In Chapter 2, the study is placed within a theoretical framework, where the two poles depicted in the upper section of Figure 1 are discussed. This section summarises my pre-understanding of this multifaceted research field, which contains elements from a wide range of disciplines, e.g. education, linguistics, psychology, anthropology and sociology. Research into the intercultural dimension in FLT is outlined with reference to how it has developed over the past century and what the challenges are for today's professionals, who now more than ever are to be seen as "teachers-of-language-*and*-culture" (following Byram et al. 1994). *Teacher cognition* as a research tradition is briefly presented with a view to anchoring the study in this relatively new domain of inquiry.

In Chapter 3, the Finland-Swedish Comprehensive school context is described, since this is where the present investigation is set. The main focus is placed on FLT, and the aims and content which the new NFC emphasises regarding the intercultural dimension.

Chapter 4 is divided into two parts. In the first part, the study is positioned in a qualitative research paradigm, i.e. the bottom pole in Figure 1. The ontological and epistemological backgrounds of my research are discussed with the intention of clarifying my methodological choices. The phenomenographic and hermeneutical traditions are discussed in so far as they have influenced my decisions. In the second part, the implementation of the empirical study as well

as the subsequent analysis is described step by step. My intention has been to make the whole research process as transparent as possible.

In Chapter 5, the findings are presented and discussed in relation to both theoretical models and previous research findings. Eventually, in Chapter 6, the overall findings of the study are evaluated with regard to the contribution of the study for e.g. teacher training and in-service training for teachers. Suggestions for further research in this area are also presented.

2 The Theoretical Framework of the Study

2.1 The intercultural dimension in foreign language teaching

2.1.1 The need for intercultural education

The importance of peace education and international understanding at all levels has long been recognised, but concepts like intercultural education, intercultural learning, intercultural understanding and interculturalism are fairly new. The first two have been interpreted in different ways in different national cultures. They may also mean different things within one and the same culture[3]. In multicultural countries with a number of cultural minorities, such as immigrants, refugees or older ethnic groupings, intercultural education has aimed at integrating different cultures and at improving their quality of life. The term "intercultural education" was in fact first introduced in the USA, where it was already used during the two world wars to describe educational programmes for the integration of different ethnic groups in North American society (Doyé 1999, 15). Similarly, *Ausländerpädagogik,* a concept which is now considered outdated, was introduced in Germany in the 1970's as a result of tensions developing between the native population and foreign workers (Auernheimer 2000, 18-19). In countries with a fairly homogenous cultural background, intercultural education is principally concerned with the education of citizens towards internationalism and multiculturalism. Intercultural education, the aim of which is to foster mutual and reciprocal understanding, is in this respect also aimed at the students of the majority.

In this study, I use the intercultural education concept when referring to teaching, whereas intercultural learning is used about the process of acquiring some kind of intercultural competence. The relationship between the two is simplified in the illustration below, which is a modification and a translation of a figure presented by Nieke (1995). It is worth noting that not only educational arrangements, but also "real" intercultural encounters may of course be regarded as starting points for the learning process. Both formal and informal, inside-classroom and outside-classroom learning situations are relevant, although my research focuses on institutional practice only, and more specifically on teachers' attitudes towards this.

[3] See e.g. Edmondson (1994, 48-50), Freudenstein (1994, 56-58) and Solmecke (1994, 165-167).

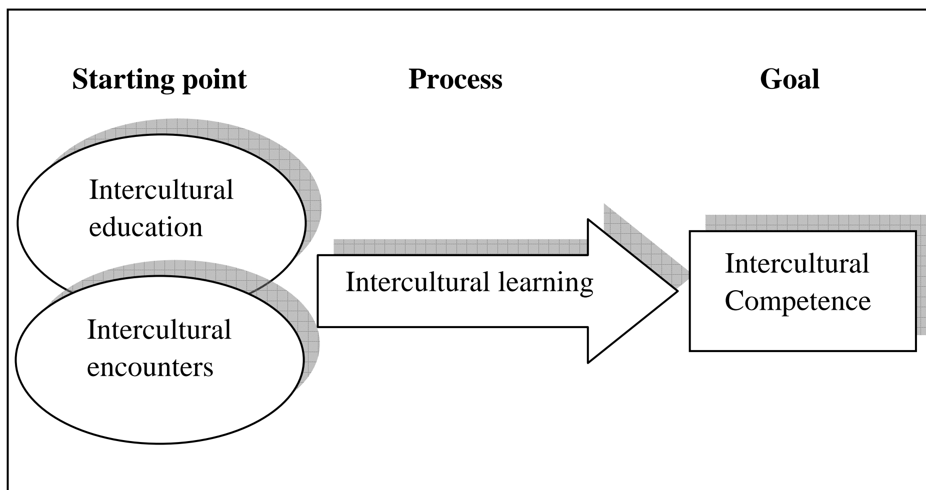

Figure 2. Clarification of key concepts: intercultural education and intercultural learning

Today there seems to be general agreement that intercultural education should become an integral part of all school education in all societies. For the transition into the new millennium, UNESCO established two commissions, *Culture and Development* and *Education in the 21st Century,* whose tasks were to develop concrete suggestions for an intercultural approach in pedagogics worldwide. Their international plan of action thus promotes intercultural education at all levels of education, the preparation of teachers for this new dimension in teaching, the awareness of cultural pluralism and of the need for intercultural dialogue (Reiberg 2000, 6). The research community has also emphasised the importance of intercultural pedagogics as something that permeates education at large. Nieke (1995, in Doyé 1999, 15) sees *Interkulturelle Bildung* as an indispensable component of *Allgemeinbildung,* and Klafki elevates "the Culture-specific and the Intercultural" as one of the seven so-called epoch-typical problem complexes that should be the starting point for present- and future oriented educational work. He stresses the responsibility that schools should bear for issues such as environmental problems, war and peace, population explosion, inequality and the dangers of the new information and communication media. According to Klafki, working with current topics like these will develop the learners' empathy, critical thinking and argumentative skills. This he sees as an important pathway to a more humane and democratic society (Klafki 1997, 47-61).

The principal factors playing a role in the need for intercultural learning in today's world are presented by Kaikkonen (2001, 70-71). The first of these is a person's own cultural identity and its strengthening. He sees self-esteem and consciousness of one's own identity as a kind of foundation for intercultural

learning. National identity, according to Haarmann (1993), is directly related to one's roots, i.e. the ethnic origin of one's forefathers, the cultural mould formed by the social environment one is accustomed to, as well as by perceptions and value judgements. The last concerns perceptions of one's own culture, perceptions of foreign cultures, as well as others' perceptions of one's own culture.

Another significant fact underpinning the need for intercultural learning is of course the multicultural reality in which we live. Kaikkonen (2001, 71) draws attention to the situation in Europe, which appears to be developing in opposite directions. On the one hand, we have seen the European Union aspiring towards a stable partnership of states, and on the other hand, new small states emerging in the Balkans. According to Kaikkonen, languages play a vital role in this changed situation, since all nations – regardless of their size or national policies – naturally wish to hold on to their own languages and the right to use them. Unfortunately, however, tendencies towards linguistic hegemony within the European Union can be discerned. As pointed out by Krumm (2004, 62-63), English and sometimes French are emerging as the dominant languages in our part of the world, whereas other languages are losing in importance. Krumm warns against making linguistic diversity invisible in public or in educational systems, which is in fact already happening, as other languages, especially in smaller European countries, do not exist as languages that could be learnt as regular foreign languages at school. Such developments may, in Krumm's view, lead to an increased awareness of the contrasts between cultures and people with different religious, historical and value backgrounds.

Although the post-modern society that we live in is becoming increasingly international, with abundant intercultural encounters through tourism, trade, diplomacy, youth exchange and the mobility of people generally, our ability to deal with differences, foreignness and heterogeneity seem to diminish. Despite growing intercultural collaboration at different levels, phenomena such as racism, xenophobia, ethnocentrism, stereotypes, prejudices and different forms of extremism appear to have become increasingly common. These will naturally have to be recognised and considered.

Racism does not necessarily refer to race alone but can, as a concept, be associated with various forms of discrimination, based on attributes such as ethnic background, sex and even age. Most frequently, however, racism involves the oppression of people who are culturally different in terms of their physical traits. Fear for the unknown, which is the literal meaning of xenophobia (from Greek *ksenos* and *phobia*) appears to lie deep in most humans. What is unknown is considered dangerous and threatening, perhaps due to its perceived unpredictability. Kaikkonen (2004b, 56) points out that when cultures meet, the fear tends to be greater among the cultural majority, who might feel that representatives of the minority will try to impose their own cultural behaviour and thus jeopardise safe and familiar traditions. The collectively aggressive behaviour of Finnish skinheads towards Somali immigrants can be seen as an example of this.

Ethnocentrism is related to one's own culture, the tendency to assume that its values and standards are universally applicable as well the opinion that it is

somehow superior to other cultures. Seelye (1988, 101) mentions three basic factors involved: integration and loyalty among ingroup members, hostile relation between ingroup and outgroup members as well as positive self-regard among ingroup members in contrast to the derogatory stereotyping of outgroup characteristics. According to Lustig and Koester (1999, 146), all cultures have a strong ethnocentric tendency to use the categories of one's own culture to evaluate the actions of others. I think we all agree on how common it is for us as a nation to claim, or at least think, that *we* produce the cleanest food and the best machines, or that *our* language is the most beautiful and *our* strategies for doing business are the most effective.

However, as Kaikkonen rightly emphasises (2001, 72), ideas of one's own excellence are as deep as prejudices towards diversity and foreignness. Prejudices and stereotypes are very closely related, and many researchers have in fact regarded them as synonyms for one and the same concept. Since the 1980's, psychologists have returned to the distinction originally made by Katz & Braly (1933), according to which stereotypes are the cognitive and prejudices the affective aspect of human attitudes to groups of people. Stereotypes are categorisations or statements about total groups of people or phenomena that are valid only for a part of these groups. A distinction can be made between autostereotypes, referring to stereotypes about one's own culture, and heterostereotypes, referring to stereotypes about the foreign culture (Jensen 1995, 50). Finns are not talkative, Scots are greedy and Britons cannot cook are all generalisations that are of course often erroneous. Fixed stereotypes could potentially be very dangerous. Stereotypes of a nation mostly develop outside the nation but seem, interestingly enough, to be maintained quite effectively by the nation itself, who may use them in jokes and even propagate them further in its own description of the nation's typical characteristics. However, stereotypes – no matter how harmless they may seem in everyday conversations – are optimal breeding ground for prejudices, and should therefore be dealt with with sensitivity regarding intercultural learning.

Prejudices, according to Lustig and Koester (1999, 153), refer to a negative reaction to other people based on a lack of experience or firsthand knowledge. It is, in other words, a premature judgement that may be fairly rigid. Gordon W. Allport (1954), who is the father of all modern research on prejudice, claims that if a person is capable of rectifying his erroneous judgements in the light of new evidence, he is not prejudiced. People who *are* prejudiced tend to ignore evidence that is inconsistent with their biased viewpoint, or then they simply distort the evidence to fit their prejudices. The rigidity of prejudices is aptly expressed by Albert Einstein: "It is harder to crack a prejudice than an atom." Prejudices can be seen as instruments of projection, meaning that feelings like fear, anger and aggression are transferred to other people, who become what we often call "scapegoats." It is always easier to blame somebody else for misfortune than to start seeking the reasons for it in oneself.

Promoting unprejudiced attitudes and preventing discrimination, which can be seen as prejudice in action, is thus a highly important but difficult task for today's intercultural education. Although it is to be conceived as one of the cross-curricular issues that pervade the whole curriculum, it should receive particular attention in specific subject areas. Obviously, FLT is in a particularly

favourable position to contribute to this general task. It could, at best, be regarded as training in respecting otherness and developing a non-ethnocentric perception and attitude. The question is, however, whether this opportunity is fully exploited.

In the following chapter, I set out to explore the (inter)cultural component in FLT from a historical perspective. I will begin, however, by shedding light on different ways of looking at culture and the relationship between language and culture.

2.1.2 Culture and language teaching

2.1.2.1 Conceptions of culture

"Culture", to quote Williams (1981), "is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language." It is a notoriously imprecise term that is used in widely different contexts. Over time, researchers from a wide range of scientific disciplines have tried to formulate definitions, which have differed considerably in their orientation.

A relatively easy approach is to look at culture from a normative perspective and distinguish between "Capital-C culture" and "Small-c culture" The former refers to elite culture in the form of outstanding works of art and music, buildings and monuments as well as literary and philosophical achievements, whereas the latter refers to products of everyday life and the conditions of its production (Doyé 1999, 19). According to Brøgger (1992, 31-32), "culture" as an elitist and aesthetic concept has been typical in the humanities, while, on the other hand, the anthropological concept of culture has been a non-elitist and collective one, involving assumptions and norms that people adopt and share, as a result of upbringing and socialisation. In the first half of the 20th century, it was customary to focus on empirically observable features such as habits, customs and artefacts. Quite a few post-war definitions, however, see culture in terms of ideas and values shared by members of a society or a social group. Geertz (1973), for example, points out that culture does not only consist of the symbols through which people express themselves (e.g. language, deeds and objects), but also of the meanings which people grant to these symbols.

This shift of emphasis taking place in the scientific debate, from a consideration of the products to the circumstances in which they are created, is also discussed by Doyé (1999, 19). He refers to Triandis (1989), who speaks of "objective culture" (such as roads, tools and houses), and "subjective culture" (such as associations, attitudes, norms and values), where the latter has reached prominence in more recent research. A good example of this is Brislin's definition of culture as:

> *Widely shared ideals, values, formation and uses of categories, assumptions about life, and goal-directed activities that become unconsciously or sub-consciously accepted as "right" and "correct" by people who identify themselves as members of a society* (1990, 27).

Hannertz (in Lundgren 2002, 29), represents a similar view of culture as human systems of meaning, when he describes culture in terms of three central

dimensions: ideas and modes of thought (that is the entire array of concepts, propositions and values which people within a social unit carry together), the forms of externalisation (the different ways in which meaning is made accessible or public) and social distribution (the way in which meaning and expressions of meaning are spread socially). According to this view, culture is a way of living and thinking, which does not necessarily have to have an ethnical or national foundation, and which, above all, cannot be considered superior or inferior to something else. Such descriptive definitions of culture have been typical among sociologists and anthropologists, who have debated this phenomenon for decades.

The essence of culture is closely related to how culture is “learnt” or acquired. An interesting set of definitions from the point of view of foreign language learning is presented by Robinson (1985, 8-12) and discussed by Kaikkonen (1991, 42-47). Robinson distinguishes between behaviourist, functionalist, cognitive and symbolic definitions. Culture in behaviourist anthropology is seen as consisting of various forms of behaviour, such as customs, habits and rituals that are linked to specific situations and social groups. In language learning contexts, this way of looking at culture is realised through teaching, for example, how spare time is spent in Germany, what a typical British family looks like or how you buy food on the market. Culture is hence comprehended as something concrete that can be seen and experienced, but very little interest is devoted to why or under what circumstances the behavioural patterns arise. As was mentioned above, this line of thinking is outdated today.

Functionally oriented anthropology, again, also deals with culture as a social phenomenon, but seems to go further than the behaviourist approach in the sense that it tries to describe and understand the structure and variety of these forms of behaviour, as well as clarify the roles they play in society. Both approaches provide the learner with a fairly concrete model for dealing with a foreign culture, by trying to describe how and why a representative of another culture acts in a particular way. The teaching aim is thus to make the learner recognize culture-specific behaviour, and, in the long run, to prevent so-called culture shocks. Understanding what lies behind certain events or behaviour, such as eating a particular type of food or speaking in a loud voice, is seen as contributing to a deeper understanding and tolerance in the learners.

Both the behaviourist and the functionalist approach represent a *product* perspective on culture, which, according to Robinson, tend to dominate FL instruction. He points out that both types of definitions have several flaws, one of which lies in the belief that culture-specific forms of behaviour and its functions can be objectively observed, and the underlying reasons deduced by the observer. As we all know, behaviour can be interpreted in numerous ways, often influenced by one’s own cultural background.

Culture according to cognitive definitions does not consist of material phenomena, such as objects, people or behaviour, but is rather a process of memorising, associating and interpreting incoming data, which is continually going on in every individual’s brain. Culture could thus be resembled to a computer programme within the individual. In order to be able to clarify the essence of culture, cognitively-oriented anthropologists have encouraged

individuals to be aware of and analyse their personal experiences. Robinson regards this "inner" view of culture as a valuable contribution to the behaviourist and functionalist approaches. It represents a view of culture as an ongoing *process,* which, according to Robinson, has had a fairly limited influence on foreign language education. This definition also has its limitations, which are related to the complexity of grasping and researching feelings which are still very closely bound to experiences of culture. In his discussion of the cognitive definition presented by Robinson, Kaikkonen (1991, 45) states that very little research has been conducted concerning how the FL learner builds up his image of culture within the framework of the cognitive theory.

The fourth definition, which is clearly favoured by Kaikkonen, sees culture as a dynamic system of symbols and meanings (cf. Geertz's definition cited above), and stresses the significance of continuous change. It focuses neither on outer events, nor on internal mechanisms, but on the meaning emerging as a result of the dialectic process between the two. Every individual is taking part in a process, in which previous experiences influence the interpretation of new phenomena, and previous interpretations influence new experiences. In every society and in every individual, culture thus takes on a new meaning, i.e. culture can also be viewed historically. As Kaikkonen (1991, 47) puts it, it is an everchanging conception of the world around us. This process sets off at birth and is solely influenced by the individual's own culture until he or she is confronted with a foreign one. When this theory is applied to foreign language teaching, it thus means that cultural understanding is an ongoing process, where the learners are continuously combining cultural data with their own previous and present experiences, in order to create meaning.

Thavenius (1999) adds yet another dimension to the discussion about culture by distinguishing between *culture* in the sense of what could unite us, and *cultures* in the sense of what separates us. In his opinion, recent theoretical discussions have come to focus on conceptions of culture as something contradictory and temporary. The same observation has been made by Lundgren (2002, 27), who points out that there were more than a hundred different definitions of culture as early as fifty years ago. However, in the 1990's, researchers began to doubt the fruitfulness of trying to find a generally acceptable definition. Every attempt to do so would lock the concept of culture to something static, which does not correspond to current views of culture as something that is constantly re-created. Bruner (1996, 97) points out that cultures have always been in the process of change, but the rate of change has increased as our fates have become increasingly intermingled through migration, trade and the rapid exchange of information. Hence, in today's internationalised world, where borders between national cultures are gradually erased and cultural phenomena tend to float into each other, a re-evaluation of the concept of culture will be necessary.

In this respect, Tornberg's (2000) contribution is of interest. She has developed three different analytical perspectives of culture in language teaching in her analysis of teaching materials and Swedish curricular texts between 1962 and 2000. According to her, the dominant perspective, still today, involves regarding "culture" as a *fact fulfilled,* i.e. a ready-made product that cannot be altered (63-71). Culture is seen as nationally defined, and cultural differences are hence seen as differences between nations. This view traces back to the Enlightenment and

to the 18th and 19th centuries. However, as Tornberg points out, in present-day society, which is characterised by a multitude of cultural phenomena and cultural groupings, such a restricted view is no longer tenable.

The second perspective in Tornberg's analysis assumes that there is an individual behavioural skill to be developed, based on cultural know-how. This means that when the FL learner is confronted with speakers in the target-language country, he/she will have to be able to act appropriately so as not to stick out. "Culture" is thus seen as a *future competence*, something that needs to be learnt and practised so as to make future encounters with representatives of other cultures as smooth as possible. This view, which can also be attributed to the product perspective, originates in the starting point of the "communicative turn" in FLT, which was initiated by the Council of Europe in the 1970's (72-73). The background of this shift in emphasis will be discussed more closely in Chapter 2.1.2.3.

Although this view of "culture" appears to go one step beyond the first one, "culture" is still abstracted to something alien, and the Other is something we have to acquire knowledge about. This perception implies that there is a mainstream national culture that can be compared to other mainstream national cultures. As Tornberg rightly points out, there is no *one* Swedish culture that can be compared to *one* German culture. Such a comparison presupposes the toning down of conflict and diversity between different cultural manifestations within a nation in the quest for a mainstream culture, which tends to be the socially dominant middle-class culture. According to Tornberg (78-79), the great problem attached to this perception is that it leaves limited space for contingency. New meanings cannot be created, since the "competence" is created in advance.

The third perspective, clearly favoured by Tornberg but rarely expressed in the contemporary curricular texts she studied, sees "culture" as *an encounter in an open landscape*. Tornberg talks about a unique, open-ended, face-to-face encounter in the space between Self and Other (79-80). This third space[4] is shared by us, but it also separates us. Contrary to the second perspective, it is not a question of trying to change one's own behaviour to suit the Other, but rather to find a balance between recognition of who you are, on the one hand, and solidarity towards the Other, on the other hand. One simply cannot foresee the outcome of such a meeting, where individuals are communicating, well aware of both similarities and remaining differences. Something new and totally unexpected may arise out of this personally initiated meeting, where identity is constituted by a process of becoming. Identity is here described in terms of my relation to myself as well as to what I have in common with the Other.

This third perspective, bearing close resemblance to Robinson's symbolic definition, sees "culture" as a continuous process without an end; as something new that is created and re-created in the discursive space. Everybody

[4] The concept "third space" was originally introduced by Bhabha (1992). Kramsch (1993) prefers "third place." Both concepts are today widely used in research on language and culture, and point to the no man's land which arises when two parties meet and both exceed the borders set by their own cultures.

communicating in this third culture is a co-creator, and therefore responsible for the outcome. Tornberg thus draws both political and moral dimensions into this perspective.

One may conclude that it is impossible to agree on one single definition of culture that would be applicable in all contexts. My own view of culture is influenced by many of the perspectives discussed above. I see culture as something that both unites and separates people. *Culture* is often the force that brings people together. However, if there were no *cultures* that people sharing the same traditions, values or ideas could identify themselves with, there would be one universal way of human interaction. Culture is first and foremost a social phenomenon, created by people for specific purposes, in specific contexts and at specific times. It is, in other words, also an historical phenomenon. We acquire culture through the interaction with the people and the contemporary world around us.

Like Takala (1991, 200), I think the metaphor of culture being the web that we (like spiders!) ourselves weave is very appropriate. It illustrates the fact that cultural features tend to be difficult to distinguish when you are right in the middle of them. What is too close is either taken for granted or not seen at all, until a situation arises when you suddenly notice that there are other "webs" out there as well. When talking about cultures, one should always bear in mind that no culture can be elevated to a higher level, in the sense that it would be more valuable, sophisticated or simply more "right" than any other. In today's world it does not make sense to treat cultures as if they were clearly limited, defined or detached from one another. Cultures today tend to be hybrids, i.e. mixtures of a wide range of cultural elements. They are characterised by inconsistency and a permanent state of flux.

In the light of this, one can argue that everybody belongs to a number of different constellations that could be conceived of as cultures. In addition to belonging to a national or ethnic culture, you are grouped by gender, age, education, profession, social class, living environment and many other factors that together form your identity. Our language and ways of behaving are influenced by the cultural contexts that we find ourselves in, since it is through language that the interaction takes place. The language also influences the way in which we think and perceive the world around us.

All this calls for a closer look at the intricate relationship between culture and language.

2.1.2.2 The relationship between language and culture

The relationship between language and culture is extremely complex. This is due to the fact that on the one hand language is an integral part of culture, but on the other hand it is an expression of culture. It is, in other words, both the substance and medium at the same time or, as Agar (1994, 28) puts it: "Culture is in language and language is loaded with culture."

Kaikkonen (2004b, 104) attributes this to the fact that languages and cultures must have developed together, in a kind of symbiosis. Whether culture originally was the product of language or whether it was, in fact, the other way round is a

controversial topic. At the beginning of the 20th century, Sapir and Whorf proposed that language determines perception and shapes our world view and our culture, rather than reflects it. Today, however, the strong version of the *Sapir-Whorf hypothesis*, also named *linguistic relativity* and *linguistic determinism,* has few believers (Brown 1986, 46). Most linguists today are concerned with the fact that language and culture interact and have apparently done so from the very beginning.

Spoken language seems to have evolved within the last 100 000-150 000 years[5]. Early anthropological findings, however, suggest that even the hominids led primitive cultural lives (Kaikkonen 1991, 39). If one sees culture as the shared ideals, values and meanings guiding the actions of members in a particular community, as well as the products resulting from these actions, it is easy to assume that culture has influenced the development of the language spoken in this community. Over time, people have then preserved their culture from generation to generation with the help of oral traditions.

As Bruner (1996, 3)[6] puts it, mind could not exist without culture. The evolution of the human mind is linked to the development of a way of life, where "reality" is represented by a symbolism shared by members of a cultural community. This symbolic mode is not only shared by a community, but also conserved, elaborated, and passed on to succeeding generations who continue to maintain the culture's identity and way of life. In this sense, culture can be described as "superorganic".

The relationship between language and culture thus becomes especially obvious in the light of the symbolic definition of culture, according to which culture is the process where symbols and meanings are learnt. This process makes the individual understand and interpret various phenomena, as well as describe them linguistically.

Due to the cultural nature of language, and the fact that languages can in many respects be conceived of as products of their culture, different languages naturally differ from each other. This applies to vocabulary, grammar as well as pronunciation. Words often contain traces of their cultural origin, but detecting them does not happen by itself. A native speaker of a language does not normally pay attention to or even know about these hidden messages that may reveal interesting facts about bygone times and societies. As an example, Kaikkonen (2004b, 104) mentions the Finnish word *kansainvaellus* and its equivalent in other languages; *Völkerwanderung* in German, *volksverhuizing* in Dutch, *les grandes invasions* in French and *the Germanic* or *Barbarian Invasions* in English. The Dutch word comes closest to the Finnish word, meaning roughly "the movements of people." The French and the English word reflect the idea of violent peoples breaking into foreign lands to gain new territories. The German word, conveying a positive or at least a neutral image, is easily understood in the sense that the Germanic peoples were the ones

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[5] Different researchers provide slightly different estimates. Kaikkonen (2004, 103) refers to Haarmann, H. (2001) and Zimmer, D. E. (1986).

[6] For an overview of Bruner's views on culture, language and cognitive processes and strategies, see Takala (2002).

expanding their territories in Europe at the time. Thus, the words given by people to things and phenomena tend to reflect their attitudes, feelings and experiences. As a result, the same word in two different languages normally overlaps only to a certain degree. *Brot* and *bread* do not necessarily mean precisely the same thing, neither do *Wald* and *forest.*

Gagnestam (2003, 33) points out that communication is not merely about using words and expressions in a particular language. Nonverbal communication, including facial expressions, gestures, eye contact, posture, patterns of touch as well as things like clothing and smells, is closely linked to culture and indirectly also to language. When you communicate with another person, that person understands you as a result of the whole picture you convey, not simply on the basis of what you say[7]. In communication we do not consciously separate verbal and nonverbal signals from each other, until, for some reason, they give contradictory messages and do not support each other in a way that would be expected in that culture. This could lead to misunderstandings or even communication breaking down. Everybody that has tried to nod and say “no” at the same time knows how difficult it is to go against culturally ingrained habits. Curiously enough, in some parts of the world shaking your head does, in fact, mean “yes.” Cultural differences in nonverbal communication are a fascinating field of research; unfortunately they are far too complex to elaborate on here.

According to Gagnestam, the nonverbal signals could sometimes be even more important than the verbal ones. Some researchers claim that more than half of the information conveyed in a normal conversation is nonverbal; the figure provided by Birdwhistell (1970) is as high as 70%.

Gagnestam also refers to research (Ockert-Axelsson & Norman 1993) into differences in communication style between cultures, a topic frequently discussed at training seminars for businessmen and other professionals going abroad. People involved in e.g. multinational business and international politics are believed to benefit greatly from having at least some notion of how their counterpart’s communication style may differ from their own[8]. Swedish culture, and most definitely also Finnish culture, is characterised by a direct verbal approach, where ideas are presented succinctly and to the point, leaving little space for interpretations. In the Arabic culture, which is said to be less direct, more time is devoted to silence, body language and introductory conversations gradually leading the partners into the topic to be discussed. Naturally, these are generalisations. Within every culture there are individuals deviating from such general patterns of communication.

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[7] Body language as well as prosodic features, turn-taking signals, hesitations, repetitions etc. can be referred to as direct *affordances (*as opposed to indirect *affordances,* which are of a social and cognitive nature). They are communicated directly to the participant in a linguistic event, and become part of the meanings generated. *Affordance*, according to van Lier (2004a, 91) denotes what is available to a person in a particular situation to do something with, i.e. signifying material provided by the environment, which creates opportunities for action.

[8] Frequently cited in this context is the extensive research by Hofstede (1994, 2001). In his classic work *Culture´s Consequences* he explores the differences in communication, thinking and social action that exist among members of more than 50 nations.

Thus, the social structure as well as the norms and values associated with a specific culture tend to colour both the semantics and the pragmatics of the language. The language carries a multitude of cultural information, a fact that will have to be recognised also when one considers how languages are taught and learnt.

According to Byram (1991b), many of the current misunderstandings of the tasks of FLT are based on an insufficient consideration of the double relationship between language and culture. In Buttjes and Byram (1991, 18) this is expressed as follows:

> *Language is not simply a reflector of an objective cultural reality. It is an integral part of that reality through which other parts are shaped and interpreted. It is both a symbol of the whole and a part of the whole which shapes and is in turn shaped by sociocultural actions, beliefs and values.*
>
> *In engaging in language, speakers are enacting sociocultural phenomena; in acquiring language, children acquire culture. Given this theoretical viewpoint it follows that to teach culture without the language is fundamentally flawed and to separate language and culture teaching is to imply that a foreign language can be treated in the early stages as if it were self-contained and independent of other sociocultural phenomena.*

The conviction that language and culture belong together in FL education was provocatively expressed in the title of a programmatic publication by Byram et al 1994: *Teaching-and-Learning-Language-and-Culture*. Through the demonstrative use of hyphens the authors wanted to draw attention to the fact that a separation of cultural studies from language learning cannot be justified.

Later, however, Risager (1996, in Gagnestam 2003, 35-39) has criticised this view of an inseparable relationship between language and culture in FLT, with reference to the cross-national processes going on in the world. Migration, tourism and globalised communication and information technology have resulted in languages, particularly English[9], spreading worldwide and cultural areas also becoming more and more mixed. This has led to both linguistic and cultural complexities, in the light of which talk about an exclusive relationship between language and culture appears problematic. She agrees with the above mentioned anthropological/philosophical statement that culture and language have developed together and, as it were, presuppose each other, but questions the conceptions existing within modern FLT culture-pedagogical discourse.

Risager distinguishes between three perspectives on the relationship between language and culture, which, in her opinion, are often mixed:

1. Culture as embedded in the pragmatics and semantics of language
2. Culture as the macro context of language usage
3. Culture as the thematic content of language teaching

1. Culture seen as the content of the pragmatics and semantics of language tends to be the traditional way of approaching culture from a linguistic point of view.

[9] The role of English as an international language will be discussed in Chapter 2.1.3.1.

This approach may concern vocabulary, e.g. cultural history and the spread of loan words.

2. Culture seen as the macro context of language usage is what lies behind modern socio-linguistics, although the term frequently used there is social structure. Halliday & Hasan (1989) make a distinction between "the context of situation" and "the context of culture", and Fairclough (1992) emphasises the connection between language usage discourse and social structure.

3. Culture as the thematic content of language teaching involves viewing culture as pedagogically and politically determined. There is no given connection between the language used and the content one speaks or writes about. Still, the conceptual structure of a particular language may be more appropriate for describing phenomena in the native context than the structures of other languages.

According to Risager (1996), language and culture can be separated on all three levels. As for 1; "near-native competence", influenced by the speakers' mother tongues and their cultures, is today generally accepted. This linguistic competence may function well although it does not necessarily contain the semantic and pragmatic features characterising native speech.

As for 2; migration and international media have resulted in the recontextualisation of languages, which are replanted into new contexts and situations. According to Risager, it is essential to distinguish between contexts where the language is spoken as a mother tongue and contexts where it is spoken as a second language (L2) or as a FL. The latter can be called a non-congruent macro context. When a language is transferred into a new cultural context it gradually develops. In other words, language and culture are separated, but reunited in a new context. The immediate situational micro contexts, or contexts of situation (to use Halliday's concept) may follow the language, e.g. through films. Often, however, non-native speakers use the language in a micro context detached from native norms and values, and instead bring in their own norms and values. Contrary to what one might think, the language does thus not become culture neutral. This complexity, which Risager does not consider to be a negative thing, should be recognised in FLT.

As for 3; there is today a tendency towards dissociating language and content in relation to traditional FLT. Thus, the subject matter does not have to concentrate on the culture of the target country but could very well focus on cultures at large.

The complexity of the concept of culture, as well as the multifaceted relationship between culture and language, is reflected in the different approaches taken to FLT at different times. The following overview of the development of teaching aims clearly illustrates that integrating language and culture has not always been considered as educationally reasonable as it might appear in the light of the reflections presented above.

2.1.2.3 The development of aims within foreign language teaching

From Linguistic Competence to Intercultural Communicative Competence

During the past hundred years a shift in emphasis in the overall aim of FL education has taken place. Before the educational reform at the end of the 19th century, it was considered enough to have *knowledge about* a language. The changes occurring in the past century were slow, but can in retrospect be described in terms of paradigms with certain characteristic features. According to Brøgger (1992, 11-12, 47), the study of languages in the first third of the 20th century, was closely linked to the field of philology. The language of texts was the object of careful historical explication and interpretation in terms of the age and culture to which it belonged. Since language, literature and culture were closely connected, one could say that philology represented a genuinely interdisciplinary approach to the study of texts. However, much of this general, cultural orientation was lost in the period between the 1930's and the 1960's, which saw the emergence of strictly formalist and structuralist modes of thinking. Teachers tended to ignore, or perhaps even deny, the importance of sociocultural context for the understanding and acquisition of the language. Having learnt the distinctive features of phonology and grammar, the student was expected to understand and use the language correctly. In other words, general structural laws were thought to ensure the necessary *Linguistic Competence (LC),* which became the unquestioned aim of every FL teacher. After the 1950's, two main disciplines emerged within FL studies at universities: linguistics, on the one hand, and literary study, on the other. According to Brøgger (1992, 12), both fields were highly professionalised and kept strictly separate.

Speaking, listening, writing and reading were highlighted as the four language skills that every pupil was to acquire. Interestingly enough, these are still today often listed as objectives in curricular documents. At that time, however, the recognition of the social dimension of language was missing. Doyé (1999, 11) refers to such conditions as setting, communicative intention and the relationship between the interlocutors, which were not considered significant, until the so-called Pragmatic reform in the latter half of the previous century. This new paradigm entailed a shift in the overall aim of FL instruction from LC over Socio-Linguistic Competence to *Communicative Competence (CC)***.** Teachers realised that it was not enough for the pupils to be able to produce grammatically correct phrases if they lacked the skill of using these phrases in real communicative contexts. This was thus the time when catalogues of grammatical structures were replaced by lists of language functions in curricular texts.

The term Communicative Competence, as pointed out by Lundgren (2001, 53), is vague and has been interpreted in different ways by teachers. The term derives from Hymes (1972) and Habermas, but it is above all van Ek who has applied CC to FL teaching. In his thorough analysis, van Ek (1986) presents six partial or superordinate abilities, which should be seen as different aspects of one and the same concept:

- linguistic competence (vocabulary and grammar)
- sociolinguistic competence (how language is used in various contexts)

- discursive competence (rules for how a discussion is built up)
- strategic competence (strategies for how to cope when one runs out of words and expressions)
- social competence (ability and willingness to interact with others)
- sociocultural competence

The sociocultural competence was added to the list at a later stage. van Ek realised that a person cannot be regarded as communicatively competent unless he or she possesses a certain insight into the sociocultural context which every language is an integrated part of, and which tends to function as a frame of reference for its speakers.

A third phase thus began in the development of FL instruction, which focussed on the content dimension of language use. As Tornberg (1997, 42) points out, the CC is indefinite as far as the subject matter is concerned. It consists of a set of knowledge and skills related to communication, but says very little about what the communication is about. Since this “something” is always embedded in the context of a particular culture and cannot be separated from it, one has to strive towards a higher goal in FL teaching. The “communicative turn” in language teaching, particularly in EFL, has in fact been criticised by Byram, among others, for emphasising speech act and discourse competence, rather than cultural competence. However, the understanding of culture now regained recognition as an important component of foreign language studies, intended to contribute to the pupils’ CC (Brøgger 1992, 12). Doyé (1999, 11) talks about a renaissance, which was named *Landeskunde* by German educators and “Cultural Studies” or “Culture Studies” by their Anglo-Saxon colleagues.

“British Studies” and “American Studies” worked their way into universities, but, as becomes evident from Brøgger’s account, it took quite some time before these fields of study gained a status even remotely equal to those of linguistics and literary studies. In fact, they were regarded as “a kind of stepchild of the two other disciplines – something bothersome yet tolerated as part of the undertaking” (1992, 16). In the beginning, the term used for the cultural dimension was “Background”, because the idea was to give the students some additional information about the countries they were studying. Many attempts to teach culture followed what is sometimes humorously referred to as the 4-F Approach, focussing on folk-dances, festivals, fairs, and food (Moore 1996, 597). Gradually, the study of culture changed its focus from historical, geographical of socio-political bits and pieces about specific nations to a deeper analysis of ideas and values shared by the members of a society or social groups.

In the 1990’s *Intercultural Competence (IC)* emerged as the guiding concept for the overall aim of FL education. The term was introduced by Michael Byram, professor at Durham University in the United Kingdom. His research on intercultural skills as well as his noteworthy contribution to the formation of the language programme of the Council of Europe is recognised worldwide. His conceptual framework is worth clarifying, since it has influenced many other researchers and also bears significance on my empirical study.

The sociocultural, social and strategic competences presented by van Ek were extended by Byram to IC. In their first paper on this theme (1997), Byram and his colleague Geneviève Zarate define acting interculturally as bringing two cultures into a relationship. They stress that the outcomes of teaching languages (and cultures, which they then saw in national terms) should be the ability to see how different cultures relate to each other in terms of differences and similarities, and to act as mediators between them, or rather between people socialised into them. It is a question of being able to interpret and understand the perspective of others as well as to question one's own perspectives, which often tend to be taken for granted. This mediation, according to Byram and Zarate, also means being able to look at oneself from an "external" perspective when interacting with others, and to analyse and adapt one's own behaviour as well as underlying values and beliefs. Persons with the ability to take a double perspective by bringing into contact two sets of values, beliefs and behaviours are called "intercultural speakers." Byram & Fleming (1998, 9) define "the intercultural speaker" as "someone who has a knowledge of one or, preferably, more cultures and social identities and has a capacity to discover and relate to new people from other contexts for which they have not been prepared." Chambers (2001, 52), following Byram, specifies the three principal qualities of the intercultural speaker as follows:

- a multilingual competence
- a sensitivity to the identities present in interlingual and cross-frontier interaction
- an ability to mediate/relate own and other cultures.

The phrase "intercultural mediator" might be appropriate as well, since we are talking about people bridging cultures. However, as Byram (2003, 61) points out, the emphasis on the speaker is useful because it keeps the link with language, and the implication that mediation presupposes some LC.

By elevating the "intercultural speaker" to the norm for FL teaching, Byram and Zarate challenged previous long-standing assumptions that the aim is to imitate the native speaker, which, until the early 1990's, had been regarded as the authority and the ultimate goal. Learners had been expected to imitate the LC of natives, including phonetic competence and a native speaker accent, and also their cultural competence. Byram and Zarate saw the imitation of the native speaker as neither desirable not fully attainable, partly because it implies abandoning one social identity in favour of another, and partly because native speakers do not "know" their culture any more than they can be said to "know" their language. In comparison with a native, the learner will always appear as an inferior language user, and hence run the risk of being the weaker part in the conversation. Furthermore, in today's English-speaking world it is very difficult to specify who is actually a native speaker, more than a constructed abstraction with little relevance.

Other prominent language researchers (Phillipson 1992, Kramsch 1993, Risager 1998, among others) had previously begun to question the fruitfulness of having the native speaker as an ideal to strive for. Kelly (2001, 129) represents a similar line of thinking when pointing out that maintaining the aim of producing native

(or near-native) competence is no longer realistic. What is required today is teaching that will enable the learner to function effectively in contexts where other languages and cultures are in play.

What does it mean, then, to be interculturally competent? Being intercultural, in Byram's view, is an activity. He has tried to describe the behaviours involved in "behavioural objectives" terms, which, however, does not imply that being interculturally competent simply means adopting some specific surface behaviour. Byram (2003, 61-62) stresses that the issues involved are affective, cognitive as well as behavioural. On the one hand, it is a question of intellectually comprehending things thanks to facts and information, and on the other hand, it is a question of attitudes and a sensitive skill to take an open stand towards new and unfamiliar things. In his classical model of IC, Byram presents five partly overlapping *savoirs*. The components are attitudes, knowledge and skills, linked to the values one acquires as a result of belonging to several social groups in a society. Byram has continually revised his descriptions of what the *savoirs* contain. I have chosen the formulations in Byram 2003, and given the model my own layout. Methodological competence (*savoir enseigner*), which was added at a later stage, is thus missing from this version.

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE				
Attitudes	**Knowledge**	**Skills** of interpreting and relating	**Skills** of discovery and interaction	**Critical cultural awareness/ Political Education**

Figure 3. Byram's five *savoirs*, components in intercultural competence (IC) (Byram 2003, 62)

Attitudes (savoir être): curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one's own.

Knowledge (savoirs): of social groups and their products and practices in one's own and in one's interlocutor's country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction.

Skills of interpreting and relating (savoir comprendre): ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents from one's own.

Skills of discovery and interaction (savoir apprendre/faire): ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction.

Critical cultural awareness/political education (savoir s'engager):

an ability to evaluate critically and on the basis of explicit criteria perspectives, practices and products in one's own and other cultures and countries.

Since the 1990's, *Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)* has been the key term, which has been included in the theories of more and more researchers. The concept also appears in a number of international documents. According to Doyé (1999, 11-12), this comprehensive competence integrates the cognitive (knowledge of languages and cultures, as in traditional *Landeskunde*), the pragmatic (the competence to perform speech acts) and the attitudinal domains (open-mindedness and tolerance, as in political education) within FL learning.

Byram's elaborate model of ICC includes the aforementioned five abilities in IC, in addition to van Ek's concepts of linguistic, sociolinguistic and discourse competence, which Byram has redefined. As can be seen from the figure below, Byram also pays attention to the locations of learning, where the teacher and the learner have different roles and relationships. ICC can be developed in the classroom, in fieldwork and as independent learning. Byram wants to present a general framework that would be applicable in different contexts, for different levels of teaching and for different types of language learning. Every point is explicated through detailed aim descriptions, in addition to being thoroughly analysed both from a teaching and an assessment perspective (Byram 1997). It is significant to note that the qualities to be acquired are not limited to encounters with members and objectives of the specific target culture(s) (TC) whose language the learners are studying. The knowledge, attitudes and skills to be learnt are directed towards communication with members of other cultures in general.

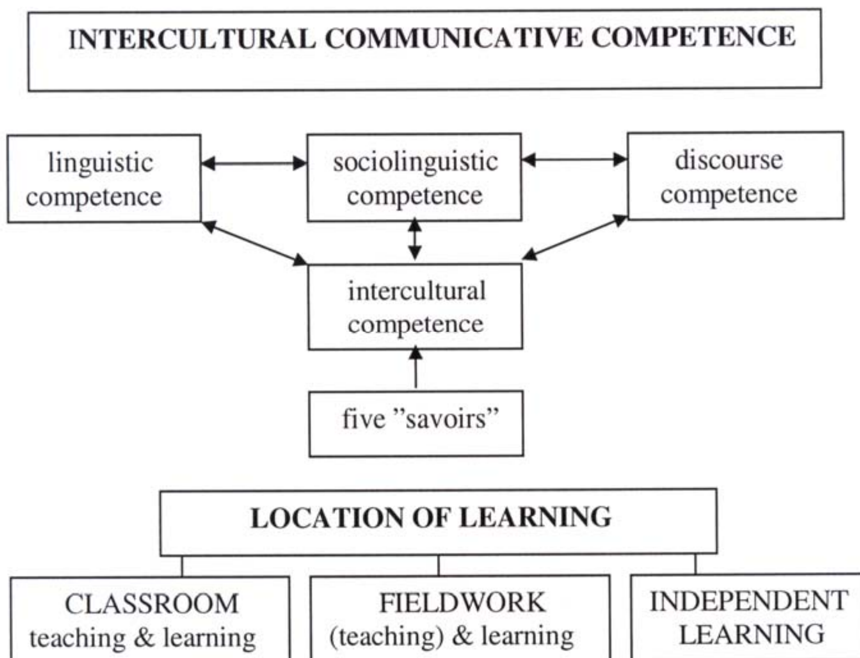

Figure 4. Byram's comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence (1997, 73)

In Lundgren's opinion (2003, 57), the weakness of Byram's model is that it has to be kept on a fairly general level in order to fit different contexts, whereas its strength is that it enables the formulation of distinct teaching aims that may be linked to assessment. The question of assessing ICC, however, entails a number of practical considerations, and is thus a problem that the model does not fully address. Theorists have approached this dilemma from different perspectives. Sercu (2004), for example, presents a systematic framework for the operationalisation of assessment of IC in an enlightening article. However, she admits that this may be impossible to assess holistically.

As outlined above, the past 20–30 years have seen a number of developments leading to a fundamental rethinking of the aims of language teaching, and have resulted in a more deliberate focus on cultural issues. The move away from the traditional scenario was not an easy one, since theories of L2 acquisition and successive methods of language teaching (grammar-translation, the direct method and even the communicative method) tended to underestimate the cultural dimension. As pointed out by Chambers (2001, 50), research into the role of culture in language learning was necessary to underpin the new directions which language learning was taking.

This successive development, sometimes referred to as the "cultural turn", was most certainly influenced by the transforming social and historical context in our modern world. Generally speaking, what has happened is a shift in emphasis

from the *whats* and *hows* to the *whys* of FL education. The key question, in my opinion, is formulated by Abdallah-Pretceille (2001, 132): "Why do we learn languages? To know the language or to understand the Other?" She answers the question herself by stating that learning another language is above all a means to learning otherness. It is not simply a matter of knowing other languages and cultures, but of understanding other people through their language use and their culture(s). She (2001, 141) distinguishes two significant shifts in language training currently taking place. One is the shift from historical, geographical and institutional knowledge to cultural learning in a broader sense. The other is a passage from cultural competence to IC as a tool for understanding the stage management, as she calls it, which takes place around us.

To sum up, culture today is no longer seen as something external to the activity of language learning itself. It is not an expendable fifth skill tacked on to the teaching of speaking, listening, reading and writing, but should always be in the background, right from day 1 (Kramsch 1993, 1). As pointed out by Byram at the international symposium *Language as Culture – Tensions in Time and Space* in November 2003 in Vaasa[10], "We have focussed too much on skills and too little on values." The ongoing research into Political and Cultural Education is now of great importance as a means to clarifying the objectives of FL teaching and how these objectives are implemented in the classrooms. The present study may be regarded as a contribution to this debate.

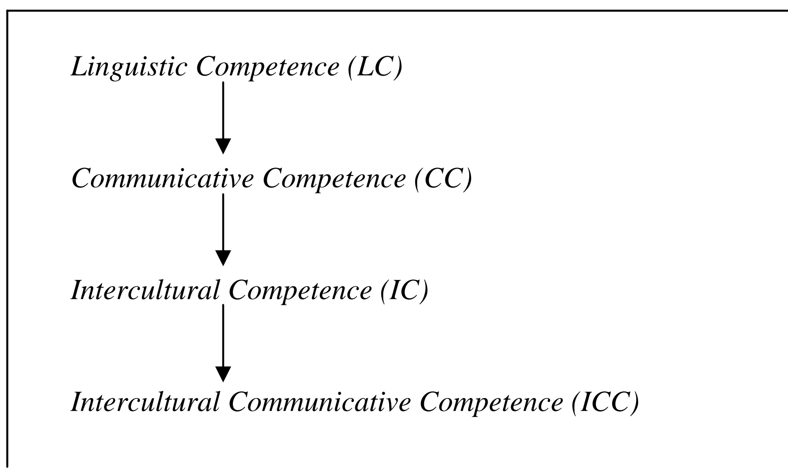

Figure 5. The development of aims in foreign language teaching

As suggested in the figure above, the different competences adopted by FLT can historically be seen as a continuous chain, in which all competences are integrated. ICC, or intercultural understanding, as Lundgren prefers to call it

[10] See Byram (2004).

(2002, 33-34), calls for a holistic approach to FL education. This is by no means an easy undertaking, since it entails going beyond the traditional borders of linguistics, including applied linguistics, and moving into a cross-disciplinary area. The holistic view of learning means that the whole personality of the learner is involved in every learning situation. The learner is thus not simply a thinking and knowing individual, but also a feeling and acting one. Intercultural FLT must hence be regarded as a new FL pedagogy, with clearly interdisciplinary ambitions. Furthermore, intercultural FLT requires that a much greater emphasis be placed on subjectivity than in the FL education of the 1970's and 1980's.

In the following chapter, I will take a closer look at what some theorists have to say about an intercultural approach to FLT, and the implications of this for the teachers.

2.1.3 Intercultural foreign language teaching – potentials and challenges

2.1.3.1 The potential of foreign language teaching in general and the teaching of English in particular

According to Kaikkonen (2001, 64), "the most important goal of FL education is to help learners grow out of the shell of their mother tongue and their own culture." He uses the metaphor of a cultural shell to discuss the personal significance of intercultural learning. We have all acquired certain culture-specific ways of thinking, speaking and shaping the world around us, as a consequence of the socialisation process into our own culture. Such patterns, which we tend to take more or less for granted, may set limits to our behaviour, making us live in a cultural shell. Sometimes, however, we may reach out of that shell to encounter other individuals and societies who may behave in different or unusual ways. Kaikkonen claims that we have learnt right from early childhood how to think of ourselves and how to relate to others, especially to people who look or behave differently. Hence, many stereotypes and prejudices are formed before school age. When children begin to learn foreign languages at school, they may already have many preconceptions about what is foreign or different. Gradually, as they become more familiar with an FL, learn new and other ways to communicate and perhaps even visit the TL culture, they begin to cross the boundaries of their own culture and grow out of this cultural shell. Their experiences of the world become more multifaceted. Kaikkonen (2001, 85) talks about the widening of the learner's picture of culture, with the help of new information about the foreign culture and language. This also increases the learner's consciousness of his/her own culture and language.

Cultural learning should therefore be introduced as early as in primary schools. According to Seelye (1988, 4), culture should in fact be taught during the first two years of FL study. For young children, contact with members of other cultures is not something that might occur in the distant future, but could very well happen at any time in their everyday lives. In the contemporary world, a person does not need to travel to encounter representatives of other cultures: popular music, the media, tourism and the multicultural nature of many societies

combine to ensure that sooner or later students will meet members of other cultural groups (Cortazzi & Jin 1999, 198). Consequently, they will have to cope with the situations arising from encounters with people from elsewhere who speak a foreign language.

The fact is, however, that the intercultural dimension in language learning has been taken seriously only at the secondary level. This may be due to fear that cultural issues might go beyond the capacities of primary school children. Doyé (1999, 25) is convinced that basic intercultural competence *can* be developed in younger children too, provided the tasks given and the experiences offered are selected in accordance with the learners' stage of development. He presents a wide selection of, what he calls, learner-appropriate contents and strategies for intercultural learning, many of which appear relevant also for older and more mature learners.

Christ (1994, 34) represents a similar line of reasoning. He discusses the possibility and necessity of intercultural learning at all educational stages, but points out that it may take different forms depending on the learner's age, prior insights and capacity for abstraction. The last is likely to determine the learner's ability to take the perspective of the Other, which Christ considers to be the desired outcome of all forms of intercultural education.

As mentioned above, developing the knowledge, skills and attitudes involved in ICC is inevitably linked to the personal growth of the whole learner. The idea of influencing someone's personality naturally raises ethical questions. At least in Western ways of thinking, a human being's personality is almost sacred and should hence be respected. It is therefore of vital importance that pedagogues consider what they want to achieve in this respect. If they are to be able to sensitise the learners to diversity in languages and cultures, accurate teaching and learning goals will have to be set up, and suitable activities to train the desired qualities will have to be devised.

English is naturally of great interest in this respect. Although, it may be regarded as a threat towards the existence of smaller languages, as indicated by Krumm and many others, its role as an international contact language cannot be overlooked, nor can one underestimate its potential for intercultural understanding. The many varieties of English existing today, as well as the prevalence of English as a common language throughout the world, highlight its unique role.

Kachru (1985, in Schnitzer 1995, 228) describes the position of English as three concentric circles. The Inner Circle comprises countries that have been perceived as the traditional bases of English; Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. The Outer Circle consists of a larger and linguistically more diverse group of countries such as Singapore, Kenya, India and Malaysia. English came on the scene in these countries with colonisation, and has established itself in particular domains of society, such as business, administration and education. In some of the countries within the Outer Circle it has the position of official language alongside the indigenous languages spoken there before the arrival of English. The so-called Expanding Circle, finally, can be said to include the rest of the world, i.e. countries where English is learnt as a foreign language at school. Here it is the unofficial second language, or the third

language in bilingual or plurilingual societies. Between 1860 and 1996 the number of people speaking English as a first or second language rose from 60 million to 593 million, making it the geopolitically most widespread language of all (Kaikkonen 2004, 111).

Schnitzer (1995, 229), like Risager (1996), draws attention to the fact that today English is used among non-native speakers at least as much as between native and non-native speakers. According to Graddol (1997), over 80% of interactions conducted in English take place in the absence of a native speaker. It is in this context that the use of English is truly expanding and also diversifying. Schnitzer compares it to a snowball that is picking up new features as it rolls. As a result, concepts such as English as an International Language (EIL), English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) and English as a Language of Wider Communication (LWC)[11] have emerged, referring to its growing function as a common code for people of different nationalities.

As pointed out by House (2002, 244), English is not owned by its native speakers any more. Thus, there is no monolithic "hegemonic" English voice, reflecting socio-cultural norms held by an inner circle, as has been claimed by Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas (1996), among others. What we have is a diversity of different voices, which reflect differences in the social, cultural, economic and political background of its speakers. According to House, ELF has great potential for international understanding precisely because lingua franca speakers must work out a joint linguistic, intercultural and behavioural basis for their communication. They tend to speak using a dynamic "interlanguage", characterised by paraphrases, language switches and low variation of so-called ritual speech, such as phrases of politeness. Meierkord (1996, in Brodow 2003, 177-178) has found that they try to adapt their own language use to the interlocutor's ability, co-operate to find a suitable conversation style, have longer pauses between the various phases in the conversation and use encouraging openings. The cultures form the background against which the common language of communication is shaped. Being aware that different languages have different norms for communication will greatly assist the interlocutors in their endeavour to find common ground. Meierkord's empirical study, also referred to by House (2002, 248), shows surprisingly few misunderstandings in ELF contacts. However, when misunderstandings do occur, they tend to be overcome by abrupt topic changes rather than resolved through negotiation.

House (2002, 245), notes that the very spread of a common language for communication tends to lead to speakers of "weaker" languages to insist on their own local language for identification with, and emotional binding, to their own culture and traditions. Contrary to Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas, she sees no need to set up a dichotomy between local languages and English as "the killer language." Since they fulfil different functions, she sees a place for both of them.

It appears as if ELF is constantly gaining new ground, not only as a variety of language in use but also as the focus of research. In 2002, Lingua Franca

[11] See Dubin & Olshtain (1986, 6-13).

Communication was one of the topics discussed at the third AILA World Congress of Applied Linguistics in Singapore. However, according to House (2002, 259), more solid research is needed in order to legitimately abandon a rigid English native-speaker norm.

All this has inevitable implications for the English language classroom. Since English today is being used as a medium among various languages and cultures, it has taken on a multicultural dimension that should be recognised. Concepts such as "target language" and "target culture" should be carefully used, as there is no such thing as one single standard English, used among monolingual and monocultural native speakers. The idea of fostering intercultural speakers, rather than looking up to some kind of native-speaker ideal, appears especially relevant when English is concerned. Dealing with the "English-speaking culture" in the sense of imparting information on specific cultures is also tied up with difficulties, and should be carefully considered. These difficulties are related to the process nature of culture as everchanging, and the multifaceted character of the concept "English-speaking countries" discussed above. It cannot be denied, however, that in teaching EFL it has been customary to focus on Inner-Circle countries only. Teaching "English culture" inevitably involves making choices concerning what to include and what to leave out. Moreover, background information as an objective truth does not exist, because the selection and representation of cultural traits is always marked by subjectivity on the part of the selector, which is often the teacher.

Every teacher thus has to individually decide how to consider and, even more importantly, how to teach, English; as an international language used worldwide, or as a language spoken as a mother tongue in specific countries. The intercultural potential of English as a school subject is related to seeing it as the means through which intercultural encounters are facilitated and intercultural understanding promoted, in addition to considering it an end in its own right. This is one of the issues that English teachers in particular will have to address when setting up goals and preparing classroom activities.

2.1.3.2 Some current challenges faced by contemporary language teachers

It is clear that the idea of intercultural FL education calls for a re-definition of the role of the language teacher. What are the qualities needed to foster intercultural understanding in a large perspective, assist the learners in achieving the coveted ICC and educate unprejudiced and tolerant intercultural speakers?

It is easy to list all the desired effects of teaching in high-flown, value-laden terms, but one should also consider the enormous demands placed upon in-service language teachers to live up to the expectations put upon them as a result of changes in society and the new goals of teaching set up as a result of these changes[12].

From the point of view of language teaching, the contribution by Kramsch is of great interest. She addressed this important but, in my opinion, frequently neglected issue in her contribution to the international conference at Örebro

[12] See Koskensalo (2002).

University in October 2004. The topic of the conference was "The multicultural language classroom: an arena for democratic experiences", and Kramsch's contribution focussed on the role of the language teachers as *go-betweens.* She points out that the days are now definitely gone when teachers could hide behind their grammar books and the discipline of dictation to get their students to learn the language (2004, 42). However, as indicated above with regard to English, gone are also the days when it was considered enough to try to transmit the standard national communicative and cultural knowledge of the native speaker. The reason for this lies in the fact that symbols of national identity have become multiple, hybrid, conflictual and changing. In Kramsch's view, teachers should have a more critical, socially, culturally and politically conscious knowledge-base than just content knowledge about the language and the culture associated with it. This I see as an indication that we have now gone even further than the idea of teachers-of-language-*and*-culture, advocated by Byram et al. in the mid 1990's. What is called for today are language teachers who are not so much authoritative transmitters of linguistic, pragmatic and even cultural knowledge. Instead, teachers should be seen as mediators between various identities, cultures, perspectives and perceptions of the world.

Now more than ever, language teachers may also find themselves at the intersection between local and more global dimensions of language teaching, balancing between the domestic needs of the students already present, and international demands that will be placed upon the students once they leave school.

Kramsch (2004, 44-47) looks at language teachers from two perspectives, on the one hand, distinguishing between the expertise they have to display and, on the other hand, the knowledge they have to possess. When doing so, she applies Byram's model of ICC (see Figure 4) to characterise the intercultural teacher. This, I think, is a fruitful way of trying to define today's language teachers, since one has to presume that the teachers themselves already possess the knowledge, skills and attitudes that they are trying to develop in the learners.

Language teachers, Kramsch writes, are to be seen as linguistic/cultural experts, expert methodologists and expert professionals. The first indicates that language teachers must not only *know about* the language, but naturally also *be able to use* it appropriately, i.e. to display a pragmatic, discourse and sociolinguistic competence adapted to a particular social context. The second area of expertise refers to language teachers' mastering of pedagogic methods and techniques of instruction, and the third is related to the teachers as professionals of the institutions they serve. These include the school they are working in but also professional organisations, collegial networks, and the national and international communities they belong to.

The knowledge that language teachers are expected to display is applied knowledge. In the three domains of expertise mentioned above, teachers are supposed to apply their theoretical knowledge to mediate between languages, and between learners and institutions. Kramsch introduces the *go-between* concept when referring to teachers' roles as mediators, and draws upon Byram and Zarate's *savoirs* to illustrate the varied types of knowledge required. As so-called cultural go-betweens, teachers should, among other things, understand

language and culture, not as static information, but as social semiotic, be able to use the language both like a native and like a non-native speaker, as well as be able to appreciate the political dimension of language teaching. For teachers as methodological go-betweens, *savoir* means remaining flexible with regard to methodology, mediating between what can be taught and tested and what must be taught and cannot be tested, as well as keeping a log for self-reflection. Finally, Kramsch describes teachers' roles as professional go-betweens as, among other things, mediating between institutional constraints and educational value, as well as mediating between commercial interests and textbook publishers and students' needs. She also stresses the importance of continuous professional development.

van Lier (2004b, 79-99) explores the changing FL classroom, and implicitly the challenges faced by language teachers, from a slightly different perspective. His contribution at the same conference in Örebro focussed on the language classroom as an arena for democratic education. This he views from a macro perspective, involving the education of democratic citizens in a democratic society, and a micro perspective, involving the promotion of democratic learning processes in the classroom. He sees democracy building as a bottom-up process.

Traditionally, the language classroom has been about learning languages, not about changing the world or even oneself. The content has been of a light-hearted, neutral nature, reflecting uncontroversial topics and safe ideas. What van Lier advocates is a move away from safe, tried-and-tested language classrooms into a more critical, challenging democratic direction. In his opinion, teaching materials should challenge students to think, with complex collaborative projects that push the boundaries of experience along with the language boundaries. However, critical-pedagogical work is not commonly practised in elementary or secondary schools. He is also aware that – just like many students would prefer not to have a cultural component in their language classes – democratic orientation is not likely to score very highly in the opinions of the students. It is always easier to stick to the old and familiar. This, I am sure, also applies to many teachers.

To highlight his point, van Lier argues that language is always about something, so it might as well be about something of consequence. Here it would be important if the learners themselves had a say and a stake in what these "things of consequence" are. Furthermore, the development of "dually compatible identity" that links the self to reality requires a voice in that language, as well as having both the right to speak and the right to be heard. Although communication and interaction are central to language development, it is in many classrooms limited to the transmission of (trivial) information. The idea of language teachers as democracy educators naturally poses challenges to language teachers, who traditionally have not ventured into the area of "big questions", to use Kramsch's expression.

This fact is also acknowledged by Tornberg (2004, 136), in her discussion about the FL classroom as an arena for democratic experiences. She sees the need for

deliberative communication[13], characterised by the acceptance of different, opposing views to be expressed, and the questioning of traditional views and authorities. In this respect, the responsibility of the teachers cannot be underestimated. Nor can one deny the importance of intuition and sound judgement regarding how a shared interest may be developed, which at the same time allows for different opposing opinions to be voiced. Deliberate communication, as I see it, is of especially great importance in multicultural classrooms, but also in every other FL classroom where the aim is increasing the learners' ability to encounter difference, diversity and ambiguity.

Kramsch, van Lier and Tornberg all highlight the fact that the role and tasks of the FL teacher have become increasingly diverse and complex. This logically raises the question of what the teachers themselves think about their work and the factors influencing their professional decisions.

In the following chapter, I will discuss some significant characteristics of teachers' thinking, as well as provide an overview of findings from a research area known as teacher cognition.

2.2 Teacher cognition

2.2.1 Some characteristics of teacher cognition

Teacher cognition refers to the cognitive processes and structures which influence, and are influenced by, what teachers do. This unobservable cognitive dimension of thinking includes beliefs, knowledge, principles, theories, and attitudes, as well as the thoughts and reflections teachers have before, during and after teaching. The study of teacher cognition aims at shedding light on these cognitive processes and structures. It explores their origins and development, and strives to understand their relationship to what teachers actually do in the classroom.

In the last 25 years, mainstream educational research has recognised the impact of teacher cognition on teachers' professional lives, and this has resulted in a substantial body of research. The findings point to a fact that is now largely uncontested, and which Borg (2003, 81) puts like this: "Teachers are active, thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex, practically-oriented, personalised, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs." As a forerunner in this area of research, he identifies several reasons for studying teacher cognition (1999, 23):

- to provide a conceptually more complete account of teaching than a solely behavioural model offers

[13] Tornberg refers to Tomas Englund (2004), who argues that deliberative communication can be considered complementary to other teaching and learning practices, since deliberation focuses not on facts but on values, opinions and perspectives regarding a variety of controversial questions that may also be discussed within the official public sphere of society.

- to understand discrepancies between theoretical recommendations, based on research, and classroom practice
- to provide policy-makers in education and teacher education with the basis for understanding how best to implement educational innovation and to promote teacher change
- to engage teachers in a form of reflective learning, by making them aware of the psychological bases of their classroom practice
- to provide the basis of effective pre- and in-service teacher education and professional development
- to provide descriptive information about subject-specific teacher cognition and pedagogy
- to understand how teachers develop

The main issues addressed in teacher cognition research are summarised by Borg (2003, 81) as follows:

- What do teachers have cognitions about?
- How do these cognitions develop?
- How do they interact with teacher learning?
- How do they interact with classroom practice?

The answers to these questions can be illustrated in the following figure (Borg 2003), which indicates that teachers have cognition about all aspects of their work. The figure represents a schematic conceptualisation of teaching within which teacher cognition plays an essential role in teachers' lives. It also outlines relationships suggested by mainstream educational research among teacher cognition, classroom practice and teacher learning, where the last comprises both schooling and professional education. Research indicates that teachers' experiences as learners can inform cognitions about teaching and learning which continue to influence them throughout their career (e.g. Holt Reynolds 1992).

There is also evidence suggesting that although professional preparation in the form of teacher training does shape the cognition of teacher trainees, programmes which ignore these prior beliefs may be less effective at influencing these (e.g. Kettle & Sellars 1996). Research has also shown that teacher cognitions and practical classroom work influence each other mutually, with contextual factors playing a significant role in determining to what extent teachers are able to implement instruction congruent with their cognitions (e.g. Beach 1994).

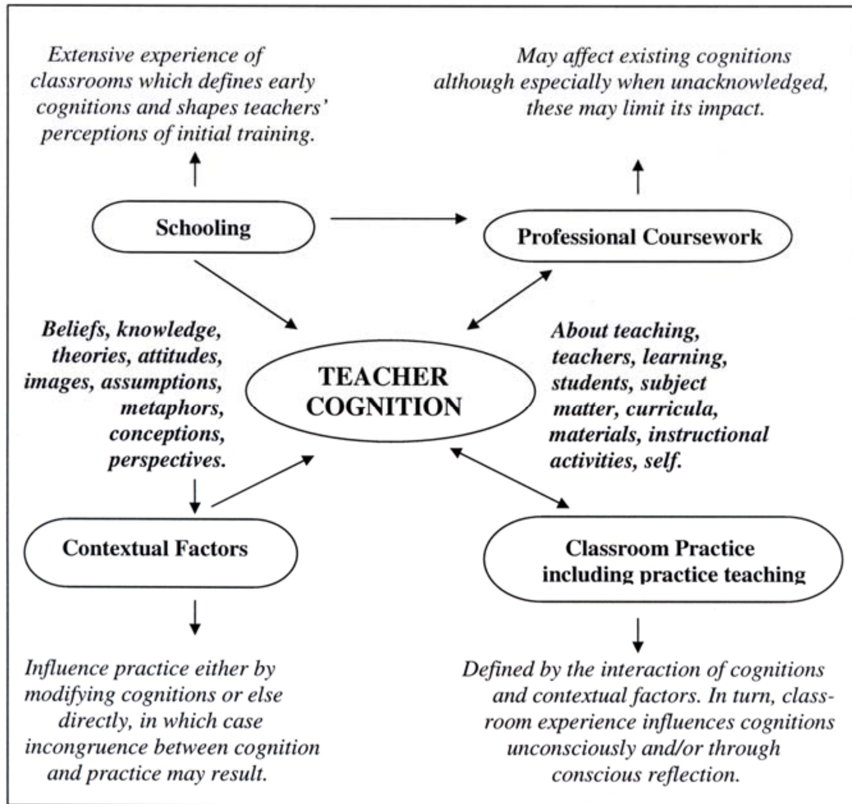

Figure 6. Teacher cognition, schooling, professional education, and classroom practice (Borg 2003)

As becomes evident from the figure above, "teacher cognition" as a concept is highly multidimensional, comprising notions which are difficult to separate from each other. The distinction between teachers' knowledge and belief about a specific subject matter, for example, is extremely unclear[14]. The reason for this, according to Verloop et al. (2001, 446), is that in the mind of a teacher, components of knowledge, beliefs, conceptions, and intuitions are inextricably intertwined. The study of teacher cognition is hence characterised by a certain degree of conceptual ambiguity, which is further complicated by the fact that identical terms have been defined in different ways by different authors, and different terms have been used to describe similar concepts. Listed below are some of the central terms, which also pertain to this study:

[14] A model for the categorisation and description of different forms of teacher knowledge is proposed by Shulman (1986).

Source	Term	Description
Crookes & Arakaki (1999)	Routines	Habitualised patterns of thought and action
Gatbonton (1999)	Pedagogical knowledge	The teacher's accumulated knowledge about the teaching act (e.g. its goals, procedures, strategies) that serves as the basis for his or her classroom behaviour or practices.
Meijer et al. (1999)	Practical knowledge	The knowledge that teachers themselves generate a result of their experiences as teachers, and their reflections on these experiences.
Richards (1996)	Maxims	Personal working principles which reflect teachers' individual philosophies of teaching.
Richards et al. (1998)	Pedagogical reasoning	The process of transforming the subject matter to learnable material.
	Content knowledge	Factual information, organising principles, central concepts of a discipline.
	Implicit theories	Partially articulated theories, beliefs, and values about teacher role and about the dynamics of teaching and learning.

Chart 1. Key terms in teacher cognition research

Another intricate matter concerns methodological issues and the question of what counts as evidence of teacher cognition. The studies reviewed by Borg are largely qualitative, generating data such as interview material, observed or

reported classroom practices, teachers' retrospective commentaries on their instructional decisions and comments elicited through video-based stimulated recall. It can be questioned whether such material can be considered evidence of the "unobservable psychological context of learning", as Borg (2003, 106) calls it. He also raises the question whether teacher cognition can be usefully studied without reference to what actually goes on in the classroom. According to him, we are after all interested in understanding teachers' professional actions, not what or how they think is isolation of what they do. As I see it, purely reported cognitions or conceptions are also well worth exploring. Gaining an insight into teachers' lines of reasoning has a value in its own right. Naturally, this may later provide a useful basis for further inquiry, as will be discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

Based on studies in this domain – some of which have indeed also comprised investigations of actual classroom practices – certain characteristic features of teacher cognition can be distinguished. To begin with, teachers' thinking is *practical* in two senses. One is that education by nature is a practical undertaking which calls for practical solutions to practical problems. The other is that teachers' understandings of instruction are largely influenced by their accumulated practical experience of classrooms, and by what works and what does not work for them as learners and teachers. Research has shown that teachers' beliefs about teaching is well established by the time they get to university, and that new teachers tend to teach as they themselves were taught, despite their intentions to do otherwise (Castro et al. 2004, 94).

Secondly, teacher cognition is *personal* in the sense that it is shaped by a wide range of experiences teachers have as learners, teacher trainees, and classroom practitioners. As indicated above, these unique experiences interact to promote conceptions of education which are highly personalised, forming "personal theories", rather than objective knowledge, which are reflected in teachers' classroom work. Furthermore, beliefs, being parts of teachers' cognitions, are considered to have an affective, attitudinal domain. They tend to act as a filter and define what a teacher considers to be important or negligible information.

Borg (2004) refers to studies suggesting that teachers' cognitive structures exist in some form of system or organised pattern, the need for which becomes obvious when one considers the wide range of issues that teachers have conceptions of: students, themselves, the subject matter at hand, curricula, schools, classroom management, parents and so forth. This *systematic* feature is something we as practitioners do not always acknowledge.

A fourth characteristic mentioned by Borg concerns the *dynamic* way in which teachers continuously develop, test, and refine theories on the basis of on-going professional experience. This process may also often occur subconsciously, but may be facilitated through deliberate conscious reflective behaviour. Interestingly, Castro et al. (2004, 93) speak to the contrary when claiming that teacher beliefs tend to persevere, in other words be resistant to change. According to them, beliefs are self-perpetuating, persevering against contradiction caused by reason, time, schooling or experience. The earlier a specific belief system is acquired and incorporated into the belief structure, they say, the more difficult it is to change. Recently acquired beliefs are most

vulnerable to change. In the light of what was said above about the personal nature of teachers' thinking, I think one can conclude that it depends on individual teachers, whether or not they are willing to alter or abandon particular beliefs when confronted with new and more relevant beliefs. I would like to think that teachers do indeed develop in their profession and consequently also develop their personal theories.

A fifth characteristic of teacher cognition, discussed by Castro et al. (2004, 94), concerns the co-occurrence of conflicting beliefs within one and the same teacher, resulting in conflicting educational practices. As an example they mention co-operative learning, which may be perceived as an affective method for increasing student learning, but which may also raise fear of increasing off-task behaviour, making the class difficult to handle. Castro et al. draw the conclusion that the conception of teachers as needing control over student behaviour is a conservative and strong force, which could even hinder the implementation of curricular reforms.

Finally, teachers' cognitive structures often appear to be *tacit*, that is implicit, subconscious or unarticulated. The beliefs, which tend to be pervasive in the sense that they underlie everything the teacher does and says, tend to operate without teachers' explicit attention to them[15]. Teaching, as well as all other activities related to functioning in a school and dealing with young people, involves making constant choices, both consciously and unconsciously, and often under pressure. Kohonen (2001, 54-55) addresses this very issue when talking about teacher development and teachers' professional growth. He points out that professional thinking is based on an understanding of the values and assumptions that underlie a specific pedagogical approach, involving both the theoretical principles of this approach and the manifestation of these in classroom practices and teaching techniques. This understanding comprises both tacit and conscious knowledge. The former, according to Kohonen, is related to fundamental, philosophical issues, such as the teacher's conception of man as well as his conceptions of the essence of learning, including the role of the teacher and the role of the learner. Every teacher has an implicit conception of man which is inherent and embedded in his/her methods and practices, and which forms the foundation of her ontological decision (see Lehtovaara 2001, 157).

As illustrated in Kohonen's figure, unconscious beliefs and assumptions can be seen as the broad basis on which conscious choices regarding teaching goals, contents, processes and forms of evaluation are made. The latter merely constitute the tip of the iceberg.

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[15] Berliner's research (1986) into the characteristics of experienced teachers and expert teachers shows that particularly expert teachers very often lack the ability to articulate the basis for their expertise and skill. It appears as if much of the experts' knowing-in-action is due to the automation of procedures.

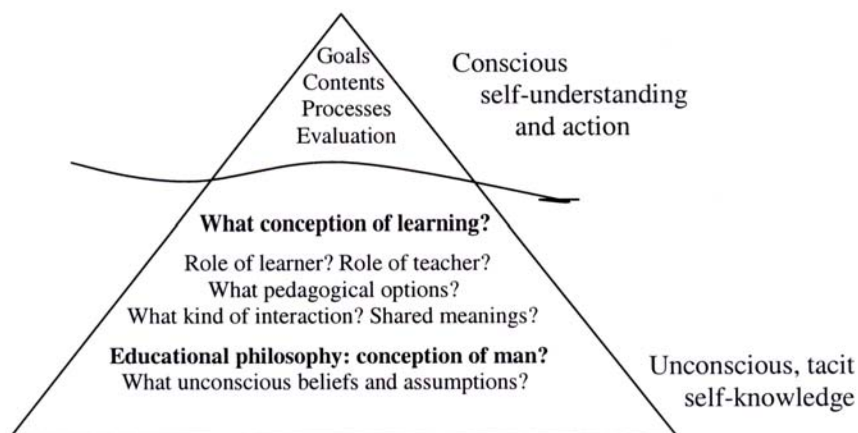

Figure 7. Conscious and unconscious teacher knowledge (Kohonen, 2001)

Both Lehtovaara and Kohonen stress the importance for teachers to clarify for themselves their fundamental educational orientation. Lehtovaara (2001, 148-149, 157) talks about teachers' self-reflection and about making the implicit explicit. As I understand this, a teacher occasionally needs to stop to seriously reflect upon what his/her personal educational philosophy is, and try, as it were, to raise the unconscious to a conscious level. If practices are to change, the beliefs and assumptions behind them need to change. Dynamic professional growth, as indicated above, can happen only when teachers actively and willingly pursue this search, and when social and situational factors do not get in the way. Unfortunately, as pointed out by Kohonen (2001, 55) there are often factors at play that offer teachers the technical curriculum implementor's role, rather than invite them to work towards an educational innovator's position. This, as indicated above, is one of the topics addressed in studies on language teacher cognition.

2.2.2 Overview of research on language teacher cognition

Language teacher cognition has been explored mainly in the last 10 years, with 64 studies published between 1976 and 2002, 47 of which appeared after 1996. The period 1990-2000 emerged as the decade of change as far as analysing teacher cognition in language teaching is concerned. According to Freeman (2002, 8), this field of inquiry has now strengthened its position as a well-established domain. He talks about "a decade of consolidation", which in his view follows change. In his analysis, teachers' mental lives represent the "hidden side" of teaching, the importance of which has now been recognised. However, this area of research is still relatively undeveloped and fragmented, lacking any coherent guiding agenda or framework. The bulk of research into

language teacher cognition has focussed on general processes, such as cognition and prior language learning, cognition and teacher education, as well as cognition and classroom practice. In terms of specific curricular focuses, grammar and literacy instruction predominate. Most of these studies, the majority of which have been carried out in the USA, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom, have specifically examined the teaching of English, mainly in English as a Second Language (ESL), as opposed to EFL contexts. Following Borg (2003), an overview of studies that are of interest and relevance to the present investigation will be provided below.

Bailey et al. (1996) have conducted a study in which seven MA candidates and a teacher educator explored the role of their language learning histories in shaping their current teaching philosophies and practices. Autobiographical writing and reflection was used as methods. The writers identified several factors related to teaching and learning situations which had made their own language learning experiences positive. For example, the personality and style of their teacher had mattered more than methodology, as had caring and committed teachers that respected and were respected by their pupils. Learning had been facilitated by a positive classroom environment, and their own motivation to learn had enabled them to overcome inadequacies in the teaching. These insights, according to the authors of the study, had proved useful for articulating their own theories of teaching, as well as becoming aware of their origins.

Numrich (1996), in his study of novice teachers, has found that specific instructional strategies were promoted or avoided on the basis of how these were perceived by the teachers as language learners. In their diaries, 27% reported that they wanted to integrate a cultural component into their own teaching, because they had found learning about the culture of the target country especially enjoyable in their L2 studies. Not surprisingly, the same teachers noted that they avoided teaching grammar and correcting mistakes, because their own experiences of these aspects had been negative. Eisenstein-Ebsworth & Schweers (1997) also refer to experiences of very formal language study, including memorisation, reading, writing and grammar, resulting in teachers adopting a much more communicative approach in their own work.

The variable influence of teacher education on teacher trainees' and in-service teachers' cognition has been studied by, for example, Almarza (1996). His findings particularly highlight the distinction between cognitive and behavioural changes which teacher training may induce. All four teacher trainees in his study adopted the specific teaching method that they had been taught, and applied this in the classroom during practice teaching. One may argue, of course, that this decision was at least partly influenced by the fact that the trainees were assessed and therefore felt a need to conform to certain standards. Cognitively, however, the teacher trainees varied in their acceptance of the suggested method. This became apparent when they talked about their work, rather than through their practice. In his comments on Almarza's findings, Borg (2003, 91) draws attention to the fact that behavioural change does not necessarily imply cognitive change, and the latter does not guarantee changes in behaviour either.

A large amount of studies in mainstream pedagogical research points to a "symbiotic relationship" between teacher cognition and classroom practice. This

topic has also been discussed in research in the field of language teaching. The findings point to the fact that language teachers' classroom practices are influenced by a wide range of interacting and often conflicting factors. Attention has been paid to four main areas, the first of which concerns the reasons most commonly cited by teachers in explaining their instructional decisions. In Breen (1991), a concern for the cognitive processes which facilitate learning was the most frequently given reason, whereas the pre-service teachers in Johnson's study (1992) claimed they made most decisions to ensure that their pupils would understand and be motivated by the subject matter. Generally speaking, inexperienced teachers appeared to be more concerned about classroom management, the pacing and timing of lessons as well as unexpected pupil behaviour than about the actual language (Nunan, 1992b). Richards's analysis (1996) of data from a corpus of teacher narratives and interviews suggests that teachers also base their pedagogical choices on maxims, i.e. personal working principles that reflect their own philosophies of teaching and learning.

Improvisational teaching is a second area of interest, focussing specifically on the reasons teachers give for departing from lesson plans during the actual lesson. One of the many principles discussed by Bailey (1996) concerns the aim "to serve the common good." This means that when an unexpected issue is raised during a lesson, a teacher may choose to deviate from the plan to deal with it, if it is perceived to be of interest and relevance to the whole class. Richards (1998, 115) also talks about "on-the-spot modification of planned activities in order to maintain students' engagement and interest."

A third area of interest in the research of classroom practice focuses on how a specific context or environment may conflict with teachers' cognitions. Borg (1998) points out that the social, psychological and environmental realities of the school or the classroom may hinder the ability of language teachers to adopt practices that reflect their beliefs. Difficult working conditions, in the form of large classes, unmotivated students, a set syllabus and even pressure to conform from more experienced colleagues, may discourage experimentation and innovation, and encourage sticking close to prescribed material and familiar teaching approaches.

A fourth area concerns the relationship between cognition and experience. As suggested by Figure 6, teachers' classroom work is shaped by their cognition, but cognition in turn is shaped by accumulated teaching experience. Borg (2003) refers to several studies shedding light on transformations of teacher cognition that may occur over time. Richards (1998), for example, supports Nunan (1992b), when suggesting that experienced teachers are more engaged in improvisational teaching than novices, who may not yet have automatised the routines associated with managing the class, and who may therefore focus less attention on the actual issues of content. However, longitudinal studies appear to be lacking in this area, meaning that one can only deduce some of the possible processes that teachers go through in developing the cognition and skills more characteristic of experienced teachers.

One noteworthy exception from the Finnish scene is Kaikkonen's (2004a) ongoing study of pre-service FL teachers on the verge of entering their teaching career. His empirical material consists of the autobiographical narratives of

students at Jyväskylä University, which were collected at three different stages. The first intervention took place when the students were in the final stages of their pedagogical subject studies, the second when they had completed these studies and work life was already looming, and the last when they had been working as language teachers for some time. The aim of Kaikkonen's study is to explore how the process of becoming a language teacher is influenced by the students' own language studies at school, their teacher training (particularly the pedagogical studies) as well as their own work as novice teachers. One can thus say that he has included all the components embedded in teacher cognition, as these were illustrated in Figure 6. He hopes to be able to clarify the intensity of and internal relationship between these three factors, which are to indicate what kind of language teaching these young students will eventually pursue in their own classrooms and the kind of learning environments they will create. Attention is also directed to how the respondents perceive the demands placed on language teachers in today's post-modern society.

The number of respondents dropped between the first and the second intervention, and the topics that the respondents were encouraged to write their reflective essays on changed as the study progressed. The experiences, conceptions and categories of knowledge emerging from Kaikkonen's material will provide useful insights into how teachers develop over time.

Lacking from Kaikkonen's study, and from the other studies on teacher cognition that I have found, is greater focus on different curricular aspects of language teaching. Much work remains to be done in this domain of inquiry. As already mentioned, grammar teaching and literacy instruction in FL and L2 contexts have both been awarded some attention, whereas other major areas, such as the teaching of speaking and listening have remained unstudied, not to mention the intercultural dimension. I am aware of very few studies in language teacher cognition which have focussed on culture as a component of the language teaching curriculum. Integrating research into language teachers' cognitions and the essence of intercultural FL education thus seems to be a novel approach, well worth developing.

2.3 Integrating the intercultural dimension and language teacher cognition

2.3.1 International research

As shown in the previous chapters, there is a large volume of research and theories on intercultural education and culture in FLT, whereas relatively meagre attention has been paid to how the intercultural dimension is perceived by teachers. An overview of selected studies will be presented below. In most studies, the language in focus is English.

Byram and Risager, who together with their English and Danish colleagues compiled material from 212 language teachers in Britain and 653 in Denmark, carried out one of the first studies in this field back in the early 1990's. Their respondents filled in questionnaires, after which 18 and 42 teachers respectively

were interviewed. Byram and Risager (1999, 104-105) summarise the findings as follows:

> *Teachers' understanding of the concept 'culture' appears to be lacking in the depth and complexity needed to grasp its significance for language teaching in the future. There is a concentration on 'national' culture and little attention to aspects of culture beyond those already found in textbooks. They are also often frustrated in their attempts to treat the cultural dimension seriously because of pressures to produce measurable results and focus on linguistic competence.*

Interestingly enough, those Danish teachers who were also teaching Danish as a second language appeared to have a deeper and more flexible understanding of the concept of culture than the others. They also had a wider perception of their role as intercultural mediators than their colleagues. Byram and Risager underline that with regard to teachers' willingness to interculturalise FL education, they found a growing awareness among their respondents of the significance of the cultural dimension as European integration proceeds, and a clear willingness to teach both language and culture.

In 1999 as similar survey was conducted among 135 teachers of English, French and German in Flandern, the Flemish part of Belgium. Sercu (2001) shows that most of the respondents represent a view of culture in FLT as a traditional paradigm with no reference to promoting ICC. She states that foreign language teachers' perceptions of professionalism seem to be typically those of teachers teaching for CC, not those of teaching for ICC.

Another study clearly inspired by Byram and Risager is Guilherme's doctoral thesis from 2000, for which 176 Portuguese teachers of English were asked about their attitudes towards the teaching of culture in English-speaking countries. The aim of the study was to explore how the teachers concretised the notion of "a critical interpretation of the cultural context" included in the Portuguese curriculum for English. Guilherme's focus is "critical cultural awareness", which is a term borrowed from Byram's model of the five *savoirs*. The results indicate that although the respondents advocate a critical pedagogy in theory, they do not apply this in practice.

On the basis of a theoretical foundation and the results of her empirical study, Guilherme suggests a model for teacher education. This comprises education for democracy, civil rights and cultural analysis applied to the local, national and global level. The cross-disciplinary field for these studies proposed by Guilherme is critical pedagogy, cultural studies and intercultural communication.

Lázár (2000, 2001) has conducted two studies of English teachers' attitudes to the intercultural dimension. The former is a quantitative study with 393 teachers, carried out simultaneously in Estonia, Poland, Iceland and Hungary. The latter is a qualitative study set in Hungary, which can be seen as a follow-up of the former. The majority of the Hungarian teachers do not include "culture" in their teaching to any noteworthy extent. According to Lázár, increased awareness of working with intercultural understanding will have to be linked to intercultural communication as an integrated part of teacher education.

In Spain, Castro, Sercu and Méndez García (2004) have conducted an investigation among secondary school EFL teachers, focusing on the extent to which teachers support the new culture-and-language teaching objectives in the curricular guidelines. They base their study on research on innovation in education, which has shown that teachers' perception of innovation to a large extent determine the success of that innovation. The findings by Castro et al. suggest that teachers are willing to support the new objectives, but that they experience conflicts when having to prioritise language teaching and the teaching of culture.

This study is part of a quantitative comparative survey that comprises questionnaire answers received from teachers in seven countries (Belgium, Bulgaria, Greece, Mexico, Poland, Spain and Sweden). The focus is on data about how teachers perceive the cultural dimension of FLT, on their perceptions of their students' knowledge of and attitudes to TL countries, their own teaching and the significance of study trips and exchanges. The overall results are published in Sercu et al., 2005. The researchers behind this ambitious report establish that two distinct FL teacher profiles can be distinguished: the favourably disposed teacher who is willing to teach IC, and the unfavourably disposed teacher who takes a much more hesitant and even rejecting stance. Both groups tend to have their own distinct, but clearly clustered, opinions regarding the preconditions that need to be met before one can start teaching IC, and the way in which IC should be taught. In actual teaching, they appear not to go beyond a traditional information-transfer pedagogy in any of the seven countries, although, interestingly enough, different topics appear to enjoy priority in the different countries.

Two studies set outside Europe are worth mentioning. In Saudi Arabia, Al-Qahtani (2004) has explored views and attitudes of EFL teachers towards introducing the TC in their EFL classrooms to develop their students' sociolinguistic competence. The data consists of questionnaires filled in by 70 teachers at selected male middle-schools in Riyadh, as well as material from semi-structured interviews with four of these teachers. Al-Qahtani's findings suggest that the teachers have positive attitudes towards introducing the TC, and are aware of the importance of developing their students' cross-cultural understanding. According to Al-Qahtani, the teachers also exhibit a broad understanding of what "culture" means and what teaching "culture" could entail. However, the teachers are limited in their involvement in the teaching of culture. This Al-Qahtani attributes to the teachers' fear that exposing students to the TC could affect their cultural and religious beliefs in an unfavourable way. The idea that intercultural language teaching (ILT) could harm the students is a new and interesting element, brought to the fore by the particular context of this study. The teachers in the study also appear to lack the profound understanding of the role of culture in language teaching, which is needed to realise its necessity in developing language learners' sociolinguistic competence.

In the United States, Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin (2003) have shed light on how critical pedagogy and multicultural education can help meet the challenges that world language teachers experience in the teaching of culture. The purpose of their study is to explore some of the factors influencing culture teaching by getting an insight into student teachers' reflections. Three graduate students

completing their last term in the teacher preparation programme were interviewed with the purpose of determining to what extent they understood the distinction between the “Five Cs approach” and the “Four Fs approach.” According to Diaz-Greenberg and Nevin (2003, 215), the “Four Fs approach” (Food, Fashion, Festivals and Folklore) trivialises the complex nature of culture, whereas the “Five Cs approach” (Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities) involves including all the five topics in a systematic approach at all levels of language instruction.

In order to elicit the students’ conscious and unconscious beliefs about the nature of their understanding, the researchers put the following questions to them: 1) How is the concept of culture approached in the textbook you are using during your student teaching?; 2) How is the textbook concept of culture similar or different to what you have learned in the teacher education programme, or how are concepts of culture taught in the language classrooms?

The results indicate that language student teachers *can* tie in the teaching of culture using the “Five Cs approach” even when their textbooks might be presenting the “Four Fs approach.” All three respondents are very much aware of the fact that it is the teacher rather than the textbook that should guide the teaching of culture. One of the problems discussed in the interviews concerned the textbook emphasis on Spain, although most of the foreign language students in the United States are closer to Mexico and Central America than Spain. The researchers conclude that the cultural base of the teacher can often influence (unconsciously) the perceptions and subsequent presentation of the cultural norms of the other culture.

The international research briefly presented here ranges from large-scale quantitative studies to qualitative studies where just a small number of teachers have been interviewed. The findings indicate that teachers are very much aware of the importance of integrating cultural aspects in language teaching. However, they do not always problematise the multifaceted concept of culture, which is often linked to a national paradigm; neither do they realise it in their own teaching in ways that would effectively promote intercultural understanding. Moreover, due to demands for quantitative assessment, they tend to feel obliged to direct their teaching towards measurable products.

2.3.2 Nordic research

The following overview of Nordic studies integrating teacher cognition and the intercultural dimension in FLT will be restricted to Swedish and Finnish research. It should be mentioned, however, that Karen Risager in Denmark has made great contributions to the debate around ILT.

In Sweden, Ulla Lundgren emerges as the main researcher interested in this field. In her doctoral thesis (Lundgren 2002) she examines the prospects of developing intercultural understanding through EFL in the Swedish comprehensive school. Her overall aim is split into two subordinate aims: 1) to analyse and problematise the intercultural dimension of EFL as three discourses; research discourse, authority discourse and teacher discourse; 2) to relate these discourses to each other in order to reveal a space for the interpretation of culture teaching and learning culture in EFL. Lundgren summarises her findings

as two categories, opportunities and obstacles for developing intercultural understanding in EFL education.

For this study, her analysis of the teacher discourse is of particular interest. Ten experienced teachers were interviewed about how they relate to the intercultural dimension in the teaching of English as well as what obstacles and opportunities they can identify. The interviews were followed by telephone conversations, where the respondents were invited to clarify points discussed in the personal meetings six months earlier.

All teachers claimed to find intercultural understanding important but very few saw it as an explicit task for FL teaching. Similarly, few teachers in Lundgren's study refer to societal changes and central guidelines as reasons for an intercultural approach to teaching and learning English. The national assessment is considered more significant. The fact that it does not assess intercultural knowledge sets the norm for what counts as important and valuable knowledge. In this respect Lundgren's survey correlates with findings from the international arena.

The obstacles discussed by the teachers are related to their own individual practices and the local school environment. Hectic workdays filled with practical problems mean limited time for didactic reflections and self-development. Lack of knowledge about methods as well as the students' lack of ability to "take the perspective of the other" is also mentioned. The teachers feel that developing the students' intercultural understanding presupposes that the students are mature, able to feel empathy and have acquired a high level of language proficiency. The last issue is in bad tune with much of the theory in this field (see Chapter 2.1.3.1).

Lundgren's study may be regarded as a source of inspiration or starting point for Eva Gagnestam's doctoral thesis from 2003 involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. She has approached students as well as teachers in Swedish upper secondary schools. Her phenomenographic study of English teachers' and student teachers' interpretations of "culture" and "intercultural understanding" reveal an uncertainty concerning how to deal with culture in language teaching. The respondents feel they lack the necessary tools to be able to carry out adequate teaching about culture.

Other Swedish researchers have also approached the field of intercultural learning from different angles. In her doctoral thesis, Ulla Brodow (2004) explores whether and in what ways international contacts and school projects can be considered to be part of the ongoing processes of development in the Swedish compulsory school. She too has interviewed both students and teachers, in addition to the heads of six schools about the importance of international work for the participating actors. Foreign language teaching, especially the teaching of English, is dealt with but at a subordinate level. The main focus of the thesis is on the role of the school in the internationalising process going on in society.

Anna Thyberg[16] is currently engaged in research on questions of democracy linked to the teaching of English at the upper secondary school, and her colleague is studying the French language classroom from an intercultural perspective.

In Finland, Kohonen and Kaikkonen have both contributed with a substantial body of research in the field of intercultural language learning. Studies where teachers voice their views on this matter appear to be limited to Kaikkonen's analysis of pre-service teachers' paths to becoming language teachers, which was referred to in Chapter 2.2.2. However, the respondents' experiences, perceptions and knowledge about culture in language teaching were only one issue among several other issues addressed in the study.

Liselott Forsman's licentiate thesis (2004a) addresses the influence of extracurricular activities in English on Finland-Swedish EFL-students' linguistic and cultural knowledge/awareness and attitudes. As part of her empirical study she interviewed eight teachers, all of whom experienced the effects of media influence on their students' learning as something positive. Increased knowledge of and interest in certain cultures and aspects of cultures were mentioned as positive outcomes. However, the teachers find the knowledge somewhat one-sided in the sense that students seem to know more about the United States than about Great Britain or any other English-speaking societies. The teachers also commented on stereotypic views, sometimes negative ones, primarily aimed at representatives of Britain and British culture. This also became apparent in the preceding student interviews, suggesting that students show less variation of ideas, seem more uncertain and express conservative views concerning British teenagers, whereas their descriptions are more detailed and "up-to-date" concerning American teenagers. This can be attributed to less media influence from Great Britain or less diversity in existing images.

Since the students in Forsman's study do not express clear opinions about different English-speaking cultures, many of the teachers in the study report that they try to provide more realistic and complementary information or enhance students' general cultural awareness. They advocate more systematic ways of bringing in positive role models in the form of representatives of other cultures to the classroom as well as helping students meet with them outside the classroom. Such experiences, Forsman writes, could give the students more knowledge about people from other cultures than the conveyance of superficial facts would. She concludes the following: "It seems impossible to expect our students to develop respect for and understanding of foreign people with other conventions and traditions than their own with such little awareness and actual knowledge of representatives of the English-speaking target cultures whose language they actually study at school. If the findings of the study are the result of what has been expressed about cultural education in the curriculum so far, it seems that further emphasis of cultural aspects is needed." (Forsman 2004a, 178-179).

[16] Thyberg´s interesting article entitled *Vad har värdegrundsfrågor med engelskundervisningen att göra?* can be found at http://www.hum.vxu.se/publ/humanetten/nummer12/art0304.html.

Forsman (2004a, 179-180) recognises the need for thorough discussions about the aspects within language education that will have to be less strongly emphasised in the future, since the time available is so limited. She stresses that cultural knowledge and attitudes are not to be left to the vagaries of unsystematic media influence, and calls for the inclusion of cultural aspects in evaluations in order to emphasise its seriousness. Hopes are centred on the new NFC, which at the time of her research had not yet been released.

Forsman's study is first and foremost a study of student knowledge/awareness and attitudes. The teachers were addressed in order to ensure a more complete description of the reality of the English language classroom in Finland-Swedish schools today. For me, Forsman's findings are of great interest and significance because they are part of the background against which my own research is set.

Drawing on the studies presented in this chapter and especially Forsman's observations, I will now specify the primary themes of interest for my own empirical study.

2.3.3 The present study – specification of research questions (RQ1-RQ3)

In this study I set out to explore the cognitions that Finland-Swedish teachers at the upper-comprehensive school level have about the intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching. In light of the discussion in the theoretical framework of this thesis, the intercultural dimension can be understood as consisting of three components: 1) Conceptions about what culture in FLT is, 2) beliefs about why culture is taught, in other words, beliefs about the cultural objectives[17] of FLT, and 3) teaching practices aimed at reaching those objectives. I use the word "belief" in the meaning formulated by Pajares (1992, 313), as "an individual's representation of reality that has enough validity, truth, or credibility to guide thought and behaviour." Hence, conceptions about culture and beliefs about the cultural objectives are seen as interacting and together influencing classroom practice. The relationship between the three components is illustrated in Figure 8 below. **What, why** and **how** are used as question words to highlight the starting point of my study within classical didactics.

[17] "Objective" tends to be used about specific outcomes or products of courses that are outlined in a syllabus. They guide teachers and may also help learners understand where the course is going and why (Dubin & Olshtain 1986, 3). With reference to culture, some researchers (e.g. Schnitzer 1995 and Seelye 1988) use the more general "goal", whereas others (e.g. Castro et al. 2004, Sercu et al. 2005) talk about "cultural objectives."

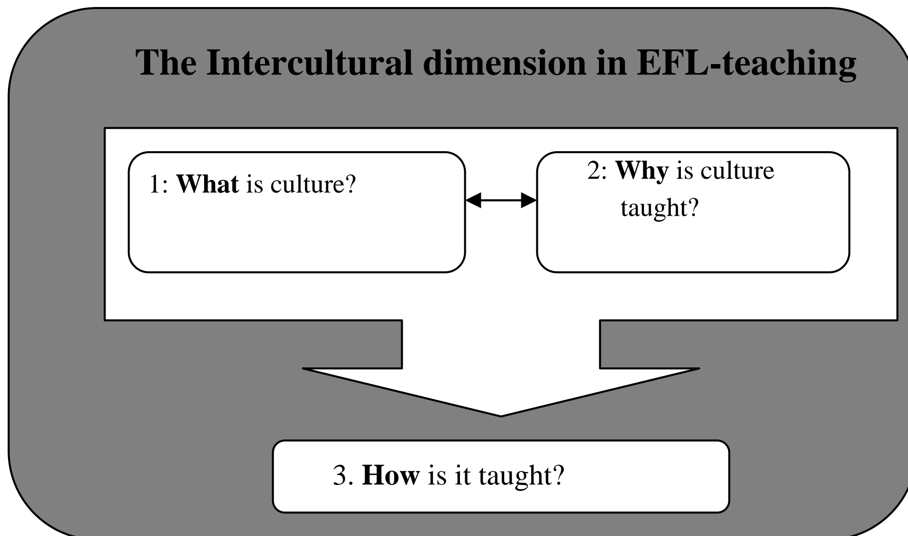

Figure 8. The intercultural dimension; perceived in this study as 1) conceptions of culture, 2) cultural objectives, and 3) the relationship of both of these to how it is taught.

My primary field of interest can consequently be summarised in the following three research questions:

> RQ1: How do teachers interpret the concept "culture" in EFL-teaching?
>
> RQ2: How do they specify the cultural objectives of their teaching?
>
> RQ3: What do they do to attain these objectives?

These questions constitute the very core of my study, and it is my ambition to try to find patterns within teachers' conceptions. In order to gain as deep an understanding as possible of the background of these conceptions and beliefs, I will, in my empirical study, also pay attention to teachers' cognitions on the following themes:

- the overall aim of the teaching of English
- the status of English in today's world
- the relationship between language and culture
- their own role as teachers-of-language-*and*-culture
- the importance of ILT

- assessment
- ambitions with respect to the teaching of culture
- factors obstructing their work
- student motivation and insights
- language teacher education and in-service training

These themes can be seen as providing vital information on the factors influencing my respondents' conceptions and their classroom activities, thus facilitating my understanding of the three main topics and enabling me to view them from a wide range of angles. The reasons for choosing these particular themes can be attributed to questions arising in me when studying literature both in the field of culture-and-language teaching and language teacher cognition.

In Chapter 4, I will clarify the methods I have used, and how I have used them, in order to reach my ultimate goal. This can be described as revealing whether or not language teaching in Finland-Swedish comprehensive schools today can be described as intercultural, in the sense that culture is taught with the aim of promoting intercultural understanding, tolerance and empathy; qualities which are needed in our world now more than ever.

3 The Setting of the Study

3.1 The Finland-Swedish context

In this study, cognitions among Finland-Swedish EFL-teachers are explored. Finland is a bilingual country with a Swedish-speaking minority, living mostly along the coastal areas of southern, south-western, and western Finland. The autonomous island-province of Åland is monolingually Swedish-speaking according to international treaties. The Finland-Swedes, sometimes also called Swedish-speaking Finns, make up approximately 5.7% of the whole population, amounting to nearly 300,000 people. The Swedish-speaking population in Finland can be traced back to medieval times when farmers colonised Finland from Sweden. Finland was, in fact, a part of Sweden for more than 600 years. There were consequently numerous contacts between the two countries. Many merchants, civil servants and military personnel moved from Sweden to Finland.

Finland-Swedish differs slightly from the Swedish language spoken in Sweden, most notably for the lack of melodic accent, which is a trait shared with Finnish and most Indo-European languages. Spelling is identical, but in spoken language – particularly among young people in Finnish-dominated areas – Finnish loanwords, as well as calques from Finnish are often incorporated.

The fact that Finland has two official languages means that the Finland-Swedish minority have the right to communicate with the authorities in their mother tongue. After an educational reform in the 1970's, both Swedish and Finnish are compulsory school subjects. Education in the student's own language is officially called *mother tongue* and education in the other language is referred to as *the other domestic language.* Although it might be possible to live your life entirely in Swedish in some towns and municipalities, Finnish is the dominant language in most towns, in most work-places and in the main part of Finland.

Still today, Finland is a relatively homogenous society. Other linguistic minorities are the Sami, the Roma and sign language users. Foreigners living in Finland, the majority of whom have come from Russia, Estonia and Sweden, amount to about 100,000, and asylum seekers and refugees to about 25,000[18]. These are small figures compared to other Scandinavian countries, which have become multicultural in a fairly short time.

3.2 Comprehensive education in Finland

3.2.1 Organisation and principles of today's comprehensive education

A central objective of Finnish education policy is to educate the whole population to a high level. The education system is designed to provide everyone

[18] Information available at http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/taskue_vaesto.html.

with learning opportunities appropriate to their abilities and needs, irrespective of their mother tongues, places of residence, sex or economic status. As indicated above, students have the right to instruction in their mother tongue. Instruction is given in Finnish and Swedish, and in the Sami-speaking areas of Lapland it is also possible to study in the Sami (Lappish) language.

The Finnish Parliament determines the general principles of education policy and legislation, whereas the Ministry of Education provides nearly all publicly financed educational provision. The National Board of Education is a central expert body, subordinate to the Ministry of Education and is responsible for developing the objectives, contents and methods of general, vocational and adult education and training. It also prepares the national framework curricula and is responsible for evaluating the Finnish education system (*Education in Finland* 1999, 3). The National Board of Education strives to develop and improve language teaching, and is influenced by the European Union, the Council of Europe, national development projects as well as research (Pohjola 2004, 257).

Basic education is general education provided free of charge for the entire age group (7-16-year-olds) in comprehensive schools. Children living permanently in Finland are subject to compulsory education. This begins in the year that a child becomes seven years of age and ends when the basic education syllabus has been completed or when 10 years have passed. Children have the right to start school at the age of six if psychological and, where necessary, medical examinations indicate that they are mature enough. Foreign children of compulsory school age are also entitled to basic education. Immigrants receive education arranged by the local authority, first usually in their own groups and then integrated in comprehensive schools. In addition, they may study their own languages. Comprehensive school is free of charge for all pupils. Books and other learning materials, as well as school meals and health care, are also free of charge.

The six lower forms have traditionally formed the lower stage (forms 1–6) and the other three the upper stage (forms 7–9). In the legislation of 1999, the administrative division into lower and upper stages was abolished, although it still tends to exist in people’s minds. Schools have the possibility to run an additional tenth form for pupils who have already completed their nine-year basic education. On forms 1-6, instruction is given by class teachers and on forms 7–9 by subject teachers (*Education in Finland* 1999, 9).

Statistics from 2005 show that there are 3,683 schools providing basic education in Finland. The Swedish-speaking population have their own schools, with primarily native speakers of Swedish as teachers, giving instructions in Swedish. Finnish upper-stage comprehensive schools amount to 443 whereas Swedish-speaking upper-stage schools amount to 30[19]. Teachers from 12 of these took part in my study.

[19] Information available at http:// www.edu.fi/svenska/skolor.

3.2.2 The 2004 National Framework Curriculum

The Finnish National Board of Education is the body that presents and confirms the Finnish NFC for the comprehensive school, determining the national objectives and core contents of instruction, as well as presents guidelines for assessment. It also provides guidelines for the co-operation between school and homes, for the teaching of students with special needs as well as for student health care. The aim of these general principles is to create a framework for all educational providers to set up their own local curricula, and for schools to construct their subject syllabi. These should provide learners with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in today's world.

The NFC is revised approximately every ten years. The previous framework was implemented in 1994 and the new framework, which was developed in the period 2003-2004, will have to be implemented by the year 2006. The 2004 National Framework Curriculum, which is of relevance for this study, is in many respects different from its predecessor. The 1994 Curriculum was characterised by decentralisation in the form of reduced state control and increased local decision-making. School- and municipality-specific additions to the curricula were designed at a local level, involving teachers and pupils as well as their parents. The objective was to better meet some pupils' individual needs in response to the changes and requirements in society and working life. Schools were thus given fairly free hands to implement the relatively loosely formulated objectives in the National Framework Curriculum according to local interests. As a consequence of the schools being able to make independent choices and creating their own profiles, the objectives and content of teaching in various schools could vary considerably. The disparate programmes became apparent, for example, when a pupil moved from one school to another.

This decentralisation process was combined with centralisation as far as external evaluation was concerned. Learning results were followed up through national tests, to guarantee that the standard of teaching remained high and that all students, regardless of school or city, would learn what they were supposed to learn. Attitudes towards this arrangement were mixed, ranging from "we-can-do-whatever-we-want"–euphoria to sarcasm over a system where freedom appeared to be provided with one hand and taken away with the other.

The curriculum of 2004 can in this respect be regarded as a swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction. In its formulation of teaching objectives it is stricter and more detailed, giving the individual schools less freedom of choice when producing their own curricular documents. Great differences between the various subjects can be noted, however.

For the present study, the NFC is of special relevance and interest regarding its approach to intercultural issues in general and culture in FLT in particular[20]. As an attempt to place it into a theoretical paradigm, I have turned to Asser et al. (2004, 34-35), who distinguish between three curricular approaches to

[20] Culture has been on the agenda in Finnish educational policy ever since the 1970's, but the importance attributed to it in curricular guidelines has varied. See e.g. *Kommittébetänkande 1970:A4,* 90, and also *Komiteanmietintö 1977:2*, 220.

intercultural education. The boundaries have now become relatively vague, but, as I see it, the following distinction still serves a purpose in illustrating the shifting approaches taken for the design and implementation of national curricula. *The traditional curriculum*, which dominated the European continent until the 1970's-1980's, does not include the term "intercultural education" at all. This, Asser et al. point out, is the approach that has been adopted by many post-communist countries, which, for historical reasons, have been careful about using concepts such as co-operation, intercultural awareness and internationalism. The second approach can be called the paradigm of *cultural deprivation*, focussing on helping minorities and immigrants assimilate into the dominant culture. Parallels can be drawn here to the idea of *Ausländerpädagogik* discussed in Chapter 2.1.1. The underlying belief is that representatives of the minority need help in changing so as to fit into their new environment. This implies that the minority culture is at a subordinate level. In contrast, the paradigm of *cultural enrichment* sees studying cultures as a process that involves two or more equal partners. This type of curriculum aims at the mutual enrichment of cultures, and considers the diversity of cultures a strength and a carrier of society's potential and resources. According to Asser et al. (2004, 35), the paradigm of cultural enrichment has been accepted and implemented in many countries since the 1990's. I would like to argue that Finland is one of them.

Although the very term "intercultural education" does not occur in the NFC, several elements relating to the paradigm of cultural enrichment can be found. In the chapter on the value basis, the basic principles for comprehensive education are formulated as follows:

> *The underlying values of basic education are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism. Basic education promotes responsibility, a sense of community, and respect for the rights and freedom of the individual. The basis of instruction is Finnish culture, which has developed in interaction with indigenous, Nordic, and European cultures.* (NFC 2004, 12)

The NFC thus points out that contemporary Finnish culture has not developed in isolation, but is the result of influences from other cultures. The fact that our society is becoming increasingly multicultural means that it will continue to develop thanks to cultural influences from elsewhere. This is strongly emphasised in the continuation of the quotation above:

> *The instruction must also take into account the diversification of Finnish culture through the arrival of people from other cultures. The instruction helps to support the formation of the pupil's own cultural identity, and his or her part of Finnish society and a globalising world. The instruction also helps to promote tolerance and intercultural understanding.* (NFC 2004, 12)

The NFC takes its starting point in Finnish society as multicultural with linguistic and cultural minorities. As stated above, the majority is made up of the Finnish- and the Swedish-speaking Finns, and the minority includes the Sami and the Roma population, people communicating through sign language as well as immigrants. In the NFC, no distinction is made between different immigrant nationalities. The aim of teaching immigrant students is said to be supporting

their growth into active and balanced members of both the Finnish linguistic and cultural community and their own linguistic and cultural community (NFC 2004, 34). The immigrant students' learning background and their experiences of the educational system in their home country are taken into consideration when teaching objectives are set up. Furthermore, the students' and their parents' knowledge of nature, languages, cultures and ways of life in their native country are seen as resources to be utilised in teaching. In line with the paradigm of cultural enrichment, all student groups are hence seen to be gaining from multicultural classrooms.

The NFC (2004, 36) points out that teaching can be subject-specific or integrated. The aim of the integrated teaching is to make the students accustomed to looking at various phenomena from the standpoint of different scientific disciplines in order to obtain a more holistic view of the world. The 7 thematic entities listed in the NFC are key topics which are intended to permeate many subjects and thus contribute to both the educational and the fostering task of comprehensive education. These cross-curricular themes are 1) personal growth, 2) cultural identity and internationalism, 3) media skills and communication, 4) participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship, 5) responsibility for the environment, well-being, and a sustainable future 6) safety and traffic, and 7) technology and the individual. It is interesting to note that several of these thematic entities are the same as the epoch-typical key-problems discussed by Klafki (see Chapter 2.1.1, page 19). By incorporating these themes into many subjects, in ways corresponding to the stage of student development as well as the characteristic features of the subject in question, the school hopes to be able to prepare the learners for the demands that will be placed upon them in today's society.

The purpose of the thematic entity named *Cultural identity and internationalism* is "to help the pupil to understand the essence of the Finnish and European cultural identities, discover his or her own cultural identity, and develop capabilities for cross-cultural interaction and internationalism" (NFC 2004, 37). This is the first instance where reference is made to intercultural competence, although the word chosen is "cross-cultural"[21]. Several objectives related to the development of the student's cultural identity in an internationalised world are listed under this heading. One of these is "to obtain an introduction to other cultures and philosophies of life, and to acquire capabilities for functioning in a multicultural community, and in international co-operation" (NFC 2004, 37).

How this objective is to be achieved in the classroom within different subjects is up to the schools and the teachers to decide. What is pleasing to note, however, is that the NFC addresses the issue of intercultural learning from so many different angles, providing a solid foundation on which the schools may develop their own principles for intercultural education. It explicitly states that Finnish society is multicultural and multilingual, and, more so than its predecessor, characterises Finland as an immigrant society that is in the position of both giving and taking, as far as cultural influence is concerned. This is something

[21] "Cross-cultural" and "inter-cultural" have been used interchangeably. However, in recent times, the latter has been preferred, since "cross-cultural" is perceived as implying the opposition or contrasting of cultures, and thus has negative connotations.

that the schools will have to take seriously - when appropriate- also taking the local environment into consideration when setting up their own teaching objectives.

3.2.3. Curricular guidelines for the teaching of English

In addition to their mother tongue, Finnish students are required to study at least one foreign language according to the so-called A1-syllabus, which begins at grade 3 at the latest. During grades 1-6 they may choose an additional language as an A2-language. However, schools are not obliged to arrange A2-language studies, neither are they obligatory for the students. Language studies initiated at the upper stage of the comprehensive school follow the B-syllabus. The local curriculum stipulates which languages can be studied as optional languages. Statistics from the school year 2003-2004 show that 89.7% of the 3rd graders chose English as their first foreign language. This figure has increased during the last few years, but tends to vary between 87% and 89%[22]. One could argue that English has the status of unofficial third national language among the majority of comprehensive-school students. In the last decade, there has been a debate about the dominance of the English language. It is seen as a problem that pupils tend to study the same languages and that there will consequently be a shortage of people who can speak other major European or world languages[23].

In the 2004 NFC, the general objectives for the teaching of foreign languages are summarised as follows:

> *Foreign language instruction must give the pupils capabilities for functioning in foreign language communication situations. The tasks of the instruction are to accustom the pupils to using their language skills and educate them in understanding and valuing how people live in other cultures, too. The pupils also learn that a language, as a skill subject and means of communication, requires long-term and diversified practice with communication. As an academic subject, a foreign language is a cultural and skill subject.* (NFC 2004, 138)

In the specifications of objectives and content, distinctions are made between A-languages and B-languages. It is stated that good learning routines in the studies of the A-language create a foundation for language studies initiated at a later stage. Moreover, the A-language studies are seen as triggers for the development of the students' intercultural skills.

The objectives are divided into *language proficiency, cultural skills* and *language learning strategies***.** The division itself is interesting, indicating that

[22] Information obtained through personal correspondence with Anna-Kaisa Mustaparta at the Finnish Board of Education, May 2005.

[23] In 1989, the Committee on European Languages and Cultures was set up by the Ministry of Education, the tasks of which were to make a survey of the extent to which European languages are taught in the Finnish educational system, and to make proposals for measures necessary in the teaching and study of European languages. In its report (*Komiteanmietintö 1991:6)* it takes as its starting point the view of Europe as a multilingual and multicultural continent, and the need for Finland to be able to communicate also with smaller linguistic communities.

cultural skills are regarded as a separate element and not as an integrated part of the development of the students' linguistic skills. A closer inspection of the cultural-skills objectives for A-language studies in grades 7–9 reveals the following:

> *The pupils will:*
> - *get to know the target language culture and understand it against their own*
> - *cultural backgrounds*
> - *learn to communicate and act in normal day-to-day situations in a manner*
> - *acceptable in the subject culture*
> - *learn to become aware of the culturally bound nature of values (NFC 2004, 142)*

In the chapter on assessment, the same three-fold distinction is made. Language skills are to be evaluated following the language proficiency scales presented in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEF, 2001). When it comes to cultural skills, it is stated that in order to receive grade 8 (representing satisfactory knowledge on a scale from 4 to 10) the student will "know about the way of life in, and history of, the target language's language region" (NFC 2004, 143).

Similar formulations can be found in the text for B-languages, which could be English, given that the student has chosen another language on grades 1-6. The student's ability to act according to the demands of the TL culture is supposed to improve. The cultural-skills objectives are formulated on two points as follows:

> *The student should:*
> - *come to understand the way of life in the target language's language region*
> - *learn to communicate with representatives of the target language culture in*
> - *everyday situations, in a manner natural to that culture (NFC 2004, 144)*

To reach grade 8, "the pupils will know the relationships, differences, and similarities between their own cultures and the culture of the TL (NFC 2004, 145)."

Including cultural aspects in the assessment criteria must be seen as a positive thing, since this is likely to raise the status of the cultural component of teaching. Something that should be assessed cannot easily be ignored in the teaching. Again, it is the teachers' tasks to consider how best to implement testing that involves the students' cultural competence in the form of familiarity with different forms of life, and ability to make comparisons with Finnish culture. One can ask oneself whether cultural competence can be tested at all, unless one sees culture as measurable products.

In fact, this brief overview of the curricular approach taken to the cultural objectives in the teaching of English does reveal a fairly restricted view of culture. Culture appears to be seen as a static product that can be transmitted to pupils, and consequently tested, rather than an ever-changing process. Moreover, the objectives contain rather vague formulations, such as "get to know the target language culture." This leaves space for a wide range of interpretations. Firstly, how do you "get to know" another culture in a formal school context? Secondly, what is meant with "subject culture" and "target language culture" in this context? As I see it, this is not explicitly stated in the text. Implicitly, the formulations point to the English-speaking world, of course. What remains unproblematised, however, is that "the target language culture" in the sense of the English-speaking world is not one homogenous national culture but a wide and disparate bulk of cultures spread all over the world, with sub-cultures at different levels. In the light of the discussion about Inner Circle, Outer Circle and Expanding Circle countries, it appears light-hearted and almost naïve to use such a phrase.

As there is no *cultura franca,* there is a great risk that teachers will choose to interpret "the target language culture" as the national cultures of the relatively few Inner Circle countries. There is, of course, nothing wrong with getting an insight into the cultures of, let us say, Britain, the USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, but the question remains whether it is at all possible to convey such an insight. Trying to capture some kind of "mainstream" culture could very well mean resorting to cultural clichés and, at worst, strengthening cultural stereotypes which all forms of intercultural education should set out to prevent. Moreover, if the idea is to implement the idea put forward in the second thematic entity, i.e. developing the students' capabilities for cross-cultural interaction in the sense of preparing them for intercultural encounters in general, not specifically with English-speaking people, FLT will not be able to make full use of its potential. This is likely to be the case, if teachers decide to stick to the literal meaning of the first cultural objective, which can be characterised as a knowledge[24]-oriented one.

The second cultural objective, related to learning to communicate and act in everyday situations in a way that is accepted in the TL culture, raises similar considerations. Here again reference is made to *one* foreign culture and, perhaps even more importantly, to *one* acceptable or natural way to act and communicate there. This behavioural objective involves preparing students for meetings with representatives of the foreign culture, whatever that is perceived to be, so that the student will not stick out unfavourably. As I see it, the perspective appears to be set to intercultural encounters taking place abroad, where the visiting student should be able to display the necessary skills to adapt and blend in. In other words, "cultural skills", appears to be seen as future skills, rather than a readiness to interact with representatives of other cultures here and now. An interesting observation is also the use of the term "*cultural* skills" in the heading,

[24] In light of this, the heading "Cultural *skills*" appears slightly inappropriate. When presenting the findings of my empirical study, I make a clear distinction between *knowledge* and *skills.* This has apparently not been done in the National Framework Curriculum.

which indicates a one-way process, instead of the term "intercultural skills", which is clearly favoured in literature in this field. This can be taken as an indication that the cultural objective in FLT is more about the Finnish student becoming "literate" in the TL culture, than about acquiring a readiness to cross boundaries by acting as cultural mediators. This, however, is again in bad tune with the idea of acquiring capabilities for functioning in a multicultural society and in international co-operation, advocated in the second thematic entity.

In the curricular guidelines, very little reference is made to affective or attitudinal aspects of language-and-culture learning. The closest one can come to this is the third cultural objective, which is related to culturally bound values. This implies that students should learn to realise that there are different ways to look at the world and that these should be respected. Words such as "empathy", "respect", "change of perspective" or "tolerance of ambiguity", which Kaikkonen (2004b, 148) among others embed in the concept of intercultural competence, cannot be found in the document. The conclusion one can draw from this, and from the observations put forward so far in this chapter, is that the FLT-objectives in the NFC are more attuned to the teaching of English against the socio-cultural background of the countries where it is spoken as a national language, than to integrating language and culture in ways that would promote the learners' ICC with other people, regardless of their cultural background. In other words, the type of language teaching envisaged by the NFC for the following ten years cannot really be characterised as intercultural language teaching, as this was described in Chapter 2.1. Although a strong blow is made for intercultural awareness and understanding in the general chapters of the NFC, the FLT-objectives do not differ considerably from the ones in the 1994 curriculum. I would therefore like to argue that the need for innovation and higher goals called for by the scientific community, and summarised in the theoretical framework of this thesis, cannot be traced in the new guidelines.

This inevitably raises the question of what chances there are of teachers being able to or even wanting to achieve higher goals than the ones stipulated in the national guidelines. How likely is it that teachers will see themselves and act as cultural go-betweens, when the national guidelines, at least implicitly, represent a view of teachers as cultural transmitters of static facts? This highlights the need for direct communication with in-service teachers, who are the ones responsible for the practical implementation of the new curricular guidelines, in order to find out how they themselves perceive culture and the cultural objectives in their teaching.

When my empirical study was carried out, the new guidelines had just been released but the actual implementation had not yet begun. The teachers I approached were all aware of the new curriculum; some were well acquainted with its formulations and were already in the process of specifying the objectives in their school curricula, whereas others were just vaguely familiar with the general tone of the document, and had not yet taken part in curricular discussions in their schools. As will be clearly illustrated in Chapter 5 below, the interviews were not explicitly about the new NFC or the teachers reactions to it, but the document should rather be seen as the background against which their conceptions can be interpreted and discussed.

4 Methodological Considerations

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, I will discuss the ontological and epistemological background of my study, as well as the influence of this on methodological and methodic choices concerning collection, analysis and interpretation of data. Second, I will illustrate the practical implementation of these considerations by describing, step by step, how my empirical study was carried out.

4.1 The position of the study in a qualitative research paradigm

4.1.1 Guidelines for choice of approach

According to Alvesson & Sköldberg (1994, 11), the quality of scientific research is not determined by the methods used, but by the underlying ontological and epistemological reflections. My perspective on knowledge is a constructivist and sociocultural one, meaning that knowledge is seen as a set of constructions and not absolute truths about the world. It is historically and culturally determined. The constructivist research paradigm is based on ontological relativism, which views the social reality and the knowledge that can be obtained about it as socially constructed. Reality is shaped through the meanings, values and experiences that people in a particular situation and context attribute to the phenomena they meet. The epistemological starting-point is subjectivist. The researcher's quest for the "truth" involves trying to identify and reconstruct the meaning that the respondents attribute to their experiences and their reality. Interaction between the researcher and the respondents can be seen as a prerequisite for the identification and interpretation of their points of view. This interaction provides the researcher with a subjective perspective on various phenomena. The interpretations are bound to vary, and are also allowed to do so. The researcher may find new possible interpretations; as may other researchers, either now or in times yet to come. It is fruitless to debate whether the interpretations are true or not, or whether they correspond to reality or not. The researcher's task is to show that his/her interpretations are reasonable, rather than final or correct (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994, 168). In order to prove that his conclusions represent a credible interpretation, he will have to carefully and systematically describe how he has arrived at them. Being sensitive to the characteristics of a given situation or context, and taking all the available information on that context into consideration is of the utmost importance.

The perspective on knowledge described above is closely linked to hermeneutics. Within the hermeneutical tradition, focus is set on interpreting, trying to understand meanings and creating relations between meanings. One tries to understand how different parts interact to form a coherent whole. The so-called hermeneutical spiral is characterised by a creation of knowledge through a dialectic movement between parts and the whole. The parts and their internal

relationship determine the whole, and the meaning of the individual parts can only be fully understood through a study of the whole. In my research, the three didactic questions *what, why* and *how* - together with the supplementary topics presented in Chapter 2.3.3 - are used to enable a holistic understanding of the conceptions teachers have of the intercultural dimension of FLT. I thus attribute the hermeneutical philosophy primarily to the analysis of data, which will be more thoroughly illustrated in Chapter 4.2.3.

In some respects, the constructivist perspective can also be associated with phenomenography. This Marton (1986, 31) defines as "a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualise, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them." The principal idea is thus that different phenomena mean different things to different people. Phenomenographers strive to characterise and categorise the qualitatively varied ways in which certain individuals understand and interpret a particular phenomenon, but also how the phenomena *can* be understood and interpreted (Marton 1978, 20). Like phenomenologists, phenomenographers find it meaningless to talk about reality itself. Instead, they look at what conceptions certain individuals hold of reality. This so-called *second-range perspective* is characterised by an aim to understand what the phenomenon is perceived to be, not what it actually is (Alexandersson 1994, 111-112). The individual and the world are not separated, in the sense that there would be a real world outside and a subjective world within the individual. There is merely one world which the individual experiences. This is not constructed by the individual but is constituted as an internal dialectic relation between the two.

A conception, according to phenomenography, is thus an experience or a way of thinking or understanding. Marton and Svensson (1978, 20) have defined conceptions as follows:

> *Conceptions often constitute the unconscious, what does not have to be said, because it has never been the object of reflection. It constitutes the frame of reference within which we have collected our knowledge, or the foundation on which we build our reasoning.*

This definition points to the unreflected foundation on which people base their behaviour and reasoning. In Uljens's words (1989, 27), conceptions constitute the taken-for-granted reality. Later, however, he points out that conceptions can be expressed both without prior reflection - when the individual himself is not aware of them - and as a result of conscious reflection. In this study I use the word "conception" when referring to teachers' views of the intercultural dimension in general, and about the fundamental way in which they understand and interpret the concept "culture" in particular. The phenomenographic approach hence bears particularly great significance on the collection of data as well as on the analysis of the first research question. Contrary to traditional phenomenography from the 1970's and 1980's, which describe conceptions out of context, I would like to argue that these are always context-bound (cf. Uljens 1993 and Myrskog 1993, 56, 125). I link teachers' conceptions to the upper level of the Finland-Swedish comprehensive school; convinced that another context could generate a different set of conceptions.

Although I have been inspired by both hermeneutics and phenomenography, I do not claim to rely exclusive on these two; neither do I implement them in their purest forms. However, both traditions appear useful with regard to the purpose of my study, which is to increase the knowledge and find patterns in teachers' cognitions about the intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching. To be able to do this, I have chosen between several available approaches within the field of pedagogic research, striving to find a method that would serve as a practical tool for gaining insights into my field of interest. Both the hermeneutical and the phenomenographic traditions are closely anchored in a qualitative research paradigm, which is where I position the present study.

In literature on methodology, the overall considerations have traditionally been reduced to the contrasting of qualitative and quantitative methods. The word *qualitative* implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity, or frequency. Qualitative researchers stress the socially constructed nature of reality, the situational constraints that shape inquiry, as well as the intimate relationship between the researcher and the object of study. They emphasise the value-laden nature of inquiry, and may use, for example, ethnographic prose, historical narratives, first-person accounts or life histories as forms of representation. In contrast, quantitative studies emphasise the measurement and analysis of causal relationships between variables, and often use mathematical models, statistical tables and graphs (Denzin & Lincoln 2000, 8, 10).

The relationship between the two is described by Salo (2002, 18) as *excluding* or *including*. He refers to Eneroth (1987), who thinks that the two methods are based on entirely different and incompatible conceptions of the world and the essence of knowledge. Dey (1993, 28), on the other hand, sees the two aspects as internally related and interdependent. The methods are considered different but equal, in the sense that they complement each other and may be combined to shed light on different aspects of the same empirical phenomenon. Quantitative techniques may be used in a qualitative research approach and vice versa. It can also be argued that an approach that integrates both methods may contribute to higher reliability and validity (Starrin & Svensson, 1994, 13-14). Today, neither method is considered superior or inferior to the other. They are rather to be seen as providing different, mutually enriching perspectives on a social reality. Virtanen (2001, 82-83) regards quantity and quality as conceptually different ways of shaping the world. Quantitative methods may be used for capturing structures, whereas qualitative methods may be used for capturing processes. Trost (1997, 12) writes that the former are best suited for issues related to amount and frequency, whereas the latter are appropriate for finding patterns and variations.

A clear definition of qualitative research is difficult to come by. Silverman (1993, 23-29) describes it as an attempt to circle or understand the meaning and the motivations that individuals attach to their own activities and experiences. Eneroth (1987, 7) writes that qualitative methods are used when one tries to find the kind of quality that is characteristic for a particular phenomenon or that separates it from other phenomena. Dey (1993, 10-11) stresses that qualitative data is often related to meaning. In this context, the problematisation of the

above definitions, put forward by Tesch (1990, 55), is of great interest. She claims that there is no such thing as qualitative research, only data of a qualitative nature. What is referred to as qualitative research reflects, in her opinion, a certain attitude to the process of creating knowledge.

According to Töttö (1999, 283-290), the choice of method should be based on the wording in the research questions. Since my point of departure was my respondents' perspectives, i.e those of the teachers, – not ready-made ideas or hypotheses – a quantitative method was excluded at an early stage. As I see it, the positivist research approach, which underlies quantitative research, reflects a view of the world as representing an objective, constant reality that can be observed and measured with methods than can be verified and replicated. The humanist scientific tradition, on the other hand, accepts more than one objective truth. According to the latter, people view the world in different ways and these will have to be interpreted.

Naturally, it would have been possible to combine a quantitative and a qualitative approach, which many researchers on culture in FLT have apparently done, and which might also have been advantageous considering the reliability of my results. Still, I chose to settle for a purely qualitative research approach, in order to be able to distinguish also subtle differences between the teachers' conceptions, and gain a deep understanding of my respondents' answers to my three main questions.

Qualitative research involves the studied use and collection of a variety of empirical materials, such as case study, personal experience, introspection, life story, artefacts and interviews. The combination of multiple methodological practices, empirical materials and perspectives within one and the same study is generally believed to add rigor, breadth, richness and depth to the inquiry (Flick 1998, 231). In phenomenographic studies individual, open interviews are the most frequently used method for collecting data. However, texts, films and drawings also count as empirical material, either alone or as a complement to interviews. When planning the design of the present study, I carefully considered the possibility of method triangulation[25], as an attempt to secure an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in question and increase the reliability and internal validity of the study. Teacher interviews appeared as the most appropriate method regarding RQ1 and RQ2, related to teachers' conceptions about culture and their beliefs about cultural objectives, whereas video observations would have been an option for RQ3, related to classroom practice. However, as already mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1, I decided to focus on reported classroom behaviour only, leaving observed behaviour to a planned follow-up study.

Consequently, the interview is the sole method used. Much has been written about different types of interviews and how to conduct them. According to Fontana & Frey (2000, 645-646), interviewing is one of the most common and powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings. The most frequently used form involves individual, face-to-face verbal interchange, but interviewing may also take the forms of face-to-face group interchange,

[25] See Denzin, N.K. (1997).

mailed or self-administered questionnaires and telephone surveys. They may be structured, semi-structured or unstructured.

My approach to interviewing is inspired by phenomenography, which is why a brief discussion of the characteristics of the phenomenographic interview will be presented below.

4.1.2 The phenomenographic interview

The phenomenographic interview is characterised by in-depth interest and an open method of questioning. The in-depth interest is related to the aim to reach contents and meanings that may not have been explicitly dealt with by the interviewee beforehand. It is therefore important that the interviewer applies a technique that reaches beyond what could be called opinions, in order to unravel the underlying conceptions. According to Kroksmark (1987, 264-265), these are often linked to direct experience, and this is the level the interview will have to strive for.

The openness is related to the aim to reveal the ways in which the interviewees choose to limit and deal with a particular thematic content. When asked questions, the interviewees are not provided with alternative answers that the interviewer has formulated beforehand. Instead, they are expected to independently define one or several aspects of the theme, and freely reflect upon those issues that are relevant to them. Due to the unstructured character of the interview, it will bear close resemblance to an informal conversation, with a personal touch determined by the interviewee's approach to the content. Ashworth & Lucas (2000, 302) have defined the interview as:

> *A conversational partnership in which the interviewer assists a process of reflection.*

The so-called entry questions should be formulated in advance and should naturally be identical in all interviews. The continuation, however, will depend on the answers given by the respondents. Interviews on one and the same theme may hence follow partially different routes.

In his defence of the interview as a method for data collection, Marton (1994, 4427) stresses the following:

> *This type of interview should not have too many questions made up in advance, nor should there be too many details determined in advance. Most questions follow from what the subject says. The point is to establish the phenomenon as experienced and to explore its different aspects jointly and as fully as possible.*

Larsson (1986, 27) advocates this type of interview technique with reference to the basic assumption that people always interpret what is said. When a respondent answers an interview question, he/she does not necessarily respond to what the interviewer had in mind, but to his/her own interpretation of the question. Consequently, the interviewer does not fully understand how the question was perceived until he has heard the answer. Then he can rephrase the question and ask follow-up question, in order to increase the likelihood that both parties talk about the same thing, and that his understanding of the topic will be as deep as possible.

Ashworth & Lucas (2000, 296-298) describe the task of the phenomenographer as stepping into the "life world" of the respondents. The concept "life world", which originates from phenomenology, has been discussed by Kroksmark (1987, 245-257), among others. He regards life world primarily as the concretely experienced everyday world, which we all take for granted, and which we subconsciously start off from when trying to structure the unstructured world around us. According to him, phenomenography distinguishes between two life worlds; the private one, consisting of all the possible conceptions of the individual, and the collective one, consisting of the possible conceptions that all people currently carry or have access to. Ashworth & Lucas strongly advocate a specific methodological principle aimed at facilitating an entry into the life world of the interviewees. They think the researcher should deliberately put aside all theories, preconceptions and premature interpretations in order to open up to the respondents' experiences and ways of viewing the phenomenon. "Bracketing" is the term used by Ashworth & Lucas about this endeavour to disregard personal assumptions and views.

Kroksmark (1987, 259-262) addresses the same issue when discussing the so-called *epoché,* or the bracketing of the researcher's beliefs and opinions in relation to the object of study. He asks himself whether such a methodology in its pure form is possible, and advocates a weaker, so-called didactic epoché. This is used with reference to a specific teaching content, which may be clearly defined in curricular texts, even though the conceptions of the same content prevailing among a chosen group of actors may vary considerably. The didactic epoché is based on the acknowledgement that all the researcher's conceptions of the phenomenon at hand cannot be bracketed, and that these can be allowed to influence the results of the research. At the same time it is stressed that the researcher should enter the interview situation with the intention of giving free rein to all new conceptions emerging out of the experienced reality of the interviewees.

Similarly to Larsson (1986, 28), who claims that the researcher cannot make himself "unprejudiced" in the absolute sense of the word, Ashworth & Lucas (1989, 420) also admit that certain ways of looking at the world are more difficult to bracket than others. Scientific theories and previous research findings may be part of the researcher's taken-for-granted world, meaning that complete bracketing is impossible to reach. In this study, I have followed Marton & Booth (1997), who do not regard pre-understanding as an obstacle that should be eliminated, but encourages the researcher to actively contemplate the phenomenon beforehand, by studying how it has been treated in previous research, as well as in other time periods and cultures. In their opinion, such preparations make the interviewer more aware of what standpoints the interviewees may take, in what situations they may have encountered the phenomenon before and in what variety of ways they are likely to discuss it. However, just like Kroksmark, they emphasise the importance of the interviewer remaining sensitive to new and unexpected points of view that may reveal themselves in the actual interview. They thus advocate a weaker epoché, or a kind of distanced nearness to the object of enquiry.

My pre-understanding of the intercultural dimension in EFL teaching is summarised in Chapter 2 in this thesis. Without prior insights into my field of

interest, the interviews could easily have remained superficial and the results trivial or even meaningless. Despite my conviction that a certain degree of familiarity with the research area is a prerequisite for in-depth interviews, I was well aware of the risks attached to having very thorough insights into theoretical models or previous research findings. To avoid an undesirable influence of my pre-understanding I tried to deliberately push possible pre-constructed assumptions aside prior to every interview so as not to lock my own thinking. I thus entered every discussion with what could be called a blank and open mind.

According to Marton & Booth (1997, 130-131), the phenomenographic interview takes place on two levels. On the one hand, we have the interpersonal social discourse, resembling the one occurring in everyday conversations, and on the other hand, the more reflective therapeutical discourse, where the interviewer is trying to retrieve conceptions that the interviewer may not have been aware of before. The second level, they claim, raises problems related to the power balance between the interviewer and interviewee. The interviewee always has the right to deny access to thoughts and reflections, and also has the possibility to deliberately lead the interviewer down the garden path. The interviewer, in turn, may risk undermining the whole endeavour by pressing too hard or too little; getting too close or remaining too distanced. He/She thus carries great responsibility for creating the conditions for and establishing a safe atmosphere marked by trust and individual freedom. Only when mutual trust has been created, can the interview reach the depth necessary for the researcher to be able to uncover a nuanced and comprehensive picture of the interviewee's conceptions.

4.1.3 Hermeneutical analysis

The hermeneutical interpretation process aims at increased understanding of a particular phenomenon. As mentioned above, the most central feature is a continuous, dialectic interaction between the individual parts and the whole, questions and answers, interpretation and understanding. Knowledge is thus constructed through the back and forth process between the parts and the whole. The meaning of the separate parts as well as their internal relationship is determined by the global meaning of the text[26]. The closer determination of the meaning of the separate parts may eventually change the originally anticipated meaning of the totality, which again influences the meaning of the separate parts, and so on. In the hermeneutical tradition, this circularity is not viewed as a "vicious circle", but rather as a *circulus fructuosis,* which implies the possibility of a continuously deepening understanding of meaning (Kvale 1996, 48).

The starting point is the researcher's pre-understanding of the phenomenon, which should be explicitly accounted for. As a result of data collection, analysis and interpretation, the understanding becomes deeper and richer. This deepened understanding then constitutes the starting point of the following step in the

[26] In classical hermeneutics the subject matter was the text of literature, religion and law (Bleicher 1980, 11-13). The concept "text" has been extended to include discourse and even action. I will use "text" referring to the transcribed interviews.

interpretation process. The researcher may either find support for his intuitive assumptions based on previous experience, or they may turn out to be problematic or contradictory. In the latter case, the assumptions will have to be reshaped in accordance with the understanding that gradually develops as the research process continues. According to Salo (2002, 17), the key concepts of a study can seldom be finally defined at the beginning of the process. Instead, the researcher should continuously redefine them in accordance with the ongoing critical analysis of their meaning.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the ultimate goal is not to arrive at one unambiguous or “correct” interpretation, but to provide a plausible alternative for how a phenomenon, situation or event can be interpreted and understood (Alvesson & Sköldberg 1994, 169-170). In principle, hermeneutical interpretation is an infinite process. In practice, it ends when one has reached a valid, unitary meaning free of inner contradiction, or when the meanings of the different themes make sensible patterns.

According to Kvale (1996, 46), hermeneutics is double relevant to interview research. Firstly, it elucidates the dialogue producing the interview texts to be interpreted, and secondly, it clarifies the subsequent process of interpreting the interview text. This may again be conceived as a dialogue or a conversation with the text. My implementation of the hermeneutical meaning interpretation is illustrated in Chapter 4.2.3, which outlines the analysis of my interview material.

4.2 The implementation of the empirical study

4.2.1 The selection of informants

My research ambition was not to be able to generalise the achieved findings to all Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers. In other words, I was not interested in how big a proportion of that group holds certain conceptions or beliefs, but in identifying qualitatively different cognitions. Significant nuances and variations might not have emerged, had the research group been too homogenous. My goal when selecting respondents[27] was thus to arrive at a group that would be heterogeneous within certain limits.

To accomplish a strategic selection, I used Trost’s (1997, 106-107) model. This involves finding a set of variables or characteristics that are theoretically significant, and then choosing categories or variable values. This results in a number of so-called cells, which are then filled with respondents. The more variables and the more variable values, the larger the amount of emerging cells. A cell may contain one or more interviewees, but some of them may even remain empty.

I chose the variables *sex, teaching experience* and *time spent abroad* as guidelines for my strategic selection. I reasoned that men and women reflect differently upon their own work. Experience of working in the comprehensive

[27] When referring to the teachers interviewed for this study, I use the words “informant”, “respondent” and “interviewee” interchangeably.

school appeared theoretically more relevant than age. Naturally, life experience often plays a significant role in the forming of conceptions, but since my field of interest is didactically oriented and the study set in a specific school context, I considered professional experience to be more relevant. In this study, a “novice” is a teacher who has been working in the comprehensive school for five years or less. All others fall under the category “experienced.” My categorisation is thus different from the one proposed by Berliner (1988).[28]

My third variable, time spent abroad, is based on my conviction that a teacher’s view of culture is bound to be influenced by whether or not he/she has had experience of real encounters with other cultures. It is easy to think that a teacher who has picked up the British culture, for example, just by reading about it, will represent a more restricted view of British culture and cultures at large, than a person with first-hand experience. Their didactic approaches are also bound to differ. Although my study deals with the teaching and learning of English, I did not want to restrict by variable to *stay in an English-speaking country***.** Persons with experience of studying or working overseas will most likely have been influenced by their stay in a way that will colour their attitudes towards intercultural education in a larger perspective. The fact that the third variable is not culture-specific can also be justified in the light of the discussion in Chapter 2.1.3.1.

The limit for when a teacher has spent a lot of time abroad has been set to one year or more. No attention has been paid to whether the stay has been related to work, studies or leisure. Neither have I considered whether the respondent has stayed in one and the same place, nor whether the overall amount of time abroad has been scattered over several places and shorter periods, as was the case for teachers who had attended several short language courses. The type of stay would naturally have affected their insights and hence their views. However, a closer analysis of the relationship between type of stay and conceptions of culture in language education would have fallen outside the scope of this study.

Having made the choices outlined above, a total of eight cells emerged, which were then to be filled with informants (see Figure 9).

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[28] Berliner’s (1988) theory of the development of expertise in pedagogy involves five stages. *Novices* tend to be student or first-year teachers, whereas *advanced beginners* are often in the second or third years of their teaching career. If they have talent and motivation, Berliner argues, they may become *competent* around their fourth year. Around the fifth year, a small number of teachers may move into a further stage of development, that of *proficient.* Some of these proficient teachers will reach the highest stage, that of *expert.*

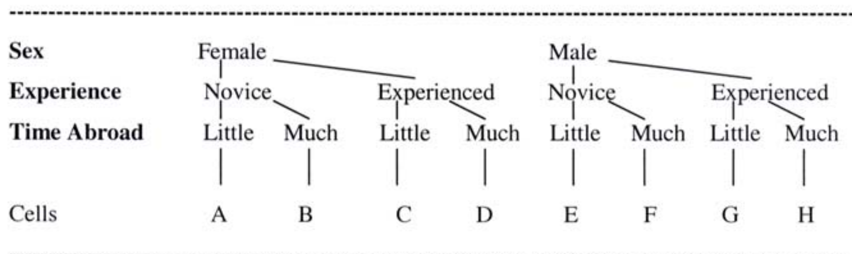

Figure 9. The selection of informants (Following Trost 1997, 106-107)

The pursuit of teachers willing to take part can be divided into three phases. Initially, a written request was sent to the principals of 14 Swedish-speaking schools located in the coastal regions of our country. Geographical spreading can thus be considered a fourth variable guiding my selection. The addresses were found on the list of schools published on the internet by the Ministry of Education. In the letter, which can be found in Appendix I (page 163), I presented myself, my research area and the topic of the planned interviews. I realised that some teachers might shy away at the thought of inviting a researcher to their school to question them about their work, well aware that the risk of being rejected would have been even greater, had my purpose been to video film their lessons. Nevertheless, I made it explicit that I did not intend to critically evaluate the teachers nor their methods. My sole intention was to explore their thinking on the cultural aspects of their English teaching. I estimated the length of the interviews, clarified ethical aspects and pointed out that the interviews would be recorded. The informants' agreement to this was of course a prerequisite for their participation. In the letter I also asked for the curricula of the schools. However, since these were the products of the 1994 NFC, they were not used to any great extent.

Five out of 14 principals responded within the time limit, whereas two agreed to accept me after I had contacted them again by phone. I had been mentally prepared that some schools would ignore my request, but I was still disappointed with the fact that the number was so high. Trivial factors, such as great workload and hurry, might have played a part. It is also possible that my topic was not considered relevant or interesting enough. In fact, several teachers who later did participate in the interview subsequently told me that their first thought had been: "I have nothing to say about this!" It thus appears as if my request had ignited a spark of interest and perhaps even initiated a process of reflection concerning their teaching of English. After a while, they decided to take part after all.

Having waited several months, I decided to make new contact with schools that had not yet responded. The characteristics of the cells were the determining factors when choosing what schools to call in the second phase.

The third phase was caused by difficulties finding inexperienced teachers matching the characteristics of the cells. In order to get them all filled, and ensure as wide a selection of conceptions as possible, I had to handpick a few informants, who were still engaged in their teacher training. Despite serious efforts, I still did not find male novice teachers currently working at the upper level of the comprehensive school. As a consequence, I saw no other alternative but to fill Cells E and F with two teachers at the upper secondary school, one of whom happens to have experience of teaching grades 7–9 as well. Criticism could be directed against this procedure. Still, I judged the advantages of securing a wide variety of conceptions as greater than the possible disadvantages of handpicking young informants. In Chapter 5, when reporting on the findings of the interviews, I always make it clear when a certain utterance stems from either of these two odd informants. Occasionally, this is done with the intention of contrasting their views to those of the other informants.

A total of 13 teachers from 12 schools were interviewed. These are distributed over the eight cells so that some cells contain two or more informants, whereas others – as indicated above – contain just one. Trost (1997, 110) points out that the number of interviews in qualitative studies is worth limiting to four or five. A large number of interviews tends to result in an extremely extensive amount of material, which might be unwieldy and difficult to gain an overview of. Moreover, the researcher runs the risk of losing sight of the details that unite or separate the informants. He writes that a small number of skilfully conducted interviews are more valuable than many poor ones. This made me give up my original idea of interviewing as many as 20 teachers. I doubt that my study would have gained from such a large selection. It would rather have obstructed the data analysis, which proved to be a challenging undertaking even with a considerably smaller amount of material.

4.2.2 The personal meeting

Prior to the empirical study, I conducted a pilot interview to obtain an idea of the reliability of my data collection method. I wanted to test my interview guide - making sure that the questions were appropriate and that the sequence made sense - as well as myself as an interviewer. This discussion resulted in some minor adjustments in my guide, not to mention an increased awareness of my own limitations. These I actively set out to remedy before stepping into the subsequent interviews. Naturally, the critical evaluation of my own interviewing technique continued throughout all 13 meetings. The pilot interview was eventually included in my material, thanks to the informant’s interesting answers.

Most teachers were interviewed during the autumn of 2003, whereas some – among them those entering the study in the third phase – could not participate until January 2004. The informants were invited to pick both the time and the place. Three interviews took place in the informants’ homes, which occasionally resulted in interruptions in the form of children stepping into the room, curiously wondering what secrets were being discussed there. The other interviews were conducted in a classroom in the informant’s school.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish. They lasted for 45-60 minutes and were all recorded. Thoughts and questions arising in me were noted, as were nonverbal signals and other valuable information that would not end up on the tape. As pointed out by Kvale (1996, 160), tapes give a de-contextualised version of the interview, since it lacks the visual aspects of the situation. Although tape-recording involves the risk of data overload and entails time-consuming transcribing, it has the advantage of being naturalistic and preserving actual language. It also means that the interviewer's contributions are recorded and that data can be re-analysed at a later stage (Nunan 1992a, 153).

My revised interview guide, which can be found in Appendix II (page 164), served as a basis for the discussions. It contained an outline of the themes to be covered, as well as the so-called entry questions and suggested follow-up questions. I was careful about avoiding standard questions, which could lead to answers that were more or less learnt by heart and therefore would not reflect the teacher's personal, genuine cognition. The themes were naturally the same for all teachers. When creating the guide, I had made efforts to organise the questions so that the order would appear natural and logical to the informants, as well as maintain their interest. It should be mentioned, however, that I did not follow the guide slavishly, with the exception of the entry-questions. As became clear in the previous chapter, phenomenographically inspired studies aim at providing the interviewees with both the time and the possibility to freely develop their own lines of thought, as well as reflect upon those issues that are relevant to them at the time.

This approach worked well, with a few exceptions where the informants tended to go completely astray. They entered areas that fell outside the scope of the study, thus forcing me to try to redirect their thinking to the current topic with the help of specifying questions. Kvale (1996, 149) stresses the importance of the researcher being fully aware of what he is interested in and not being afraid of controlling the course of the interview by interrupting possible digressions. Walking this tightrope was a challenging endeavour.

According to Kvale (1996, 129-130), the questions in a research interview can be evaluated thematically, i.e. with reference to their relevance to the topic, as well as dynamically, i.e. with reference to the interpersonal relationship prevailing in the interview. To create the breeding ground for a fruitful interplay between the interviewee and myself, I started every session by inviting the teacher to chat about everyday matters, which provided me with valuable background information. This warm-up talk concerned family, leisure-time activities, education and teaching experience. Questions of a factual nature are easy to answer and may help the interviewer understand important aspects of the situation and the context in which the interviewee is located (Lantz 1993, 63-64). This positioning guided me into the private life world of each informant.

Once a relaxed and open atmosphere had been established, approaching the actual theme of interest followed as a natural step. Still, I was careful about maintaining a positive social interaction throughout the meetings, well aware that the mutual influence of interviewer and interviewee may play a vital part in the outcome of the interview. Most teachers spoke openly, spontaneously and enthusiastically about their work. They appeared motivated by the topic, and

eager to make me, as well as themselves, understand the essence of their thinking. Some questions were followed by long pauses. To some informants the interview apparently turned into a kind of reflection forum, where – by thinking aloud – they became aware of conceptions and insights that they had not acknowledged before. Being forced to verbalise a certain conception can be an effective way of sharpening your own thinking. However, the contemplative stand taken by some informants resulted in extremely long answers with a high degree of redundancy.

Despite attempts to put my own life world aside, at least temporarily, I was constantly aware of the fact that my own experiences as an English teacher in the comprehensive school served as a frame of reference, within which everything I heard was interpreted. Similarly to Rhöse (2003), whose doctoral thesis is based on interviews with five teachers about teaching and teacher identity, I found that my own professional background facilitated my understanding of the experiences and possible dilemmas discussed by my informants. Their everyday life is also mine. I believe that they would have been less open-hearted in their accounts if my own background had been different. We have the same education, profession, and frame of reference, and speak, as it were, the same language. I would therefore like to argue that the personal meetings took place in a spirit resembling what Trost (1997, 67-68) calls a subject-subject relation, rather than a subject-object relation. Although I was the one asking the questions and guiding the discussion, I was in no way on a "higher level" or in a power position in relation to my interlocutors. However, as pointed out by Rhöse (2003, 99), there are risks attached to similarities and a high degree of concordance between the interviewer and interviewee. As a listener you may not be as attentive and unbiased as when the reality of your informants was far from your own. As a consequence, you might assume that you have understood, without having bothered to check. Another aspect is that the interviewee might mention something in passing that you find interesting and therefore attribute more weight to than the informant had intended. These risks further accentuate the importance of fully recognising the purpose of the interview, and of critically evaluating your own influence on both the interview situation and the interpretation of what was said there.

All interviews were wrapped up with casual questions. The informants were also invited to clarify and complete previous lines of thought. Interestingly enough, many teachers seized the opportunity. Some presented accurate and articulate summaries of thoughts and beliefs that they had been rather vague on earlier, whereas others even introduced new and interesting angles to the topic. The fact that the interview had reached its final lap obviously evoked a certain degree of clear-sightedness and candour.

In many of the meetings, the actual interview was followed by informal conversations that were not taped. The teachers talked about how they had experienced the interview, and expressed great curiosity towards the work that lay ahead of me and towards the results that the interviews would generate. I gained the impression that many teachers had found the interviews rewarding. For teachers, it is a fairly unique situation to have another person's 100 % interest and attention when talking about their work, aims, methods and visions. Some teachers spoke candidly about how the meeting had left them feeling

"cleansed." This I would like to take as an indication that we together managed to conduct the interviews within both the social and the therapeutical discourse discussed above. This also points to how important it is that teachers' voices may be heard and that we may acquire new knowledge about what cognitions they have about their work.

My lodestar in all interviews was to become close to my informants through empathy. An empathic approach, according to Ashworth & Lucas (2000, 298-299), is vital if one is to be able to make interpretations that reflect the informants' conceptions, not the researcher's expectations. I would like to argue that it is of the essence at all stages of a qualitative study, not the least in the analysis of the empirical material.

4.2.3 Analysis of the material

Every interview was recorded and transcribed, some by an assistant and some by myself. To secure cross-comparisons among the interviews, the same procedures for typing were used by both of us. The work began as soon as the first interviews had been conducted. Transforming oral speech to written text is a strenuous process, entailing a wide range of methodic and theoretical dilemmas.

As the previous chapter set out to illustrate, an interview is an evolving conversation between two people who meet face to face in a specific context and atmosphere. A transcript, on the other hand, is frozen in time (Kvale 1996, 166-167). It is a decontextualised conversation or a kind of abstraction. The difficulties are embedded in the transgression of one narrative mode to another. The oral and the written discourse have different rhetoric forms, meaning that a transcript – just like any other form of translation – is an interpretation in itself. In the hermeneutical tradition, translators are called traitors; the same may pertain to transcribers.

Repetitions, paraphrases, hesitations and incomplete sentences are common in oral speech. Apparently incoherent statements may, however, be fully coherent within the context of a living conversation, when supported by vocal intonation, facial expressions and body language. These may give nuance to, or even, contradict what is said. When such characteristics of oral language are fixed on paper, the transcribed interview may give the impression of confused and erratic speech, giving no credit to the informants, or to their statements.

As a researcher I was thus faced with the choice of transcribing the interviews verbatim and word by word, or transforming them into a more formal, written style, which might also make them more readable. According to Kvale (1996, 170), the decisions about the style of transcribing should depend on the use of the transcriptions. Although my study is neither purely sociolinguistic nor psychological I applied a very detailed approach, which is in line with the general practice in phenomenographic research. The idea is that all elements that may yield important material for interpretation should be included. In Uljens (1989, 46) words, the data material in phenomenographic studies is made up of "textualised speech" (my translation of the Swedish *förtextat tal).* All interviews were thus reproduced verbatim in their entirety. Repetitions, pauses and stresses in intonation were included, as were emotional expressions in the form of laughter or sighs. By including non-verbal signals and the emotional tone of the

conversation - both in my own notes taken during the interviews and in the transcripts - I hoped to come to grips with the informants' attitudes towards the topic. As I see it, feelings of uncertainty, enthusiasm or frustration provided me with valuable material for the interpretation. It should be pointed out here that although *analysis* and *interpretation* are often used interchangeably, I use the latter term for more extensive and deeper interpretations of meaning, inspired by hermeneutical philosophy (see Chapter 4.1.3).

In one case, minor mistakes in the Swedish grammar of a Finnish-speaking informant were corrected. There was never any doubt about the meaning of her statements, but the linguistic form was slightly modified to make the text more readable. This was also done to enable the use of excerpts from this particular interview without putting the anonymity of the informant at risk.

The interview protocols amount to approximately 25 pages of A4 size, written with line spacing 1½ and wide margins. The total amount of pages is 330. As mentioned earlier, the extensive protocols contain much redundancy, as a result of the teachers often talking themselves into a particular idea or view. Hardly surprising, all teachers were extremely verbal, which led to long answers and for me a time-consuming search for the essence in their statements.

Kvale (1996, 187) wisely points out that there is no magical tool for uncovering the treasures hidden in the many pages of opaque interview transcripts. It is up to the researcher to develop a procedure that best serves his purposes. My analysis can be divided into four steps: 1) Gaining an overall picture of the material, 2) organising the material according to themes, 3) identifying patterns of meaning within each theme, and 4) structuring these patterns into categories. This is no standard method, but should rather be seen as an ad hoc use of different approaches and techniques for meaning generation. My way of analysing the transcribed interviews should be seen as one among many possible ways of conducting a qualitative analysis.

Getting an overall picture of the material

The first step involved carefully reading through all the interviews to obtain an overall impression. Those interviews that I had typed myself, and thus listened to over and over again, were very easy to recall. When reading those protocols, I could almost hear the informants' characteristic voices, and it was like being transported back to the interview situation with its special atmosphere. The other protocols took more time to become really familiar with.

Those passages that reflected the teachers' cognitions about the intercultural dimension were marked, whereas information that I considered superfluous for the present study was discarded. The discarding happened deductively on the basis of my theoretical frame of reference and pre-understanding.

Organising the material according to themes

After I had acquainted myself with the material on this relatively general level, I began an in-depth reading of the protocols against the background of the 16 thematic questions. All statements that could be attributed to a specific question were highlighted with a marker. Other questions had their special colours.

Colour-coding[29] the text made it easier for me to find my way around the material at the initial stages of the analysis.

As a first attempt to identify individual variations, I set up a matrix on two A3 size pages, where the vertical column contained the names of the 13 informants, and the horizontal column the thematic questions as they were formulated in the interview guide. The emerging boxes were filled with key-words reflecting each informant's thinking in relation to a particular theme. These two sheets of paper enabled quick and easy access to the main points in the informants' statements, albeit on a fairly shallow level. I soon noticed that the answers were complex and multidimensional, sometimes also internally contradictory, meaning that key-words could easily give the false impression of clarity. Moreover, due to the semi-structured character of the interviews, different aspects of one and the same issue were often dealt with in several parts of the discussion. To give an example; an informant, when asked to define the concept "culture", could suddenly stumble into descriptions of classroom practice, or discussions about cultural objectives could be interspersed with reflections about student motivation. I found myself going back and fourth in the 300-page material looking for answers to specific questions. Eventually I realised that although dealing manually with the material had been rewarding in many respects, it was not the best approach from a practical point of view.

The computer software programme QSR N'Vivo (2002a, 2002b) proved to be a useful tool for the organisation of text passages according to the questions asked. To begin with, *case nodes* made up of the 16 thematic questions were set up. Thereafter, all statements related to a particular question were coded onto that *case*. As a result, every informant's statements concerning the concept "culture", for example, could be found within that *case*, regardless of where in the individual interviews the topic had been addressed. Concentrating the material to 16 *cases* made it much more manageable. On the other hand, it also entailed a risk of losing sight of the context in which the statement had been made, because it was, as it were, cut off from the rest of the interview. It should be recalled at this stage that, in the hermeneutical tradition, the understanding of a text takes place through a process in which the meaning of the separate parts is determined by the global meaning of the text. The meaning of the separate parts may change the meaning of the totality, which again influences the meaning of the separate parts, and so on.

Consequently, the following step of the analysis involved constant shifting between the interview passages – thematically organised in *cases* - and the whole interview documents from which they stemmed.

Identifying patterns of meaning

The third step, which can be considered the analysis proper, involved interpreting the interview statements with a view to developing meanings. This turned out to be the most critical phase in the analysis. I carefully studied all the

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[29] For more information about colour-coding, see Seidman, I.E. (1991). *Interviewing as Qualitative Research: A Guide for Researchers in Education and the Social Sciences.* New York: Teachers College Press.

statements within each *case,* trying to understand their essence and making contrasts and comparisons in order to sharpen my thinking. As I went along, I started noting patterns, which in turn led to the identification of their internal relationship. At this stage, N'Vivo was used to set up *tree nodes,* onto which all material that hung together was coded as clusters. Interview passages were thus transferred from *case nodes,* where they constituted one great bulk of text, onto *tree nodes,* where they were organised according to the found patterns. This resulted in hierarchical structures of meanings, where particulars were subsumed under the general. These structures were revised several times and became more and more elaborate. My understanding deepened and more subtle meanings emerged every time I dug into the material. The more familiar I became with it, the more urgent became the need for me to step "beyond the words" and read between the lines. I also became more and more aware of the importance of taking the whole context into consideration; not just the linguistic context of the interview, but also the whole life-world of the informant. It should be noted that although computer programmes are useful for the processing of extensive qualitative data, they cannot think nor feel for you. You as a researcher will still have to make all the choices.

One of my choices was to apply a slightly different analytical approach to my first research question. Since it concerned my respondents' understanding of a particular phenomenon, a phenomenographically inspired approach appeared adequate. Hence, statements related to conceptions of culture (RQ1) were analysed in accordance with phenomenography; whereas statements related to beliefs about cultural objectives (RQ2) and classroom practice (RQ3) underwent, what could be called, a thematic content-analysis. The supplementary material listed in Chapter 2.3.3 was also thematically analysed.

The two approaches differ in some respects. According to Gagnestam (2003, 104-105), the phenomenographic analysis, which sets out to clarify varieties of conceptions, pays greater attention to both the part and the whole, whereas thematic content-analysis is more focussed on the parts. I chose a phenomenographic analysis for RQ1 because I believed it would enable a deeper insight into the varied ways in which people understand culture in FLT. The informants' utterances were analysed with a view to finding their meanings both on their own terms and in relation to other utterances and the emerging whole. The hermeneutical spiral was thus particularly relevant in my analysis of RQ1, where each conception was put in relation to the whole interview and also in relation to other conceptions in other interviews. Through comparison and contrasting, and reading combined with reflection, the characteristics of a specific conception were revealed. This, according to Larsson (1986, 31) is the very core of a phenomenographic analysis. My goal was to find as many qualitatively different conceptions as possible. However, I was more interested in variations at large than in individual variation. Consequently, I did not pay any great attention to whether different informants represented different conceptions or whether one and the same informant contributed with several conceptions

Structuring patterns into categories

The final step involved summarising my findings into categories. Salo (202, 135) argues that the term "category" implies sharp borders between exclusive entities, and prefers the more flexible term "dimension" for entities that complete, support, overlap or even presuppose each other. Since the word "dimension" is used in an entirely different context (as in *the intercultural dimension)* throughout this thesis, I decided to stick to the more familiar "category" in order to avoid confusion. My ambition was to set up categories that would clearly illustrate the patterns found, cover as many qualities in the different themes as possible, and thus provide plausible and credible answers to my research questions. When labelling these categories, I shifted from the everyday informal language used by my informants, to a more scientific language characterised by a higher degree of abstraction.

Each research question generated three main categories, most of which also entailed a number of subcategories. The so-called supplementary material, which not only provided me with valuable background information for the three research questions but also constituted interesting findings in itself, will also be accounted for in the chapter below.

When presenting my results, I will balance between the collective and the individual level. This not only means accounting for the found patterns by describing both general tendencies common for a specific group of informants, but also extreme views or opinions expressed by individuals within the same group. The essence of each category as well as features highlighting the differences between categories will be exemplified with interview excerpts. When choosing the excerpts, my main goal was to let every informant's voice be heard at least once, and to include both neutral and more value-laden statements.

Every interview excerpt is followed by an indication of the cell that the informant belongs to. For example, a C indicates that the informant is an experienced female teacher who has spent less than one year abroad (see Figure 9). Occasionally, the quotations have been slightly shortened. If only a few words have been omitted, this has been indicated with (…). If one or several sentences have been omitted, this has been indicated with (---). Words or expressions that have been changed in order to secure anonymity are underlined. (-) has been used in cases where I have been forced to leave out entire words or expressions to avoid the identification of the teachers or their schools. In excerpts where it is unclear what the pronouns refer to, I have added words to facilitate understanding. These additions are written in normal letters, whereas the excerpts are all written in italics.

4.2.4 Validity and reliability aspects

Validity, reliability and generalisability are key concepts within the positivist research tradition, where each of them has its specific meaning. Whether or not they should be discussed in relation to qualitative studies is a much debated issue. Some researchers (e.g. Denzin 1978, and Goetz & LeCompte 1984) think it is not fair to try to measure the quality of qualitative research using the quantitative research yardstick, whereas others give new meanings to these concepts when applying them to qualitative studies. Suoranta (1995, 38-39)

claims that a constructivist view of knowledge should entail the abandoning of the notion of one objective truth that can be unravelled. Different truths are constructed, meaning that the results should rather be seen as *one* perspective or *one* interpretation that may exist alongside other possible perspectives or interpretations. The truthfulness [30] is determined on the basis of how well the researcher's reconstructions correspond to the original constructions of the multifaceted conceptions of reality held by the informants.

Lincoln & Guba (1985), use validity, reliability and generalisability as a starting point for a discussion about *trustworthiness.* Internal validity is discussed in terms of *credibility,* with focus on the research process. Reliability can be considered by studying the situation and context in which the research is conducted (*dependability),* or by studying the degree of *confirmability* rather than objectivity. This means focus on the empirical material and the results. External validity, focussing on the generalisability of the results, is discussed in terms of *transferability.* This is determined by the degree of agreement between the situations or contexts between which the results are transferred. Research within the constructivist research paradigm is also characterised by the need to determine *authenticity,* which Salo (2002, 29-30) thinks goes beyond the research process and its results. Ontological authenticity contributes to the involved parties expanding their own personal constructions of the phenomenon. Educative authenticity aims at increased understanding of how others construct the phenomenon. Cathalytic authenticity stimulates activity, whereas tactical authenticity authorises activity.

Helenius (1990, 247) approaches validity and reliability from a hermeneutical perspective. In his opinion, these concepts should be characterised by both depth and width. They may be continuously developed as the research process continues and the reality to be investigated changes. As for phenomenographic studies, Uljens (1989) claims that validity is related to how comprehensively the categories represent the conceptions revealed in the interviews. Reliability would then be based on how well these categories manage to convey the meaning content.

Validity in this study

Validity, according to Kvale (1996, 241) is determined by the quality of the researcher's craftsmanship. I will scrutinise the validity of the present study from the five points of view presented by Larsson (1993, 204-210): the discourse criterion, heuristic value, empirical anchorage, consistency and the pragmatic criterion. These are criteria which in quantitative research are related to external validity.

The discourse criterion indicates that the results of the analysis should maintain a high standard, not only within the framework of the study itself but also in discussions where alternative reasoning within the same domain of inquiry are compared. In other words, the researcher's statements, arguments and interpretations should have been tested against alternative statements, arguments and interpretations. The aim is to convince the scientific community. This line of

[30] My translation from Finnish.

reasoning comes close to the idea of science as "disciplined inquiry." Larsson refers to Shulman (1988, 5), who writes:

> *What is important about disciplined inquiry is that its data, arguments and reasoning be capable of withstanding careful scrutiny by another member of the scientific community.*

The findings in this study are the results of careful and continuous consideration and reflection. Nothing has been taken for granted. What may have appeared obvious at first glance has been questioned again and again. In this respect, repeated discussions with colleagues and my supervisor have proved invaluable. When reporting on my findings, I have made efforts to provide reasons for all my choices, regardless of whether these have concerned terminology, interpretation, category labels, interview excerpts or conclusions drawn.

The heuristic criterion is related to discovery; to finding new categories or concepts, or new ways of examining a phenomenon, as a result of systematic analysis. It also involves communicating these to the readers in a convincing manner. A qualitative study that describes a phenomenon in the same way as it is normally perceived by people is pointless, Larsson writes. A successful analysis results in new perspectives on reality. Chapter 5 will show how issues related to culture, cultural objectives and methods are perceived by Finland-Swedish EFL-teachers. The found categories can be seen as contributions to theories of intercultural language teaching and learning.

The interpretations should naturally be empirically grounded. The empirical criterion of validity is thus about the agreement between reality and the interpretation of reality. My interpretations will be accounted for with a view to pointing to their credibility and plausibility. Another researcher might make other interpretations and hence end up with a category system different from mine. Although respondent validation is sometimes used in qualitative studies, I have chosen not to make use of the opportunity to let my informants evaluate the credibility of my interpretations. There are risks that the informants become offended by certain interpretations or conclusions and therefore reject them, or they may unconditionally accept them without having bothered to reflect upon their credibility.

The consistency criterion is linked to the hermeneutical demand for consistency between the separate parts and the whole. A study can be considered valid if the available data is dealt with in a manner resulting in as few contradictions as possible between the interpretation (the whole) and the individual data (the parts). This involves aspiring for an internal logic, which can be compared to a puzzle. Every piece in the puzzle will have to fit in if a coherent picture is to emerge. Larsson (1993, 208) points to problems related to this criterion. If reality is scattered or atomistic, one could argue that the researcher violates this reality by trying to squeeze in parts in a whole that does not really exist. Also, the researcher might be tempted to exclude data that do not fit into the whole. I have tried to balance between the demand for consistency and empirical anchorage by presenting my findings in a way that makes internal sense at the same time as it accounts for those conceptions or beliefs that appear odd in relation to the overall patterns. When choosing excerpts, I have always returned

to the interviews to recapitulate the context, as well as checked that the excerpts are appropriate in the new whole into which they have been placed.

The pragmatic criterion, finally, is about the practical implications of the study; the “So what?”-question. Larsson refers to Habermas (1972), who – from a critical hermeneutical standpoint - has argued for an interlocking of knowledge and human interests. He discusses different knowledge interests and how these can be used for pragmatic validation. For the humanist approach he distinguishes between a practical-hermeneutical and an emancipatory hermeneutical knowledge-interest. The former is related to inter-personal understanding and communication. The validity aspect concerns the extent to which the study inspires debate and leads to increased understanding of the research area. The validity aspect of the latter concerns the extent to which the study raises people’s awareness of their societal rights and opportunities, freeing them from previous conceptions that may have prevented them from rational action. Parallels can be drawn to Lincoln & Guba’s *authenticity* criteria referred to above. The practical-hermeneutical perspective mostly pertains to this study. It is, in fact, often discussed in relation to phenomenographic studies. The argument there is that insights into what conceptions people have of a specific phenomenon can have didactic consequences. I naturally hope that my findings will lead to an increased understanding of the teaching of culture and how it can be developed.

Reliability in this study

Within the positivist tradition, reliability concerns how exact the measurements are. Although qualitative studies do not “measure” things, demands can still be placed on their accuracy. Helenius (1990, 247) discusses reliability in terms of logical thinking and a sensible presentation of the research process and the results. Kvale (1996, 235) attributes reliability to the consistency of the research findings. He touches upon a wide range of situations where the quality of the results is determined by the trustworthiness of the researcher. These situations include choice of methods, the selection of informants, manner of questioning, the coding of the interviews, the use of independent co-assessors and so on. Many of these critical choices have been illuminated in the previous chapters of this thesis. A few points are worth repeating: In the interviews, I was careful about not asking leading questions which could inadvertently have influenced my informants’ answers. Furthermore, the thematic questions were formulated in precisely the same way for everyone. I wanted to minimise the risk of my wordings inducing different interpretations, resulting in the teachers providing incomparable answers to the same question. When transcribing, the same principles were used by my assistant and myself in order to secure intersubjective reliability. By explicitly outlining the various steps in my subsequent analysis of the data, I have, so to speak, put my cards on the table for inspection.

According to Kvale (1996, 236), increasing the reliability of interview findings is desirable in order to counteract haphazard subjectivity. However, too strong an emphasis on reliability may counteract creative innovation and variability.

4.2.5 Ethical aspects

Ethical decisions, just like validity and reliability aspects, do not belong to specific stages of interview investigations but arise throughout the entire research process. Their purpose is to serve both scientific and human interests. Kvale (1996, 112-117) discusses three ethical guidelines for human research: informed consent, confidentiality and consequences.

Informed consent entails informing the respondents about the overall purpose of the investigation, as well as of any possible risks and benefits from participation in the project. It also involves obtaining the voluntary participation of the respondents with their rights to withdraw at any time. This may appear self-evident, but at closer inspection informed consent is not entirely unproblematic, since it raises questions of who should give the consent and to what. In my case, the consent was given either by the principals, having consulted the English teachers at their schools, or directly by the volunteering teachers. The fact that several schools did not respond to my initial letter of request, but agreed to participate only after I had contacted them again, may raise doubts as to the teachers' genuine willingness to be interviewed. Still, I am convinced that none of my 13 informants decided to participate as a result of persuasion or feelings of duty. They all appeared interested by the topic – which nonetheless was considered difficult by quite a few - and stimulated by the fact that they were given the opportunity to voice their views on it.

When providing information about my study, first in the letter and then at the beginning of each interview, I balanced between giving too much information and leaving out aspects of the design that may have been significant for my informants. My aim was thus formulated in general terms. I wanted to obtain the teachers' natural views on the topic and avoid leading them to specific answers. For example, I did not state that one of my interests was to find out their definitions of "culture in FLT." This could have resulted in some teachers preparing answers in advance; perhaps even by studying literature. This, again, would have jeopardised the validity of my results.

The second guideline, confidentiality, concerns the informants' right to privacy. In this study, private data identifying the teachers and their schools have not been reported. Names and identifying features have been changed. In the interview excerpts, changes are indicated with an underlining. However, hundred per cent anonymity may be difficult, if not impossible, to guarantee. Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers of English are, after all, numbered. Readers who are familiar with this circle of professionals might be able guess the persons hiding between the descriptions or interview quotations if they really set their minds to it. I find the informants' descriptions of their classroom practice (RQ3) particularly problematic from an ethical point of view. Different teachers have their own maxims and practical theories about teaching which can be seen as their professional trademarks. Thus, when teachers talk about their working methods, in this case their approaches to teaching culture, they inevitably also give out clues about their identity. The informants' students are naturally in the best position to identify them. It is my judgement, however, that 13-15 year-old learners are not an essential part of the intended readership of this thesis. Even if they read it at a later stage and recognised their former

teachers, the risk of harm to my informants would be minimal. It can be mentioned that two informants retired even before the interview data was analysed. Particularly vivid descriptions have hence been included, because I think the importance of the knowledge gained through them outweighs the possible threats to the informants' anonymity.

When reflecting on the expected benefits and possible consequences of an interview study, one should consider not only the persons taking part in the study but also the larger group that the informants represent (Kvale 1996, 116). Ideally, there should be reciprocity in what is given and what is gained. As for the present study, I distinguish between short-term and long-term benefits. For the 13 informants personally, the short-term benefits lie in the attention and interest in their work, which they all said they experienced as extremely encouraging. The long-term benefits for them and their present and future colleagues will hopefully be increased focus on culture in FLT with regard to language teacher education, teaching materials and in-service training.

It is now time to let the teachers speak.

5 Presentation and interpretation of results

5.1 Approaching the field of interest

As a prelude to the discussion about cultural aspects, all my respondents were encouraged to talk about the overall aims of their teaching of English. My question was: "What would you first and foremost like to achieve as a teacher of English?"

Eight of my respondents stated that to them the most important thing is to give their pupils communicative skills and self-confidence to use their English without being afraid of making mistakes. The pupils should acquire a readiness to express themselves in English, and a feeling that they can cope in real communicative situations even if their grammar may not be flawless. Positive attitudes towards the subject were emphasised by many, among them the young and enthusiastic teacher speaking in the extract below:

> *Well, generally in my teaching it has turned out to be the oral part. The absolutely most important thing is that the students feel that they are allowed to speak, that they dare to speak, and that it doesn't always have to be right, but that they get a feel for the language. And then, of course, an interest at the same time. I hope that those who have had me as a teacher in the comprehensive school would think that English is quite all right.* (Cell B)

A genuine interest in the English language was also discussed by a highly experienced female teacher, who emphasised very strongly that her primary goal is to inspire her pupils to continue learning on their own and outside school. She sees language as a key that opens doors, and her task is to encourage her pupils to try out their own wings. This teacher, who gave the impression of being extremely devoted, told me that at the beginning of her career she saw it as her responsibility to make her pupils master the English language as well as possible. However, gradually she has given up this – as she calls it – "perfectionist ambition" and now sees her task as that of an inspirer and motivator.

She identifies the following reason for this change in thinking:

> *Perhaps you yourself mature and start to realise that ... I'm something of a perfectionist ... you can't be good at everything, but if you at least arouse interest, then you have accomplished a lot. I have simply had to cut down on my perfectionist demands. You have to realise that not everybody can be extremely good, but you should make the most of your own capacity.* (Cell D)

In fact, several of my more experienced respondents stated that the aim of their teaching has changed. In the past, they placed much more weight on grammatical accuracy, whereas now getting their pupils to talk has the highest

priority. According to all but one newly examined teacher, pronunciation and intonation is of great importance in this respect.

It is interesting to note that my male respondents appeared to find purely linguistic accuracy more important than their female colleagues. One experienced male teacher described his overall aim as producing measurable results in terms of the linguistic proficiency that is called for in the curriculum. Although he too admitted to having become less strict, for example when marking test papers, he definitely represented what could be called "the old school." The fact that, during his 20-year teaching career, he has spent just one month in an English-speaking country may to some extent explain his view of language teaching and learning.

> *I suppose that primarily I am strictly efficiency oriented, that is I try to get the students out of here, I try to convey the kind of knowledge that will enable them to meet the stipulated requirements. That's my first goal, and I suppose that's why I am here, really.* (Cell G)

When asked about how they look at the English language from the point of view of teaching it, four teachers stated that they consider it and also teach it as a national language spoken as a mother tongue in certain countries. These teachers referred to Inner Circle countries, primarily Great Britain and the USA, as points of reference from which they teach English. Naturally, they tend to be more oriented towards either British English or American English, depending on where they themselves have spent more time. However, their students are free to decide for themselves what variety they would like to develop, as long as they are consistent, both in their pronunciation, spelling and choice of words. Students who have been exchange students in English-speaking countries are naturally encouraged to stick to the accent they have learnt there.

One of the teachers representing views of English as primarily a national language was explicit about what variety is prioritised in her classroom.

> *To me it's more a national language and we also try to stick to British English. But then American English always creeps in because they would like to speak that. I try to say "Now, wait a minute, that we'll deal with later".* (Cell D)

This teacher thus gives priority to the British variety, despite fierce opposition from her students, who tend to idolise American English and generally be influenced by what they pick up from American films and TV series. Her arguments for this approach were that Finland, just like Great Britain, is part of the European Union, and that the textbook she uses begins with England, Scotland, Ireland and Wales, whereas the USA is left to the very last class of comprehensive school.

Four female novice teachers, three of whom have a lot of experience of living abroad, perceive English first and foremost as an international contact language, a lingua franca. Consequently, they also teach it as a means of communication between people regardless of their national background. As one teacher put it:

> *You have a chance to talk to somebody who has Arabic as his mother tongue; English is what you have in common.* (Cell B)

Another teacher made the following statement about the lingua franca status of English today:

> *It's much more an international contact language. Of course, there are native-speaking countries with English as the mother tongue, (---) the French are probably the ones that are especially angry about this due to historic events such as wars. But you simply have to face the fact that English is gaining more and more ground as a means of communication for everyone. I don't think it's a bad thing.* (Cell B)

Later in the interview she spoke enthusiastically about the diversification of the English language, thanks to the fact that non-native speakers contribute with their own national styles of speaking it. She appreciates and encourages the preserving of regional varieties, accents and dialects, and thinks that is important to make the students aware of them. However, she never criticises or corrects pronunciation mistakes in her students, unless they cause semantic misunderstandings. According to this particular teacher, native-like pronunciation is nothing worth striving for; the main thing is to be understood. She also pointed out that she thinks audio materials should include different kinds of speakers.

The remaining five teachers represented views of English as both a national and an international language, a fact that also permeates their approach to teaching it. These teachers are all aware of the status of English as an international lingua franca, and the ultimate goal of their teaching is to provide their students with a tool for communicative interactions with native and non-native speakers alike. One teacher put it as follows:

> *Of course you stress where it is spoken and talk about the culture of these countries, but as I said, the ultimate goal is that they learn to communicate in English, but it doesn't have to be just with people who come from English-speaking countries but also as a means of communicating with people from other parts of the world.* (Cell E)

However, in their teaching they tend to "end up within national borders", as one teacher put it. In other words, things like socio-linguistic features of English are dealt with in relation to the countries where English is spoken, and differences between, primarily, British and American English are highlighted. My interpretation of this is that English is conceived as international, whereas "culture" in their teaching of English is conceived as national.

It is worth mentioning at this point that one young female teacher with a vast experience of living and working abroad was the sole respondent who immediately led our discussion into the field of culture in English teaching. To her, language and culture are two sides of the same coin, and she thinks it is impossible to teach one without the other. As a consequence of the many years she has lived and worked abroad, her view of what FLT is all about has changed fairly dramatically from the days when she herself was a student. The cultural objectives have an extremely high priority in her everyday classroom work, and she even thinks the name of the school subject should be changed from just "English" to "English language and culture." In her opinion, language teachers should devote much more time to integrating language and culture.

She described her overall teaching aim as follows:

Considering how society and the school have changed, now it is more about combining language and culture. (---) You should be able to make the subject as interesting and fascinating as possible, and not just get stuck in struggling with the grammar. (---) I think the students would become more motivated if you were able to bring in as many different aspects as possible. (Cell D)

Interestingly enough, all the other respondents also admitted early on that culture in language teaching is very important, but it was apparent that they prioritise communicative and linguistic competence, and tend to address cultural issues once the "obligatory" things have been properly dealt with. Occasionally, I got the impression that some teachers might have felt an obligation to start talking about cultural objectives because they had been informed beforehand that culture in foreign language teaching was going to be the theme of the interview. Perhaps they felt that this was something teachers are *supposed* to find important these days, and did not want to come across as ignorant of this new trend.

Nevertheless, it is obvious that to some of my informants cultural bits and pieces are introduced only if there is extra time. As one respondent put it:

If I have the possibility and the time, I'll give them some background information. (Cell G)

When I asked him what he meant with "background information", he replied:

Everything that has to do with the target country, that is culture in one form or another. (Cell G)

This leads me on to the very core of my study. In Chapter 5.2 below, I will briefly present a holistic overview of my space of outcome, i.e. the categories emerging out of my rich interview material. This schematic illustration will serve as the basis for the subsequent chapters, where my informants' diverse cognitions about cultural issues will be explicated. Eventually, in Chapter 5.4, my findings will be discussed with regard to three different discourses.

5.2 Preview of three orientations: the cognitive, the action-related and the affective

I have chosen to set up categories of description based on the three research questions presented in Chapter 2.3.3. The figure on page 102 is intended to illustrate the internal relationship between the category systems that crystallised as a result of my data analysis. As can be seen, each research question generated three qualitatively different categories, which were later split into subcategories. These are found on the horizontal axes.

- RQ1 generated Categories 1a, 1b and 1c
- RQ2 generated Categories 2a, 2b and 2c
- RQ3 generated Categories 3a, 3b and 3c.

As in all horizontal category systems, categories 1a, 1b and 1c, just like 2a, 2b,2c and 3a, 3b and 3c, are equal and on the same level. The differences between the categories are only related to the differences in their content (see Niikko 2003, 38).

The vertical axes show the general orientations which the nine categories have been attributed to. Categories which have something in common have been grouped together, on the basis of what views about teaching and learning cultural issues they contain.

- Categories 1a, 2a and 3a represent a cognitive orientation
- Categories 1b, 2b and 3b represent an action-related orientation
- Categories 1c, 2c and 3c represent an affective orientation.

Within the cognitive orientation, cultural issues are viewed as related to quantitative knowledge and hence focus on the intellect of the learner. Culture teaching is seen as taking place through the presentation of facts by the teacher, relying primarily on the learners' cognitive skills and their ability to acquire, preserve and transfer the information presented into useful knowledge of foreign cultures. Parallels can here be drawn to the University Approach, discussed by Jaeger (1995, 22).

Within the action orientation, cultural issues are discussed in relation to concrete behaviour in intercultural encounters. Culture teaching is seen as giving the learners the ability to perform adequate, culturally appropriate actions. Although working methods are described as more pupil-centred, this orientation is also characterised by a quantitative view. Students are expected to learn as much as possible about how to behave when meeting another culture, in order to avoid making "cultural blunders." This approach resembles the Social Skills Approach, discussed by Jensen (1995, 33-34) and the Survival Approach, referred to by Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991, 158-159). They describe this approach as "practical" and "instrumental", with continuous stress on the notion that students will need certain linguistic and cultural knowledge in order to "survive" in the TC.

Within the affective orientation, cultural issues are discussed in terms of influencing the learners' attitudes, thus taking not only his intellect but also his emotions into account. Jensen (1995, 34-35) uses the concept of the Holistic Approach, which implies an endeavour to contribute to the personal growth of the whole learner.

Focus / Orientation	Cognitive orientation	Action orientation	Affective orientation
	Quantitative view		Qualitative view
1. WHAT? (Teachers´ conceptions of "culture")	a. Factual knowledge	b. Skills	c. Bi-directional perspective
2. WHY? (Teachers´ beliefs about cultural objectives)	a. Providing general background information	b. Preparing for future inter-cultural encounters	c. Promoting tolerance and empathy
3. HOW? (Teachers´ classroom practice)	a. Pedagogy of Information Teacher in centre	b. Pedagogy of Preparation Teacher and pupil in centre	c. Pedagogy of Encounter Pupil in centre

Figure 10. Teachers' conceptions of the intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching

A similar distinction is made by Byram, who presents knowledge, skills and attitudes as key components in his model of Intercultural Competence (see Chapter 2.1.2.3, page 32). In the following chapters, where the space of outcome will be scrutinised horizontally, my findings will be related to Byram's theories, among others. This is done with the intention of clarifying the extent to which my empirical findings may contribute to the existing theoretical base within the field of ILT.

5.3 The intercultural dimension in EFL-teaching as perceived by Finland-Swedish teachers of English

5.3.1 Teachers' conceptions of culture (RQ1)

My first research question was "How do teachers interpret the concept of culture in FLT?" When raising this issue in the interviews, I made it clear to my respondents that I was not interested in general dictionary definitions of culture, but how they personally perceive it in the context of FLT. One respondent asked himself whether culture in FLT is something else than culture in general, whereas all the others did not seem to reflect on this to any greater extent. This lack of reflection can be traced in many answers, which indicate that they do not see a clear difference between these two approaches.

It was hardly surprising, in view of the discussion in Chapter 2.1.2.1, that the majority of the interviewed teachers perceive culture as something highly complex that cannot be defined with one or two words only. Two teachers were of the firm view that culture is something all-embracing that should be experienced. One teacher put it like this:

> *You cannot leave anything out, really, because culture is everything. It is very difficult to try and teach it and talk about it, because in the end you should just go there and see for yourself what it's like.* (Cell B)

Most teachers, however, made serious attempts to come to terms with the multifaceted concept of culture by making long lists of things that they consider to be embedded in it. A variety of aspects are included in these characterisations, meaning that one and the same informant often contributed with several different views (see Appendix III, page 167). Although, as indicated earlier, the main emphasis in this study is not on individual variation but on variations at large, it is still possible to discern a general orientation within each respondent towards either the quantitative or the qualitative perspective. The quantitative view, which involves perceiving culture as measurable products that can be transmitted to students, clearly predominates. As can be seen from Figure 10 above, the quantitative orientation comprises views of culture as factual knowledge as well as skills, whereas the qualitative orientation is related to views of culture entailing a change of perspective.

5.3.1.1 Factual knowledge

The first category contains conceptions of culture as factual knowledge; knowledge in the sense of *knowing that.* I use the word "knowledge" in the meaning described by Byram (1989, 120) as ideas, concepts, facts and material about or from a foreign culture and its people, presented in a structured way. He views "knowledge" as structured information. The nature of the structure may vary according to pedagogic and other principles. In the CEF (2001) the term used is declarative knowledge. This category can be divided into four subcategories, which are illustrated and commented on below.

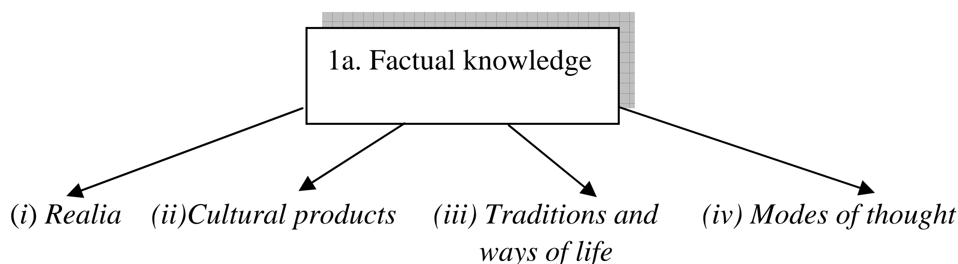

Figure 11. Culture as factual knowledge

(i) Realia

Half of the respondents describe culture in terms of facts about the history, geography, religion and political conditions of the English-speaking countries. One teacher also included racial issues into this category, which I have chosen to name *realia. Realia* is originally a Swedish word used in educational contexts to denote school subjects such as the ones listed above. A German word coming very close to this concept is *Landeskunde*, or *Deutschkunde*, as a female

respondent also teaching German pointed out in her description of culture. In the CEF (2001) this type of knowledge is attributed to *knowledge of the world.*

(ii) Cultural products

Many teachers also refer to the art, literature, film and music associated with the English-speaking world. This second sub-category thus involves the so-called Capital-C culture or "cultural culture", as Gagnestam (2004, 116) calls it. However, the vast majority of the teachers including this aesthetic view into their characterisation strongly stress that these cultural expressions are just part of the wide concept of culture. "It is the easiest way to look at culture", as one teacher put it, referring to how easily cultural products can be brought into the classroom, also in the literal sense of the word. Works of art are concrete, tangible things as opposed to many other aspects of culture, and teenage students' interest in film and music can hardly be underestimated. This clearly shows that teachers' conceptions of culture are influenced by their readiness to include certain aspects of it into their own teaching. If you know that working with film or music with your students pays off, it is easy to prefer to look at culture as just that, rather than as something you do not normally include in your classroom work and perhaps do not even know how to address in a teaching context.

(iii) Traditions and ways of life

The majority of the teachers regard folkloristic features such as traditions and ways of life as an essential part of culture. In fact, this behaviouristically-oriented anthropological view of culture (cf. Robinson) appears to predominate among my informants, who tend to describe it from two different perspectives. Firstly, they talk about the ways in which festivals such as Christmas, Easter and Halloween are celebrated.

> *Well, things like Christmas and other festivals. What you do and don't do, that's part of the English teaching for sure. Those are things that certainly come up in comprehensive school, perhaps even on the lower grades ... vocabulary related to Christmas and Easter. That's also culture.* (Cell F)

Secondly, they refer to daily life with all its special habits and routines as far as school, work, leisure-time activities and family life are concerned.

> *If you read about England, what they do there, at home, home routines, school, studies, work and so on.* (Cell D)

One respondent pointed out that these are things we experience every day but which a person from another culture might find odd, simply because he or she is not used to them. In this context an experienced female teacher raised the issue of what everyday life could look like in a multicultural society like London, thus showing awareness that ways of life might differ considerably within one and the same TL culture, and that this is something that students should be made aware of. She wisely points out that although we do have some refugees here, Finland is still an underdeveloped country when it comes to multiculturalism.

It should be made clear at this stage that this third subcategory involves views of culture as general life-styles and not as behavioural patterns in specific situations

within these life-styles. I hence regard *traditions and ways of life* as a much broader area than etiquette. The latter will be treated as *social conventions* in Category 1b below.

(iv) Modes of thought

Whereas the first three categories can be said to denote outer, visible aspects of culture, the last one is related to the inner, mental processes of people sharing the same culture. This view can be described in terms of the values, norms and beliefs underlying the way people live and act. The teacher speaking in the excerpt below refers to different cultures holding different attitudes towards political events.

> *They (the Americans) think differently from us. For example, about Bush (…). We think about it differently than they do. We may have more negative views and that may be due to how people live there and what they know about the world….* (Cell B)

Interestingly enough, three teachers only talked about ways of thinking and ways of looking at and interpreting the world as components of culture. This I take as an indication that teachers seem to prefer views of culture as something that can be empirically observed, to views focussing on the fundamental attitudes, conceptions and beliefs that form the breeding ground for observable cultural features.

Traditions and ways of life together with *modes of thought* constitute Small-c culture, as this was defined in Chapter 2.1.2.1. In the CEF (2001) the term used about this type of knowledge is *sociocultural knowledge.* All conceptions within Category 1a are based on the assumption that "culture" involves facts that constitute general knowledge. This category contains conceptions of culture as something that you learn as matter-of-fact truths, or as *facts fulfilled*, to use Tornberg's term. This is something that students should know simply for its own sake, not implying that they should act upon this knowledge in any particular way.

The following interview extracts are intended to summarise Category 1a: Culture as factual knowledge. They reveal that one and the same teacher may touch upon several of the aspects of culture discussed in subcategories (i)-(iii).

> *Culture is so much, it is what we in German call Deutschkunde, that is that you know a little about how people in these countries live and how they think, and that you know something about their history, because we are all affected by our history to quite a high degree. These things are really important.* (Cell D)

> *It is a vast concept. Still, you imagine it somehow … I suppose the easiest way is to look at it as music, art, traditions and ways of life, that is how people live in a country like this. Literature is also something I try to include. This concept is endless! But mostly this is what it turns out to be in my teaching.* (Cell B)

> *Culture in language teaching … Well, it is a vast concept; so much is included, and that may be one reason why the textbooks cannot deal with everything, but the teacher will have to look for this material. I suppose culture is everything related to literature, art and history … and everyday life .. that is definitely one of the most important things … and a little politics, religion.* (Cell B)

It is music, film, pictures, behaviour, art, dance, customs and traditions. (Cell A)

The teacher speaking in the last excerpt pointed out that culture in FLT, as she sees it, should take very concrete forms. She added that she finds it difficult to relate to the "fluffy" and vague terms used in the NFC.

5.3.1.2 Skills

The second category contains conceptions of culture as skills to be acquired for future use; knowledge in the sense of *knowing how* representatives of the TL culture(s) behave in certain situations, both verbally and non-verbally. This type of knowledge can be characterised as procedural. The focus here is on learning how to act in an appropriate manner, not offending the rules and conventions of the TL culture.

A distinction can be made between skills related to social conventions and skills related to socio-linguistic conventions. The former concerns how people sharing the same culture tend to behave in certain situations**,** whereas the latter concerns which language forms they tend to use, depending on such conditions as setting, relationship between communication partners, communicative intention, etc. Admittedly, the border between the two is unclear in the sense that behavioural patterns in specific social contexts very often contain linguistic elements, and the use of language is always determined by the social context. Nevertheless, to illustrate the diverse views among my respondents, the distinction to be elaborated on below appears adequate.

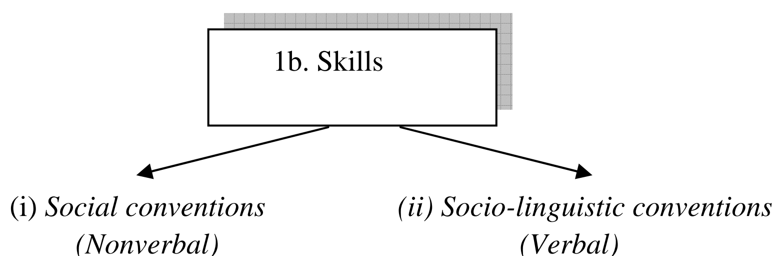

Figure 12. Culture as skills

(i) Social conventions

Three teachers referred to behavioural habits related to specific social situations. As an example, one male teacher talked about giving tips in the USA, which tends to follow certain unspoken rules. He said that most people probably know about the phenomenon itself thanks to films and TV series, but not everybody might be aware that the tip should be about 15% of the price and that it is normally given in taxis, pubs and restaurants, never in shops. Moreover, you do not normally give tips with nickels and dimes, but with quarters. A young female teacher referred to the habit of *not* taking off your shoes in Great Britain when entering somebody's home, and *not* thanking your French host for the food you have just been served. The latter implies that you really did not expect the meal

to be good, and that you were positively surprised to notice that the chef pulled it off after all.

Both teachers have vast experience of living in the countries they talked about. They pointed out that these are examples of behavioural patterns that are taken for granted by the Americans, the British and the French, who may show surprised amusement at the outsider digging out his quarters or removing his shoes in the hall. In the French example, the chef's reaction to the ignorance of his foreign visitor might be indignation. Questions of etiquette are things you gradually pick up through trial and error, unless you have been informed about them beforehand. In the female teacher's opinion, cultural clashes of this type are often associated with situations that could be perceived as funny by both parties, and that detecting cultural differences at this behavioural level is an adventure in itself.

Another female teacher mentioned that her students enjoy hearing anecdotes about her making a fool of herself in culture-clash situations in England, and that they tend to remember the aspects of British culture involved in these situations extremely well thanks to their teacher's personal experience of them.

Embedded in the utterances of all three respondents is the idea that representatives of different cultures behave differently, and that intercultural encounters are facilitated once the TC behaviour is acknowledged and acquired.

(ii) Socio-linguistic conventions

Many teachers talked about culture in terms of socio-linguistic conventions in the TL culture. Their views illustrate a clear awareness of language as a socio-cultural phenomenon. Conceptions within this category concern register differences, related to how and in what contexts you use certain expressions, as well as phrases of politeness and conventionalised linguistic responses in general. Several teachers stressed the importance of using "thank you" and "please" appropriately, and pointed out that since politeness conventions differ from one culture to another, they are frequent sources of misunderstandings. One young female teacher raised the issue of choice of greetings, by referring to the British habit of greeting even strangers with a familiar "Hello, love!." She pointed out that when greeted in this manner on a path in the wood, a Finn, being used to interpreting expressions literally, might fear he is about to be sexually harrassed.

One male teacher stated that socio-linguistic features are the aspect of culture that he gives priority to in his teaching. He pointed out that in England you communicate using certain verbal codes which are not used in other English-speaking countries.

> *(...) to me culture is something very wide. (...) I don't think it is just opera, ballet, classical music, modern dance and so on. Culture is something much wider than these cultural expressions. Culture is the way in which people communicate in a country, like in England; they speak using certain codes that are not used in Ireland or South Africa (…). I would say that it is rather this aspect of culture that I emphasise.* (Cell F)

In other words, although the language is basically the same, the way in which it is used differs with the cultural context. He defines codes as taken-for-granted characteristics of communication, and points to the tendency to leave out things from a conversation because you assume that your interlocutor already has that knowledge. If you assume too much, conversation could break down. According to this male teacher, it is often difficult to put your finger on these differences between cultures, but as an alien in a country you tend to see them much more clearly than the natives. Correspondingly, people coming to Finland might point out things that we here have never even thought of before.

The following interview extracts may illustrate the essence of Category 1b: Culture as skills.

> *Culture is everything that has to do with people and human behaviour … socially.*
>
> *(---) You could call it some kind of social culture, and I mean rules of etiquette and so on, certainly that's part of culture. These are the things I tend to focus on, since I try to make them realise that there are certain differences.* (Cell G)
>
> *This is a North-American thing. When you meet somebody somewhere, shake hands and have a five- minute chat, and then the North-American says "Drop by for a cup of coffee some time!." And you, being Scandinavian and very literal, knock on the door a week later and say "Hello!" And the North-American looks at you with a much stranger expression on his face than when you first met him. You are not supposed to visit for a cup of coffee at all. It's just a way of saying "Hi, nice to meet you! Perhaps we'll meet again later some time." That's a classical thing that I often mention, and it's actually true.* (Cell F)
>
> *Culture is how and in what contexts you use certain expressions and how you talk to somebody you meet on the street, a stranger, and how you talk to an office clerk or with family and friends.* (Cell C)

5.3.1.3. Bi-directional perspective

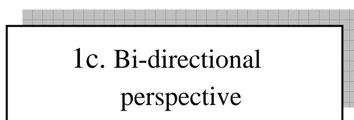

Figure 13. Culture as a bi-directional perspective

In the third category, culture as seen as more than knowledge and know-how related to the foreign culture(s). The importance of learning about and knowing your own culture is stressed and seen as a prerequisite for relating the two to each other on equal terms. Awareness of one's own cultural background is considered an inevitable basis for more or less conscious comparisons that the students will make when encountering other cultures. *Knowing why* representatives of the familiar culture (C1) and the foreign culture(s) (C2) act the way they do is seen as enabling a deeper understanding of similarities and differences.

The cultural content of FLT is thus described not only in terms of observing the foreign culture(s) from the perspective of C1, but also trying to observe C1 from the perspective of the foreign culture(s)[31]. How does Finnish culture come across to a Japanese? What might an American find odd about our ways of doing things? One of the three teachers discussing this view of culture talked more generally about foreign cultures, whereas the others referred specifically to how English-speaking people might look at us Finns. I have chosen the concept bi-directional[32] perspective to denote this view of culture as a mutually enriching relationship between the C1 and the foreign culture(s). Both are explicitly present and taken into consideration in the teaching situation.

This conception thus differs from the conceptions in Category 1.a and 1.b. in two respects: Firstly, it draws more deliberate attention to the student's own culture, and secondly, it involves putting oneself in somebody else's shoes and taking the viewpoint of the other. This is a challenging thing to do, especially as it involves putting emotions and attitudes at stake.

The following excerpts may serve as illustrations:

> *(...) when you learn something about another culture and especially those things that are different, you also automatically learn something about your own culture.* (Cell F)

> *Before you start talking about foreign cultures you have to know your own. The idea is not that we should become like Britons or Americans but that we have our own identity and our own cultural background that we are hopefully proud of. But what makes it interesting is that when these cultures meet, then I think it is important that you know your own culture and that way learn something new and are able to compare. (---) There is nothing right or wrong, but you should know the differences.* (Cell D)

Rounding off

To sum up, teachers' conceptions of culture in FLT can be divided into three categories: Category 1.a: Culture as factual knowledge, Category 1.b: Culture as skills, and Category 1.c: Culture as a bi-directional perspective. In Category 1.a, the foreign culture only is in focus and the cultural content of teaching is considered to be on a par with information. The foreign culture is seen as something alien that is studied in a detached manner without reference to the student's own culture. In Category 1.b, the foreign culture is still in focus, but now the student's own culture is also brought into play. Differences between behavioural patterns in the C1 and the C2 are focussed, with the underlying idea that the C1 behaviours should be adapted to suit the C2 if intercultural encounters are to succeed. Categories 1.a and 1.b thus both view culture in FLT

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[31] Cf. Christ's (1994, 34-36) discussion about *Perspektivenwechsel* and Bredella's (1988, 13-15) argument that the perspective from within needs to be mediated by the perspective from outside if intercultural understanding is to be accomplished.

[32] van Lier (2004b, 90-91) uses the concept "bi-directional" when describing ecological perception as directed outwards as well as inwards. You perceive something in the environment at the same time as you perceive yourself. From this, it follows that any act of perception is simultaneously an act of self-perception.

as the nationally defined C2 observed from the perspective of the C1. Category 1.c, however, contains an additional element in the form of awareness of the C1 and how this might be perceived from the horizon of other cultures in general and the target culture(s) in particular. It thus involves taking a dual perspective. The underlying idea here is that intercultural encounters may be enriched by all cultures taking part. The main differences between the three conceptions are illustrated in the figure below.

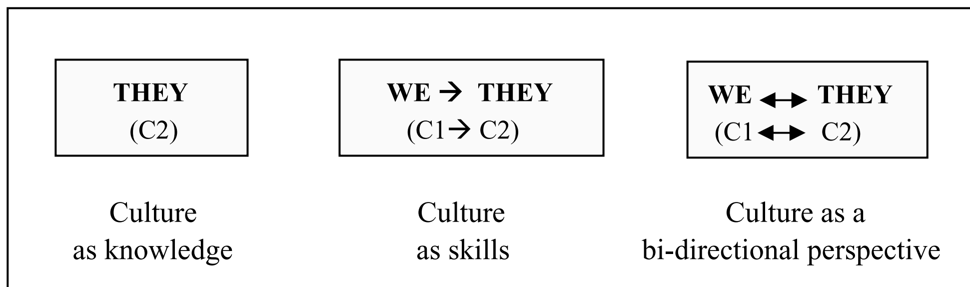

Figure 14. Illustration of the difference between three conceptions of culture

5.3.2 Teachers' beliefs about cultural objectives (RQ2)

My second research question was "How do the teachers specify the cultural objectives of their teaching?" The respondents were encouraged to reflect upon their aims for including cultural aspects in their classroom work. Those few teachers who felt they do not integrate culture in their teaching talked more generally about why cultural issues should or could be introduced (their reasons for still not doing it will be commented on in Chapter 5.3.4.2), whereas all the others described what they personally think their task is, as far as the teaching of culture is concerned.

One respondent felt slightly uncomfortable with the concept "cultural objective", since culture in her own work is not an end in itself but rather a means of enhancing various aspects of her students' linguistic and communicative competence. She discussed strategies for working with cultural products, such as literature, music and film.

> *When it comes to music, art and pictures, culture is more like a method than a goal. When I work with music, I usually use lyrics in order to increase their vocabulary. They may look at specific expressions in the texts. Films are used as a starting point for discussions; to get the class to talk. It works well because people tend to have a lot of opinions about films. Everybody can see, everybody understands and everybody has something to say.* (Cell A)

Some teachers did not address this topic explicitly, in which case I tried to elicit their views by reading between the lines, and drawing upon what they said in relation to their views of culture and their description of their classroom work.

I have distinguished three different objectives, which are closely associated with the conceptions of culture discussed above. Within the cognitive orientation, the view of culture as factual knowledge is linked with the task of providing the students with this knowledge. Within the action orientation, the view of culture as skills is linked with the task of preparing students for future intercultural encounters by giving them appropriate skills. Within the affective orientation, the view of culture as a change of perspective is linked with the task of promoting tolerance and empathy. It should again be mentioned that one and the same teacher may represent more than one view, and that my purpose is not to categorise teachers but conceptions and beliefs, regardless of which respondents they happen to stem from.

Since the perspective throughout this thesis is that of the teachers, the objectives emerging from the interviews are formulated in terms of teacher process, rather than student achievement. Consequently, I have used formulations such as "*providing* general background information", rather than "*acquiring* general background information." To illustrate the essence of each category, I have added a subheading in the form of a slogan or a proverb uttered in the interviews.

5.3.2.1 Providing general background information

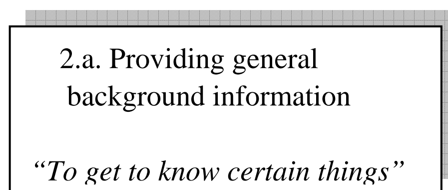

Figure 15. The cultural objective perceived as providing general background information

The statements within this category derive from teachers who strive to transmit information about the English-speaking countries, mainly Great Britain, the USA, Canada and Australia. The pupils are to acquire factual knowledge in the form of realia information, information about cultural products (Capital-C culture) as well as information about ways of living and thinking (Small-c culture). For example, students should *learn that* Canberra is the capital of Australia, that Mark Twain wrote about Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn, that turkey is often eaten at Christmas in Britain and that Catholic values play an important role in the lives of the Irish. The objective can be characterised as descriptive. The teachers speak of general background information that all people that have taken the compulsory education should possess, regardless of whether or not they will ever meet a representative of the TC or intend to visit the country in question. They see their task first and foremost as transmitting knowledge from their own heads into the pupils' heads.

This view of the cultural objective is reflected in the frustration that some teachers said they experience due to the fact that they do not "*know* enough about the foreign culture." Neither have they spent enough time in English-speaking countries, in order to be able to share their insights with their pupils. Consequently, they spend a lot of time searching for appropriate material that will help them convey the basic facts.

The following excerpts may illustrate the essence of this category:

> *The students should acquire knowledge about what is considered important in English-speaking culture, regardless of whether it is the USA, Scotland or South Africa.* (Cell A)
>
> *One aim is that when we have studied London, it is no longer a strange city.* (Cell D)
>
> *Somebody who has studied English should know who Shakespeare was and who wrote Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer.* (Cell D)
>
> *It is giving the students as broad insights as possible, it shouldn't just be the language but also a lot about everyday life, politics, history, art. (---) Here I think the textbooks fail sometimes. Greater demands are placed on the teachers that you should be able to introduce material and information outside the book, because it contains so little about culture.* (Cell D)

The objectives in Category 2.a resemble the second component in Byram's model of IC (see Figure 4), but also differ from it in at least two essential respects. Firstly, his *savoirs* concern knowledge of social groups and their products and practices, both in C1 and C2. My respondents did not refer to the students' own culture when discussing the transmission of information about cultures. Secondly, what Byram calls "knowledge of the general processes of societal and individual interaction" would in my model be attributed to Category 2.b.

5.3.2.2 Preparing for future intercultural encounters

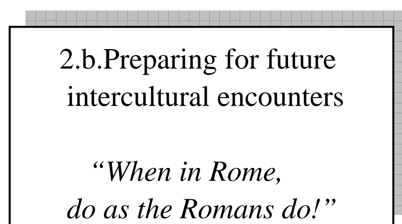

Figure 16. The cultural objective perceived as preparing for future intercultural encounters

Within this category, teachers see it as their task to give the pupils readiness to manage in direct contacts with individuals from the target culture(s). This approach is based on the idea that conflict situations should be predicted in order to be avoided. The student should *learn how* to act appropriately and respond adequately in intercultural situations, and should hence be made aware of rules

of conduct and of the pragmatic aspects of linguistic proficiency. The teaching objective is seen as making the pupils aware of the social and socio-linguistic conventions of the target-culture, implying that they should adapt themselves to the foreign culture in order to have better chances of coping and blending in. The students will consequently learn a repertoire of behaviour and manners as well as an arsenal of phrases that are typically used in specific situations.

Several teachers spoke about the importance of giving the pupils practice in concrete every-day situations, such as going to the grocery store, booking tickets or ordering food at a restaurant. As indicated earlier, phrases of politeness were strongly emphasised. One teacher mentioned taboo subjects, such as religion and politics, which should preferably be avoided at dinner table conversations in the USA.

The following excerpts may serve as illustrations:

> *I wish they would learn to communicate so that they would be understood and do right, that would be good. (---) So that they won't make fools of themselves. For example, do things that are not normally done in specific situations in that country, like Great Britain.* (Cell C)

> *They should learn to behave in another country and in another situation. For example, this little word "please." It's much more important than in Finland. It's more important to be polite. Here we talk to everybody in almost the same way.* (Cell C)

> *In dialogues they should learn to say "please" and "thank you".* (Cell C)

This view of the cultural objective of teaching seems to aim more at providing the students with "tools" regarding the specific target culture(s), than at developing ways of encountering cultures in general. Most statements within this category contain explicit reference to Britain and the United States.

Byram's *savoir-faire* (skills of interaction) is also related to specific situations in bi-cultural contact, i.e. between the culture(s) of the learner and of his/her interlocutor. In his model, he discusses the student's ability to operate knowledge, skills *and* attitudes in interactions with representatives of other cultures. By contrast, the utterances in Category 2.b are primarily related to ritualised behaviour, with little, if any, focus on affective aspects. These, however, abound in the last category illustrating my respondents' beliefs of cultural objectives.

5.3.2.3 Promoting tolerance and empathy

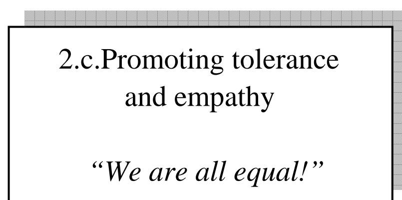

Figure 17. The cultural objective perceived as promoting tolerance and empathy

Within this category, the culture-teaching objective is described in terms of reducing ethnocentricity by working against stereotypes and prejudiced views of other cultures. Some teachers referred to racist expressions from pupils, and insinuated in that context that these often stem from the homes. Fostering tolerance is seen as especially important at the comprehensive-school level, since teenagers are at a stage of development where they tend to be receptive to different kinds of influence. At the same time, my respondents warn against allowing the teaching to become too coloured by the teacher's own views, and stress the importance of letting the students form their own opinions. The students should *learn to* respect others, and still not be told so explicitly. As one teacher pointed out, "it is no use demanding "You all have to be tolerant!", unless you first ensure that certain intermediate goals are set up and achieved."

Since intolerance is often caused by pure ignorance, a fundamental task is making the students aware of why representatives of other cultures act they way they do. Several teachers talked about the importance of making the students realise that there are many different ways of doing things, and that people with a different background cannot be considered strange or dumb simply because they happen to do things differently from us. We may not always accept certain features related to a specific culture, but an awareness of the value systems underlying its operation will enable respect and intercultural understanding.

Several teachers reported that if they have been able to arouse interest in foreign cultures and perhaps even create positive attitudes, they have already gone a long way towards tolerance and an "open mind", as one teacher put it.

> *Well, it is increased understanding for people and individuals from other countries and with other cultures. That somehow you could ... you have to work a lot against ... it comes into society …this with racism and such. In foreign language teaching I think it is pretty important to try and include increased tolerance, also a buzz word. But that you could convey the positive things about gaining an impression and that it is not dangerous to be influenced by the cultures in other countries, and that you could somehow encourage them to have contacts and not be afraid of having contacts with people from other countries and cultures.* (Cell B)

> *Well, that we wouldn't have ... such racist thoughts, for example ... or thoughts that they are dumb because they do what they do and our ways are the only right ones to*

do things ... and well, that they would become more tolerant towards other people. (Cell B)

The reason for why this is a vital goal to work towards is clearly expressed in the following utterance:

(...) In the long run it is important because there should be harmony in our world. We have just left the 20th century behind us and it was a horrible century, especially in Europe but also in the rest of the world. We have to do something about these things! It's extremely utopian, we will never reach absolute coexistence and absolute peace, but certainly it's all about this, both on a personal level and between nations. (Cell F)

A final look at Byram's model of IC suggests that his *savoir être,* involving the ability to understand another viewpoint and to relinquish ethnocentric attitudes, bears close resemblance to the thoughts put forward above. Several teachers spoke about their desire to bring about curiosity and openness towards otherness, as well as readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures.

Rounding off

To sum up, teachers' beliefs about cultural objectives can be divided into three categories, in accordance with the previously presented conceptions of culture. The teachers perceive their tasks as 2a: Providing the students with general background information that should be learnt and memorised, 2.b: Preparing them for future intercultural encounters by giving them social and sociolinguistic skills, and 2.c: Developing positive attitudes towards other cultures in general and the target culture(s) in particular, with the ultimate goal of promoting tolerance and empathy, and, in the long run, creating the breeding ground for peaceful co-existence.

The objective in 2.a can be seen as developing the student's intellect, whereas the objective in 2.b concerns influencing the student's behaviour as a preparation for situations to come. The objective in 2.c, however, cares for the entire individual by also taking into account the student's attitudes and feelings here and now, and bringing in personal development as an ultimate aim. The approach taken to culture and the teaching of culture can be described as holistic for three reasons: Firstly, it integrates both external and internal aspects of culture (observable facts as well as underlying value systems). Secondly, it takes both the C1 and the foreign culture(s) into consideration, and thirdly, it aims at the personal growth of the whole learner.

The three types of cultural objective elicited from the interviews can be seen as steps in a staircase, or as stages in a cumulative process. Category 2.b involves more than Category 2.a, and Category 2.c involves more than 2.b. Consequently, the higher you get on the staircase, the more difficult it is to reach that particular goal. It goes without saying that it is a much easier undertaking for a teacher to provide the students with factual bits and pieces, such as the number of inhabitants in Australia, than promoting genuinely positive and empathetic attitudes towards people with different backgrounds. Tolerance and empathy should be the ultimate goal, which requires that the previous objectives have been reached. Knowledge and skills can thus be seen as the foundation on which

deeper intercultural understanding could be fostered. This is illustrated in the figure below.

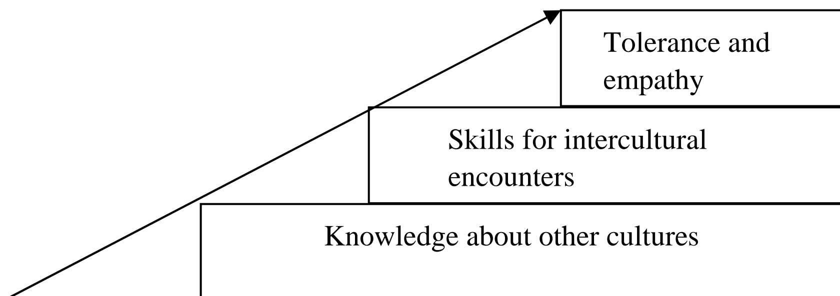

Figure 18. Illustration of the cumulative character of three cultural objectives

This reasoning can also be traced in both Seelye (1988) and Byram (1989). Seelye (1988, 48) points out that the learning of facts for their own sake is not justifiable. Much of what is done in the FL classroom in the name of “culture” is done in the hope of contributing to an affective change. However, he warns against formulating innocuous-sounding but impotent “supergoals” involving words such as “understanding” and “appreciation.” Such goals, Seelye writes, will have to be delineated to be useful. He himself lists seven intermediary goals of cultural instruction, and suggests different types of learning activities (1988, 48-59, 66-75). These, however, appear to be based more on a behaviourist-functionalist view of culture than a cognitive-symbolic one.

Attitude change, according to Byram (1989, 116), is dependent upon change in cognitive structures. He draws attention to the concepts “tolerance” and “empathy”, and the difference between the two. Tolerance, according to him, involves a “willingness to work and live with other people who are different, refraining from banishing them from our society as we do in the present, or even waging war upon them, as we have done in the past.” Empathy, Byram argues, is more demanding. It requires an activity rather than a passive acceptance. It requires a change of viewpoint which has to be worked towards and engaged with.

The question thus arises whether the idea of tolerance and empathy is a concrete goal that teachers are purposefully working towards in our comprehensive schools, or whether it is just a vague and distant vision, a “supergoal.” This leads us on to the third research question, bringing teachers’ descriptions of their own classroom practice into focus.

5.3.3 Teachers’ descriptions of their classroom practice (RQ3)

My third research question was “What do teachers do to attain these objectives?” My respondents were encouraged to discuss the methods they use to achieve

their cultural objectives. I also invited them to reflect upon their students prior cultural insights, and to what extent these are made use of in the classroom.

The approach taken to this topic varied considerably among my respondents. Two male teachers emphasised that culture is an integrated part in their teaching, and that it is therefore impossible to describe what particular methods they use to teach culture as opposed to other curricular objectives. This is in itself an interesting finding, implying that culture to them is not a separate component that requires a specific methodology, but something that permeates all classroom activity. However, their stories also reveal an interpretation of culture as primarily related to the socio-linguistic features of language learning. Vocabulary teaching was mentioned as an example where cultural issues are addressed. Words related to a particular topic, such as the school system in Great Britain, are taught with reference to its cultural context, and comparisons are made to the corresponding words in Swedish. Those teachers who felt that they do not include culture teaching in their classroom practice to any great extent chose to describe what a typical lesson might look like, and what methodology they generally apply when teaching English to their students.

Most teachers, however, gave detailed descriptions of methods, exercises and assignments, which illustrate their attempts to achieve their cultural objectives. Their stories are closely anchored in practical classroom situations, providing useful insights into the diverse ways in which culture can be taught. As can be seen in Figure 10, I have organised their forms of practice into three categories, according to the cognitive, the action-related and the affective orientation. Inspired by Kaikkonen (2004, 150-153), I have chosen the concept *Pedagogy of Information* for those classroom activities that are aimed at providing the students with factual knowledge related to the English-speaking countries. The concept *Pedagogy of Preparation* has been invented to denote activities aimed at preparing the students for future intercultural meetings. Again inspired by Kaikkonen (2004, 153-154), the concept *Pedagogy of Encounter* is used about forms of practice where the students meet the foreign culture in a dialogic process. One and the same teacher may discuss methods than can be attributed to more than one type of orientation.

5.3.3.1 Pedagogy of Information

Pedagogy of Information is used when the main purpose is to convey facts about the culture of the English-speaking countries, as this was defined in Chapter 5.3.1.1. Providing the students with information has traditionally been the main task of school education, where the teachers have possessed the knowledge and then transmitted it to their students. As working methods have become less and less teacher-centred, more responsibility has been passed on to the students, who are encouraged not only to be passive recipients of information but also explorers that are actively looking for that information themselves under the guidance of their teachers, and analyse it. Although the modes of acquiring factual knowledge are many, the underlying aim is still that the students should "be informed"; hence the concept *Pedagogy of Information.*

The teachers in my study discussed both teacher-centred and more learner-centred activities. These are often combined.

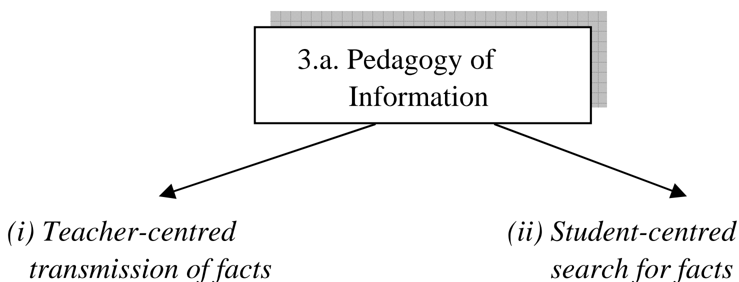

Figure 19. Classroom practice influenced by Pedagogy of Information

(i) Teacher-centred transmission of facts

Three teachers stated that they rely heavily on the textbook as a primary source of cultural information[33]. One teacher only said that she is extremely pleased with the book she uses in class, and thinks that it contains sufficient information about the English-speaking countries.

> *We use (-), from the seventh to the ninth grade. When we have gone through these textbooks, we have dealt with all the English-speaking countries, apart from the USA and ... Canada. (---) I think this series is very good, because it's really based on culture.* (Cell B)

The others feel an urgent need for supplementary information, and are constantly on the lookout for suitable texts that would add extra flesh to the bones.

Authentic material, such as newspaper articles, TV-documentaries and internet-texts are mentioned as examples of other sources of information. One male teacher stated that he begins every lesson by showing a 3-minute newsflash that he records on his VCR every morning. This, he says, widens his students' general knowledge about what is going on in the world, and also provides them with vocabulary related to current societal topics.

Another teacher described her way of teaching Australia to her students. To begin with, a mind-map is presented giving a holistic picture of the range of

[33] For an interesting analysis of ways in which culture figures in textbooks for teaching EFL and ESL, see Cortazzi & Jin (1999). They describe the various functions of the textbook as *teacher, map, resource, trainer, authority, de-skiller and ideology.* Their examination of textbooks reveals that some are based on source cultures (examples being EFL books for Turkey, Venezuela and Saudi Arabia), many focus on target cultures and some are aimed at international target cultures. The third category includes a wide variety of cultures set in English-speaking countries and in other countries where English is not a first or second language. Cortazzi & Jin conclude that the full realisation of the cultural content of textbooks ultimately depends on the participants in classroom interaction, all of whom are to be seen as major cultural resources. The method, they write, determines the use of the medium, and medium and method are culturally interdependent.

topics that will be dealt with in the lessons to come. These include history, the Aborigines, "Aussie" English, the Outback, indigenous animals and Sydney with its sights. The topics are dealt with using the textbook texts and supplementary material, which she herself has created either alone or in co-operation with her colleagues. These are designed to activate the learner, for example by stimulating them to combine "Aussie"-English words with their Standard-English equivalents, or fill in words missing from well-known Australian songs and then check with the tape.

According to several teachers, *realia* tends to be concentrated to the ninth form. This is attributed partly to the fact that the textbooks are organised in this way, and partly to the fact that students are not mature enough to take in this type of information at an earlier stage. One teacher, however, pointed out that culture-teaching should also have its place at the lower stages of comprehensive school, but did not want to speculate as to what that could comprise.

(ii) Student-centred search for facts

A popular working method intended to increase the students' knowledge about English-speaking cultures focuses on different forms of problem-solving, discovery-oriented project work. Students are put into groups and given the assignment to find out as much as possible about a specific theme. The themes are either presented by the teacher beforehand, or the students can themselves choose what to do their research on. Cities, American states, famous people and sights, different types of food, customs and traditions are mentioned as examples. The students should either prepare a poster covering their main findings, or a speech to be delivered to the rest of the class. The importance of making the findings of all student groups available to the others is stressed. This working method thus aims at a shared pool of knowledge. Some teachers use work sheets to check whether the students have actually learnt something from each other.

> *On the 8th grade... the last few years it has been about the American states. Each group chooses a state (---) or then it could be important people in the United States or Great Britain or important monuments.* (Cell H)

> *We agree on an English-speaking country. They say "Yes, this we want to look for!" or then I give them the information about what to concentrate on. Should it be more about traditions or more about sights and entertainment or ... Then they present in front of the class. Then I try to make everybody read each other's posters, with work papers.* (Cell B)

5.3.3.2 Pedagogy of Preparation

The pedagogy of preparation concept is used about working methods aimed at preparing the students for acting appropriately in future intercultural situations. The teachers referring to this approach, can be divided into two groups; those telling stories about incidents where intercultural meetings have gone wrong due to lack of skills, and those using dialogues to highlight and practice specific social and socio-linguistic patterns. The dialogues could be model-dialogues presented in the textbook, or dialogues that the students themselves produce, to

show that they have picked up and are able to use specific features that have been discussed previously in class.

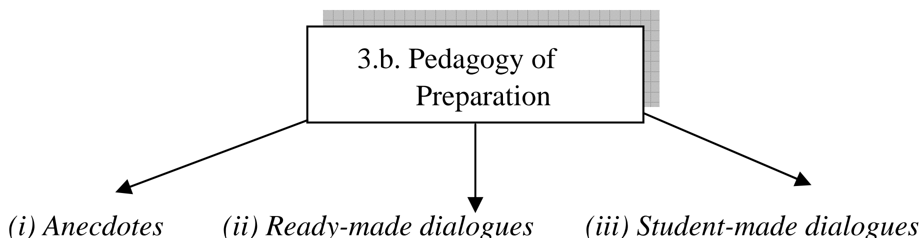

Figure 20. Classroom practice influenced by Pedagogy of Preparation

(i) Anecdotes

Anecdotes in this context can be defined as stories of a personal nature, which illustrate culturally determined divergences in thinking, acting and communicating. Often these are true stories about episodes or incidents where the person involved has made a mistake or caused an embarrassing scene due to lack of insights into the culturally appropriate way of behaving in a particular situation.

According to Müller (1995, 77-78), differences in etiquette are well-suited for anecdotes. With their help, prescribed rules of behaviour can be explained, which students can directly use in future encounters with members of a foreign culture. This may give them a sense of security about how they should behave. Another advantage of the anecdotal method is that they are the result of authentic experiences in intercultural situations, and that that they may encourage many students to reflect on and talk about their own experiences. Since anecdotes are suited to narration and discussion they are also useful in practising oral skills.

However, the cultural differences highlighted through anecdotes tend to focus on almost ritualised cultural interactions, where people are ascribed rigidly defined roles. Often they are constructed and narrated to achieve a particular effect on the listener, such as to make them laugh, to entertain them or to surprise them. According to Müller (1995, 79), one should therefore carefully consider to what extent they demonstrate what is genuinely typical of the foreign culture.

Two teachers discussed episodes of this kind as a way of demonstrating culture-specific behaviour.

> *I think that as soon as you tell them something that is not in the textbook, especially when you tell them something about yourself - "When I was in England, this and that happened" – that's interesting. (---) Preferably there could be situations where you have made a fool of yourself. That they remember.* (Cell C)

> *Well, I have a very concrete example from my summer in England, when I didn't know the difference between "sorry" and "excuse me." I used them incorrectly and*

was met by quite a few raised eyebrows. I bumped into somebody in a crowd and said "excuse me", and then he looked at me with horror and must have thought "What else is he going to do to me? He has already kicked my leg; what's next?".

(---) I don't have a very big arsenal of these stories, but those I have I tend to tell. (Cell G)

Although anecdotes tend to give just fragmented flashes of a foreign culture they should, in my opinion, not be underestimated as a way of increasing student awareness and interest. Hardly surprising, my respondents pointed out that their students tend to be much more interested in hearing stories about what has happened to their teacher in a shop in Britain than in reading a text or a dialogue about a similar situation. Incidents which are authentic will naturally stick to their memory better than a story invented by a textbook writer. Both teachers regret that they have not spent more time abroad and consequently do not have as many anecdotes at their disposal as they would like to have.

(ii) Ready-made dialogues

Two teachers referred to model dialogues in the textbook as the material they use to demonstrate both social and socio-linguistic features. Concrete, everyday activities such as booking tickets, going out to eat and similar kinds of consumer rituals are mentioned as examples of situations which the students are familiarised with through ready-made dialogues. Culturally appropriate phrases are emphasised and practised.

(iii) Student-made dialogues

One teacher only talked about dialogues which the students themselves produce to show that they are familiar with the key phrases associated with certain concrete situations. This type of working method places focus on how the knowledge the students have acquired through text study is applied and operationalised. In other words, students are expected to *do* something with the knowledge; put it in practice rather than just memorise it.

Well, it could be dialogues that they have come up with themselves, and then I point out that it's important to be polite. (Cell C)

5.3.3.3 Pedagogy of Encounter

The Pedagogy of Encounter concept is used about working methods aimed at reducing ethnocentric attitudes and fostering tolerance and empathy towards members of foreign cultures in general and the target culture(s) in particular. The teaching of culture is seen as a reciprocal, dialogic process where the student's own culture and the foreign culture(s) are taken into consideration. Both cultures interact either in simulated or authentic encounters, where changes in perspective are made possible. The interlocutors become aware of their own points of view at the same time as they gain insight into the viewpoints of the other. This enables the relativisation of one's own taken-for-granted ways of looking at the world, which in turn forms the breeding ground for respect and tolerance for others. In this respect, subsequent reflection and discussion play a

vital role, since it encourages the students to express their experiences verbally and sharing them with others in the class.

I would also like to regard reflection and discussion as a working method in itself, since many teachers refer to it as a special strategy to raise the students' intercultural awareness.

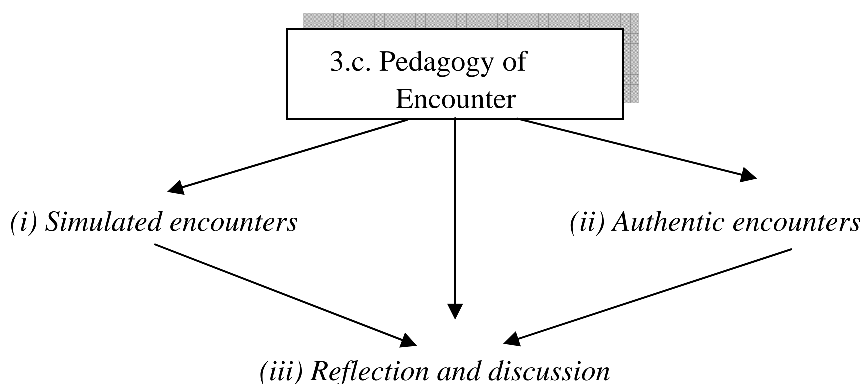

Figure 21. Classroom practice influenced by Pedagogy of Encounter

(i) Simulated encounters

I have chosen the term *simulated encounters* about cultural meetings that do not take place in reality, but which are either mental constructs or role-plays initiated by the teacher with the purpose of giving the students the possibility to experience what it might be like to meet members of another culture. One teacher's description of a simulation exercise was particularly vivid. However, since this exercise had the primary function of stimulating reflection and discussion, it will be dealt with under that heading below.

(ii) Authentic encounters

In this study, authentic encounters refer to genuine meetings in real life between students and representatives of the TC or other cultures taking place in the classroom. To my surprise, none of my respondents talked about immigrant pupils as resources in this respect, although there are hardly any comprehensive schools in Finland that would not have at least one student with a foreign background. Foreign exchange students, on the other hand, are mentioned by several. However, as they tend to be one or two years older than comprehensive school students, they normally spend their year in Finland at the upper secondary school. Consequently, they are not permanent schoolmates but temporary guests on grades 7–9.

One teacher told me that whenever she can, she invites foreign exchange students to come to the class to talk about themselves and their country. She described in great detail a specific visit where an American exchange student had made a great contribution. The Finnish students had been organised into

groups beforehand, and given topics to discuss with the guest, who went from group to group having informal chats with all students in turn. Those groups who waited for her to arrive were engaged in other activities, such as checking their homework, listening to a tape or reading from the textbook. The arrangement had been highly successful, thanks to the fact that the guest did not just stand in front of the class giving a formal presentation but actually addressed all students personally in the group conversations. The Finnish students had had the possibility to prepare questions or comments in advance, which benefited weaker students and students less inclined to spontaneously come up with something to say. Whether or not they actually stuck to their assigned topics was irrelevant. The primary reward was that the students met with an American and talked with her, if not for more than 15 minutes.

Another teacher mentioned regular visits from an American congregation. She too had made the observation that even the most introvert students tend to find the courage and motivation to ask questions when given the opportunity to talk to native speakers.

Not only foreign students but also teachers are used as resources in authentic intercultural encounters. One teacher informed me about an ongoing international project within the European Union, in which schools from five countries co-operate. The purpose is to highlight the things we have in common, despite our different languages and cultures. Student and teacher visits are organised, and one concrete result of the co-operation, which also integrates several subjects within one and the same school, is a cookery book containing recipes from all five countries.

All the encounters mentioned above take place face to face. However, virtual contacts also have their place within this category, as these were mentioned by one of my respondents as a possible way of promoting intercultural understanding. Internet chatting with people from other cultures is seen as a possible way of reducing mental barriers, as can be seen from the following extract:

> *And I think that through the internet they have contact in their spare time. They may not always think that now I am sitting chatting with someone from China in English. Hopefully they become more tolerant. A more open society.* (Cell B)

(iii) Reflection and discussion

Two young female teachers emphasise reflection as a method for raising their students' intercultural awareness. In their classroom practice, reflection is encouraged as a means of decentreing, that is stepping out of the taken-for-granted perspective to gain new insights. One of the teachers described the way she uses a text about the experiences of a South African boy during the apartheid era as the basis for reflection.

> *In the book there was a black guy who was on a baseball team. He was sitting on a bus and always came home hungry from their trips because he was the only black person and couldn't eat in the same restaurants as the others. Then they (the students) should think and discuss. Why? What would you have done in a similar situation? Put yourself in the black boy's situation and in his team mates' situation!*

They should really reflect upon why things like this happen and perhaps try to come up with examples from their own world and ... just become aware of things. (Cell B)

Asking the students to reflect upon what they would do in a similar situation, forces them to put themselves into the shoes of others, realising that there might be several different reasons why people behave the way they do, and that things may not be as black and white as they appear from our familiar Finland-Swedish horizon.

Later in the interview, the same teacher expressed her helplessness when confronted with the rigidity of stereotypes.

And then I might turn the table around and say "If you as a white person go to the blackest parts of Africa, where there are hardly any whites or they have very seldom seen whites, then you are in that same situation ... then you are the ones being stared at. Well, then they (the students) make comments like "You said it yourself, negroes are also racists!" (---) No, no, everything can be distorted so quickly and it's so difficult to try to get rid of the stereotypes of 15-year olds. Maybe they get them from home .... (Cell B)

Stereotypes are also in focus in another young female teacher's description of a fascinating class activity, where the students simulate a multicultural cocktail party. Each student is assigned a different nationality and is then supposed to mingle with the other guests - plastic glass in hand - acting in ways intended to give the others clues as to where they are from. In other words, they are supposed to behave and speak as one would expect a Japanese, a Frenchman, an Arab or a Finn to act. Students may speak English in a characteristic accent or display culture-specific behaviour that they have previously discussed in class. After the activity, each student is invited to explain what it was that made him or her guess the cultural background of the others. The purpose of the activity is to bring stereotypes about other nationalities to the fore, to help the students recognise the nature of stereotypes and transcend them. The students are encouraged to think about the stereotypes other nationalities might have about us Finns. These are used as the starting point for reflection. When the students notice how ridiculous stereotypes about us Finns appear, they simultaneously become aware of how false their own prejudgmental attitudes towards other nationalities may be. This teacher thus deliberately works with stereotypes in order to reduce them. She thinks that foreign language teaching is especially well-suited for this type of work, and that intercultural matters can be drawn into the teaching in a natural way. However, later in the interview she warns teachers against bringing their own values too clearly into the open and being very explicit about what they really want to achieve in terms of increased tolerance.

I think you should be careful about talking too much. Perhaps you don't need to use words like "racism." It's more that you go through the cultures and traditions of different countries, so that they would become interested that way. Not you standing there saying "This is good and this is not that good." Not too much of your own values .. Although the goal in the background is these positive things ... understanding. (Cell B)

This statement reflects the idea discussed above that knowledge should be the first step towards, what I have chosen to name, the ultimate goal. Positive attitudes and tolerance cannot be taught the way that vocabulary and grammar

structures are taught. They are to be seen as the desired outcome of the students' own personal development, and should come naturally as a result of increased knowledge and interest.

Two other teachers informed me that intercultural issues in their lessons are often raised through more or less improvised discussions. Often these discussions are spontaneously initiated by the students as a result of a text they have studied in class or a film they have seen. One teacher pointed out that since students of this age are often extreme in their opinions, discussions tend to be lively. One comment or question leads to another, and the outcome is unpredictable. These discussions are encouraged by the teachers, who have no desire to interrupt them or restrain them, even though they might involve deviation from the original lesson plan. According to my respondents, what the students lose in terms of prepared lesson content, they gain in terms of argumentation skills, oral practice and an increased awareness of the complexity of intercultural issues.

The discussions are often not restricted to the English-speaking world, as the following interview extract illustrates:

> *It's like this: During a lesson we get into many different situations, so many different things and questions pop up which lead us on to other things. It could begin with Japan, then suddenly we are in South Africa, jump over to Russia and then to the USA. I don't normally keep a strict line in a discussion, like "This does not belong here because we're talking about South Africa today.* (Cell B)

Within all three types of classroom practice described by my respondents – Pedagogy of Information, Pedagogy of Preparation and Pedagogy of Encounter – attempts are made to take the students' possible prior insights into consideration. *Insights* should here be understood as an umbrella term covering cognitive, action-related and affective aspects. According to the teachers, some students appear quite ignorant of cultural aspects and even of the fact that they can be seen as an essential part of foreign language studies. Others know, or think they know, quite a lot about other cultures. This is attributed primarily to increasing travel and media-input. Those few students who have lived in a foreign country for a period of time tend to display awareness of, for example, the ways and habits of people living there, what food they eat, what the atmosphere there is like and generally, how society is run. Students with experience of living or travelling abroad, regardless of whether the destination has been an English-speaking country or not, are always encouraged to share their experiences and observations with the others. They are invited to show photos, bring artefacts to the class or even have a little presentation about what they have learnt. The others are encouraged to ask questions; however, according to one teacher, this seldom works unless the class is exceptionally outspoken.

Apparently, different teachers use slightly different strategies to student input of this type. One experienced teacher said she thinks students who know something out of the ordinary should be given the opportunity to shine a little in front of the others. Another teacher informed me that she does not want to glorify students who know a lot about other cultures just because their families happen to be able to afford trips abroad. Certainly, she asks them to comment on their experiences,

but she is careful about not leaving other students outside by giving too much time and attention to students who have just returned from overseas.

The attitudes towards the influence of the media regarding the students' cultural insights vary among my respondents. Some of them highlight the fact that students know a lot thanks to film, TV, the internet, magazines and newspapers, whereas others fear that what students really pick up are stereotypical views of other nationalities. The teachers within the latter category seem unanimous on the point that what the students see on TV and films concerning primarily the USA and Great Britain, they take as genuine reflections of what people and society are like there. The students themselves think that they know a lot about American culture in particular, but in reality the teachers assess their insights as shallow and one-sided.

> *They don't really know so much more than what they see in films. And they think that what they see in films* ***is*** *life in Great Britain and the USA, which it's not. (---) Their conceptions are so incredibly coloured by this video culture.* (Cell D)

Two teachers had made the observation that the stereotypes are particularly visible, and to some extent also negative, concerning Britain, the British and British culture. This supports the findings made by Forsman (see Chapter 2.3.2, page 57).

> *They don't know a lot about Great Britain. They have prejudices but they don't know. More about America, I'm surprised sometimes.* (Cell B)

> *They really say their prejudices out loud. And when you start asking them questions you notice that in the end they really know extremely little.* (Cell B)

The second teacher speaking above has experience of teaching both young children and retired people. She told me that she finds it extremely interesting to compare the conceptions that different age groups hold of different nationalities. In her opinion, foreign language teachers are in an exceptionally favourable position to address both stereotypes and prejudiced views in a natural way, which is something she herself has purposefully set out to do.

Rounding off

To sum up, the types of classroom practice described by my informants can be divided into three categories. The first of these, Pedagogy of Information, involves providing the students with factual information about the English-speaking countries. The facts are either transmitted in a traditional way through teacher-centred activities, where the students tend to be passive observers or recipients, or acquired as a result of the students' own research-based inquiries. This is the type of cultural studies that FL teaching has traditionally included, but which most theorists today find insufficient. The accounts of the majority of my informants can be attributed to Pedagogy of Information. This is hardly surprising considering that most interviewees also represent conceptions of culture as factual knowledge (see Appendix III, page 167).

The second category, Pedagogy of Preparation, aims at preparing the students for behaving appropriately when meeting people from, primarily, Britain and the USA. The focus here tends to be on ritualised social behaviour or

conventionalised linguistic responses. Anecdotes and ready-made or student-made dialogues serve as instructional activities, often highlighting differences between the students' own culture and the TC. Although several informants describe culture in terms of skills that should be acquired, very few talk about methods intended to provide these skills. In fact, only three interviewees' stories can be placed within this category.

The third category, Pedagogy of Encounter, aims at reducing ethnocentric views by fostering positive attitudes towards and respect for representatives of both the target culture and other cultures in general. Students are given the opportunities to experience both simulated and authentic encounters, whereupon they are encouraged to reflect upon the thoughts and feelings evoked through these intercultural meetings. Subsequent discussions with the other students in the class are considered important. Reflection as a method for processing and analysing intercultural learning experiences is discussed by Kaikkonen (1994) and Forsman (2004b), among others. Kaikkonen (1994, 152) stresses that reflection should have both an individual and a collective dimension. Every student has the possibility to come to terms with his or her own experiences and to evaluate them, but it is only within the peer group that they are relativised and may open up new perspectives. The group thus acts as a reflector. Forsman is convinced that the FL classroom can provide opportunities for reflection that may lead to an awareness that the students might not have reached on their own. She also thinks that reflection may give the students tools that could be used in a wide range of situations, both inside and outside the classroom. The teacher should thus try to create systematic opportunities for guided reflection, as well as recognise the spontaneous possibilities for this type of classroom work as they arise.

It is interesting to note that although many informants stated that their main cultural objective is to foster tolerance and empathy (Category 2.c), few of them apply teaching strategies beyond the level of transmission of facts. Pedagogy of Encounter, which represents a truly intercultural approach to language teaching, can in fact be found primarily in the accounts of informants in Cell B. Apparently, teachers who themselves have first-hand experience of other cultures are more inclined to have both the motivation and the initiative to create intercultural experiences in the classroom.

5.3.4 Teachers' views on the results and constraints of culture teaching

5.3.4.1 Assessment

Having discussed their practical classroom work, my respondents were encouraged to reflect upon the extent they think they succeed in reaching their cultural objectives. Most teachers thought that their students do learn something, but added that as teachers they are constantly facing feelings of inadequacy, regardless of the subject matter. Those teachers that earlier in the interview had emphasised the importance of arousing their students' general interest in English as a school subject (see Chapter 5.1, page 97) pointed out that being able to ignite some kind of spark towards other cultures is extremely satisfactory.

Occasionally you see it in their eyes, that something has been lit. That's great! (---). You get direct feedback. Nobody is sitting there looking at their watches. Then you feel that you have succeeded. And if you even hear them talking when they leave the classroom, you get so happy … those few times! (Cell B)

Evaluating the effects of teaching as far as the intercultural dimension is concerned was generally considered difficult. The majority of the teachers do not pay any significant attention to this dimension when testing their students. Their tests tend to be traditional check-ups of vocabulary and grammar structures.

Testing is pretty traditional, there tend to be a lot of structures, spelling, grammar and such. Less culture, in fact. (Cell D)

(---) my opinion is that when I give them a grade in English, culture is not the main thing. It's perhaps a bit old-fashioned but the grade is based on how active you are during the lessons – well, of course you are also active if you talk about what you know about culture! I test grammar and word order of course. (Cell B)

My informants admitted that culture in the sense of factual knowledge is possible to check in formal tests, for example by including questions on *realia*[34], but nobody actually does it. One teacher mentioned that the students tend to find such questions out of place in an English language test.

In the last tests by Sukol35 there have been such things, for example that they were to know that Australia is called Down Under and words such as "outback." These are things that I try to transmit, but I have never tested them, as a matter of fact. They were fairly perplexed when these things turned up in a national Sukol test, although we have talked about it. (Cell D)

For several teachers it does not appear relevant to test such knowledge, especially since every teacher might have different subjective opinions concerning what factual bits and pieces are significant enough to be checked up in a test paper. This was also the view held by the two upper secondary school teachers I talked to, one of whom expresses his views on testing culture as follows:

Perhaps it's possible but I don't know if it's really relevant or necessary to ... I mean, it's an important part but it comes naturally in a way, when you talk about everything else. I can't imagine myself making a test on a specific factual point about something. Those are things that they automatically pick out as we discuss texts (…).

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[34] These types of objective (easily scored) tests have been criticised by Nostrand (1974), among others. He believed that they did greater damage since they reduced the teaching and learning to a study of fragmented, incomplete and sometimes even inaccurate pieces of information.

[35] Sukol=Suomen kieltenopettajien liitto; the Federation of Foreign Language Teachers in Finland. Sukol is a pedagogical organisation whose aim is to promote language skills by developing the instruction of foreign languages, teaching materials and supporting the language teachers in Finland. Among other things, it produces national language tests, which schools may use for their students in 9th grade. These give the individual schools the possibility to compare the level of their students with the level of students in the rest of the country.

One specific course contains facts about the political system in the USA, the Senate and such. I mean, you can discuss such things but I would never have them read it as factual knowledge ... that they should be able to write about the House of Representatives in a test. (Cell E)

Another male teacher spoke to the same effect.

Well, if we read a text or a chapter on London, there could be facts about London, but I would never check facts about London in a test. I don't know if it's right or wrong, but I don't do it. One could very well do it but I have chosen not to. (Cell H)

This teacher later brought attention to the fact that it would be an entirely different matter if there were a list available on all the facts that comprehensive-school students are supposed to obtain regarding the culture of specific countries. The 2004 NFC provides very meagre guidelines in this respect. As became clear in Chapter 3.2.3, the final-assessment criteria for grade 8 involve cultural skills defined as knowledge about "the way of life, and history of, the target language's language region" (NFC 2004, 143). It fails to specify which region is referred to, and leaves it to the discretion of the schools and the teachers to interpret the wording as they see fit. Two respondents discussed the contradiction which they think exists within the document. On the one hand, it implies that culture can and in fact should be assessed, but on the other hand, it leaves the teachers out in the field uncertain about how this could be accomplished.

It's extremely difficult. I don't know what they've had in mind. I mean, if they say that the students should acquire cultural competence[36]*, one would have to be able to measure it somehow.* (Cell D)

It is worth noting at this stage that although the cultural objectives of the NFC also include more action-related aspects, described as "learning to communicate and act in normal day-to-day situations in a manner acceptable in the subject culture", these do not re-occur in the passage on assessment. This can be taken as an indication that only knowledge should be assessed, not skills (what adds to the confusion is that the concept "cultural skills" is used throughout the document, also when what is referred to is pure knowledge). In the light of this, it is interesting to find two experienced teachers in my study claiming that culture-appropriate behaviour and socio-linguistic features can in fact be assessed. One of them informed me that he tries to pay attention to culture-appropriate use of language in his tests, for example by including dialogues where the other interlocutor's lines are missing. The students should then complete the dialogue with suitable utterances, displaying that they are aware of both social and socio-linguistic conventions. He admits that these tasks test culture in a fairly shallow manner, and that other pragmatic features, such as intonation and non-verbal communication, will be left out altogether.

Sometimes in tests we have situation-bound dialogues where the other half is omitted. This may have something to do with culture (---). They should be aware that if somebody asks "Would you like some…?", they should say "thank you" or

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[36] This informant referred to the Swedish version of the National Framework Curriculum, which lists *kulturell kompetens* as one of the teaching objectives. In the English version, the concept used is "cultural skills".

"thanks" after a "no" or "Yes, please." Really simple things that you can learn mechanically in a way. (Cell G)

The most ambitious objective of ILT, the promotion of tolerance and empathy, naturally poses the greatest challenges also with regard to assessment. My respondents were well aware that prejudices and racism are intricate and sensitive matters that they as teachers should go about very carefully. Checking whether their teaching has actually contributed to more positive attitudes and a personal growth in their students appears to them to be an almost impossible undertaking.

It's such a personal thing, this with tolerance and racism and prejudice. It could be sensitive ... (Cell B)

The majority of my respondents concluded that cultural aspects are best evaluated through practical exercises, such as discussions, project assignments, role-plays and simulations. However, none of them mentioned portfolios. They see a risk that teaching content that is not followed up in formal tests will not be considered important by the students[37].

It easily happens that you have a project lasting for several lessons, and you discuss traditions or whatever, and then you leave it there, as if it wasn't that important. I think you don't necessarily need to have it in tests, but you should still prove that it's important, and not something we do just for fun. (---) Often when I've had project assignments, they don't just do their presentation or hang up a poster on the wall. They also have question sheets that they go around with and look up the answers. (Cell B)

When they write essays and do project assignments ... if they write about countries and cultures that we have dealt with, there you can see…(Cell D)

I've tried to give points to discussions. There it is revealed ... Those who have opinions talk and are given credits for it. (Cell H)

Quite a few teachers confessed that their own work could be improved towards a more intercultural approach. Many respondents let me understand that they find culture more important than they make it in their own teaching. The teacher speaking in the excerpt below expressed frustration about the fragmented and improvised manner in which cultural aspects are addressed in her classroom.

It's important, but at the same time I think I could do so much more. Because it feels as if there's a little bit here and a little bit there, what happens to pop up in some context. But I think it's more important than I make it in my teaching. (Cell C)

This led the interviews into a discussion about what they would *like* to do concerning culture, but which, for various reasons, they do not get around to doing.

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[37] This fact is also discussed by Sercu (2004), who speaks strongly in favour of designing tools for assessing intercultural competence (IC). Assessment is important for all parties concerned; learners, teachers and parents. She also draws attention to the "backwash effect" it has on teaching. Teachers tend to teach what will be tested, meaning that the type of assessment applied in national exams directly influences what happens in the classrooms.

5.3.4.2 Ambitions and obstacles

The most spontaneous comment from my respondents was that they wish they could take their classes to an English-speaking country for a week or at least a couple of days, to make their students acquainted with e.g. British culture in an authentic environment. One teacher also spoke enthusiastically about setting up contact with English-speaking classes abroad, and subsequently visiting them. However, in the same breath she pointed out that three years is a very short time for establishing a solid foundation for international ventures of this calibre, and that everything depends on whether the project can be externally financed. All teachers referring to trips abroad realised that these are fairly unrealistic dreams, and quickly moved on to talk about other ambitions with respect to classroom activities.

> *I would like to take all my classes to as many English-speaking countries as possible. (---) If we can't go there I would bring in native speakers.* (Cell B)

In fact, several teachers said they would like to have native speakers coming to their classes, preferably on a regular basis. Visits of this type, they said, would be a welcome supplement to their own teaching and provide their students with opportunities for real intercultural encounters. As indicated above, very few teachers actually make use of this possibility, although many acknowledge its potential for raising the students' interest and increasing their intercultural awareness. Seelye (1988, 25) addresses the discomfort that some non-native teachers tend to feel in the presence of native speakers. He attributes this, among other things, to the fact that teachers may not be used to following speech at conversational speed, have not themselves learnt what to talk about and what to avoid, and may not have learnt the cultural referents to the topics of discussion. According to one experienced informant, fear of criticism from native speakers regarding things like the teacher's pronunciation or choice of words may also play a part. She herself always points out to her students that "we are all learners", and that she is not bothered by the fact that her non-native accent is revealed as soon as she opens her mouth.

A few teachers wished they could devote more time to literature, film and theatre; that is cultural products of the kind that teenage students do not normally get in touch with outside school. One young teacher spoke about taking her classes to art exhibitions and to the theatre. She also hoped she could inspire her students to one day put up a play in English. Another teacher pointed out that leaving the course book altogether and focussing on literature for a period of time would be a refreshing methodological change, which would probably mean that all the obligatory linguistic aspects would come in naturally.

One experienced teacher, on the other hand, said she would like to get hold of a course book that would contain more dialogues highlighting culture-specific behaviour. She wished she were more proficient when it comes to setting up situations in the classroom where her students would receive practice in acting appropriately in specific social situations. This teacher, clearly representing conceptions of culture as skills to be acquired for future intercultural contacts, admitted that ready-made dialogues might be more relevant on the lower grades. Still, she felt they would support her in her endeavour to teach her students social and socio-linguistic conventions.

It is obvious that the ambitions described by my respondents reflect their conceptions of culture and their beliefs about the cultural objectives of their teaching. When asked about why they consider themselves unable to realise their ambitions, my respondents discussed a wide range of constraints or obstacles. The list below is ordered by the number of respondents referring to a particular obstacle. Thus, the first obstacles were mentioned by most teachers, whereas the last ones were referred to by just one. Naturally, these obstacles are interrelated.

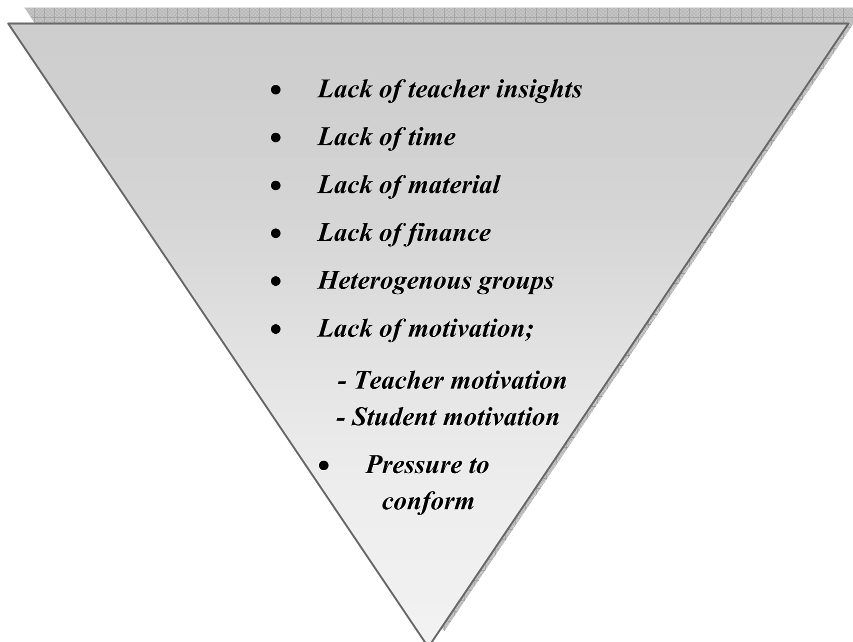

Figure 22. Factors perceived as obstructing the teaching of culture

Lack of teacher insights

All teachers feel that they do not have sufficient insights into cultural aspects and how they could be properly addressed in their teaching. Some attributed this to the fact that they have not spent as much time in English-speaking countries as they think they should have. In fact, they might even have students with considerably more experience of stays abroad.

Several teachers pointed out that unless you have first-hand experience of a specific country and its culture, the picture you convey of it will inevitably be superficial, because it will be based simply on what you have read or heard other people talk about. One teacher informed me that she is much more comfortable teaching French culture, since French is her main subject and her experience of living in French-speaking countries fairly extensive. She has to prepare more for

her English lessons, and still feels that something essential is missing; a kind of personal touch based on experience.

The majority of my respondents also referred to their own education to become teachers, which they do not think fully met the demands placed upon today's teachers-of-language-*and*-culture. Since the early 1970's, all teacher education in Finland has been university-based and leads to a Master's degree. The education of class teachers is mainly the responsibility of the teacher education departments which belong to the university faculties of education. The education of subject teachers is the joint responsibility of subject departments and the teacher education departments.

Thus, future foreign language teachers first spend about three years at the Faculty of Humanities, studying generally two languages taught in school, and then take part in one year of teacher training at the Faculty of Education. The language studies tend to involve literature, linguistics and an obligatory stay in an English-speaking country. The teacher training programme involves both theoretical and practical preparation. The theoretically oriented preparation takes place at the departments of teacher education, whereas the practically oriented preparation is mainly undertaken by guiding teachers in separate training schools and to some extent also in so-called field schools. The universities aim at contributing to a research-based way of knowing and reasoning, while the teaching staff guides student teachers to act in classrooms inside particular school cultures (Hansén 1999, 104). Swedish-speaking teachers receive their training from the Faculty of Education at the Swedish-speaking university of Åbo Akademi. Two of my respondents conducted their language studies at Finnish-speaking universities, and all but one completed their teacher training at Åbo Akademi.

The teacher education was generally considered both broad and advanced by my respondents. However, from the point of view of culture, criticism was expressed towards both the language studies and the subsequent pedagogical studies. Several teachers pointed out that hardly any courses on the culture of the English-speaking countries were offered, and that cultural aspects were limited to literature studies. These, however, focussed primarily on advanced classical prose and poetry, rather than modern literature that would provide insights into everyday life in contemporary British or American society. Many of my respondents felt that reading 18th century fiction was stimulating and interesting for them personally, but that it gave them as future comprehensive-school or upper secondary school teachers very little that they could actually use in their own teaching.

> *It's on a high level, based on literature. You learn things that you would never deal with neither at the comprehensive school, nor at the upper secondary school. (---) Does it have to be on such a high level? More about everyday life.* (Cell D)

Generally speaking, the language studies were considered too theoretical, involving things that they feel they have never had use for in their teaching profession. What they picked up in terms of cultural insights came from the obligatory stay in an English-speaking country, which all respondents found extremely rewarding.

A more practical approach was also missing from their pedagogical studies. Several respondents wished they would have spent less time on pedagogical and didactic theory, and more time on practical teaching methods. One respondent informed me that her interest in the intercultural dimension of language teaching, and especially the use of role-plays as a method for working against stereotypes, was awakened during her teacher training. All the others, however, failed to recall specific courses or modules that would have trained them for ILT. This they highly regret because they often feel at a loss when trying to include cultural aspects in their classroom work, and almost have to "start from scratch", as one teacher put it. In their opinion, language teacher education in the future should definitely involve increased focus on the intercultural dimension of teaching. Their views of what such a programme might look like can be summarised as follows:

a) More courses designed to provide insights into the culture of the English-speaking countries;

> *As for the language studies, the cultures of the English-speaking countries could be emphasised. That you could attend courses that would deal specifically with the cultures of Great Britain, North America; a little bit about their history and other things, so that you would acquire some kind of readiness.* (Cell E)

> *Well, you would have to learn more about other countries. When I studied, there was one teacher from England and one from America. But there was nobody from Canada, India or Australia.* (Cell B)

b) greater focus on methodological skills related to culture teaching;

> *In the subject didactics, sensible ways of dealing with these things could be discussed.* (Cell E)

> *In the teacher training it would be good if everybody would get the chance to try out a cultural aspect. When I did my training, it varied a lot. Some could get a topic for four lessons, and that could be Australia. But I heard about a friend who just had grammar. It would be important if you were given the freedom to bring in cultural aspects.* (Cell B)

c) increased opportunity to spend also longer periods of time abroad, in order to gain experience of genuine intercultural contacts.

> *I suppose it's still obligatory to spend a certain amount of time abroad. That time could be prolonged.* (Cell C)

> *Obligatory stays in the target country already existed when I studied. But nothing was said about what the stay should contain. I spent a whole summer waiting at a café in Germany, and of course I learnt something about that, but I could have done something much more sensible. (---) I think it's important that they try to replant people in an authentic environment and give them something sensible to do while they are there. Not just say "Go to England!"(…)* (Cell D)

One teacher pointed out how extremely valuable it would be if student teachers were given the possibility to go abroad to teach in multicultural classrooms. Another teacher called for increasing collaboration between Finnish universities and universities abroad with regard to language teacher training. He himself has

experience of working as a non-native teacher of English in the USA, within the framework of the Fulbright Program[38].

Two novice teachers regretted that the tight programme of their own teacher training allowed limited time for reflection and debate, and consequently little room for personal development. One young teacher described her training period in terms of "stuffing sausages" and said she was disappointed to notice that the student teachers were taught in a style that they themselves were discouraged to use when teaching their own students. According to the more experienced teachers, you grow into your role as a teacher as you work; hence your own classroom is the place where you really learn your trade. Moreover, it is up to yourself to make sure you gain new insights by educating yourself further.

The vast majority of my informants said they would appreciate in-service training in the field of ILT. Methodological hints as to how culture could be integrated in their teaching would be more than welcome, but also possibilities to attend courses abroad. One teacher admitted that he would probably need in-service training, but felt reluctant about the idea of learning things that he fears he would not have time to implement anyway. He wanted to make it clear to me that pressure to have time for all the obligatory things is a stronger factor than his antipathy towards changing his ingrained teaching practice towards a more culture-oriented approach.

Lack of time

Interestingly enough, most of the other respondents also complained that they do not have enough time for dealing with cultural aspects. Those two male teachers working at the upper secondary school pointed out that the six-period system adopted by their schools allows very little time for what they call extra activities. Each period comprises six weeks, and within that limited time space they have a tight syllabus that should be completed. Grammar structures, text study as well as reading- and listening comprehension exercises are prioritised, with the motivation that the students should be efficiently trained for the matriculation examination. One upper secondary school teacher said he considers grammar teaching an instrument for achieving communicative competence, which is the most important goal of his teaching. Cultural aspects are inevitably pushed into the background.

> *I don't want to say that culture is of less importance, but considering the situation they are in and the conditions we have, it may happen that culture is sometimes pushed into the background.* (Cell E)

> *Grammar ... that I have to go through. In the end, they are supposed to do the matriculation examination (…) and it's my fault if there's a detail that they don't know about.* (Cell F)

[38] The Fulbright Program, established in 1946, provides opportunities for students, scholars, teachers, trainees and other persons to participate in educational exchange programmes. Its aim is to "increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries…."
(http: exchanges.state.gov/education/fulbright/)

Several comprehensive school teachers referring to lack of time attributed this to the new distribution of lesson hours, which the 2004 NFC brought in its wake. In practice, the reform means that the number of English lessons in most schools has been cut down from 3 weekly lessons on grade 7 and 8 to merely 2. Consequently, all three grades at the upper level of the comprehensive school now have to settle with just 2 lessons, as a consequence of the lower stages of the comprehensive school gaining extra lessons in English. This is highly regretted by my respondents, who feel that it will inevitably result in something being left out from the curriculum. "All that extra, all that is fun will have to go", as one teacher said. At the time of the interview, she was in the process of writing the local version of the curriculum. She felt that she could not leave out significant grammar structures, and said she dreaded the day when people would look at her school's curriculum and say: "What's this, you're doing the same things you have always done!"

From one informant's point of view, resources are removed from where the expertise lies.

> *The lessons won't be lost, because in a way they are saved for English. But the upper level of the comprehensive school does have specially trained teachers, so it is a shame. That can't be denied. (---) This is where the subject expertise is.* (Cell D)

One young teacher said she was shocked when she heard about the reform, and fears that the interest of the pupils in the subject of English could be killed if cultural issues were left out because of a lack of lesson resources. She thus sees a conflict between teaching the required grammar structures, and keeping the interest of the students alive with the help of cultural elements. In her opinion, this places greater demands on teachers to produce teaching material that would combine linguistic and cultural aspects, since the textbooks do not represent such an integrated approach. She appreciates the fact that the local schools have the possibility to realise the core guidelines as they see fit, but admits that it is a challenging thing to do, which will undoubtedly be strongly influenced by the teachers' personal beliefs and priorities. She herself said she will stick to her goals as far as culture teaching is concerned, despite limited time.

When reading between the lines, I cannot help seeing contradictions within the teachers' utterances. On the one hand, most of them do not give an especially high priority to the intercultural dimension in their teaching. Communicative competence is their primary teaching goal. When faced with a situation where some teaching content will have to be excluded from the school curriculum due to the reform, many fear that culture will have to go whereas grammatical structures will have to remain. This is something they regret, because they feel the pupils will be deprived of something they apparently have not been taught before either.

Lack of material

Nearly half of my respondents talked about a lack of appropriate material that would convey the culture of the English-speaking cultures in a fresh and stimulating way. They refer to books and different types of texts, but also films that would illustrate culture-specific behaviour. They are aware that material exists, but find it difficult to get hold of it. The books in libraries are considered

outdated, and the material to be found on the internet tends to be linguistically too complicated for comprehensive school students. It would have to be reconstructed to suit the level of the students. One teacher pointed out that rewriting texts from the internet as well as producing vocabulary lists is a time-consuming activity, which may result in the teacher rather leaving it altogether and sticking to the textbook. A lack of learner-appropriate material can thus partly be attributed to the lack of time discussed above. One male teacher pointed out that he himself thinks that the textbook he uses would very well suffice, but it is his students that express more or less explicit demands for other types of texts, as becomes clear from the following utterance:

> *The textbooks would be quite enough but it is the students who often think ... believe that it's more interesting if I bring in articles from the internet or the New York Times.* (Cell H)

This third obstacle reflects the cognitive orientation to culture-teaching. Embedded in the teachers' utterances are views of culture as knowledge and skills, which the students should acquire by studying texts. Teachers call for material that would present information about the English-speaking countries and illustrate ways of acting appropriately in social situations. The underlying idea is that students learn more about the target culture, the more facts the teacher has at his or her disposal.

Lack of finance

Four teachers discussed the lack of financial support for purchasing appropriate teaching material or attending in-service training courses for teachers. It is obvious that there are great differences between towns and also between schools regarding the attitude towards the continuing education for teachers. One young teacher spoke with gratitude about her headmaster who always tries to arrange possibilities for the teachers to attend courses if they themselves are interested. One experienced teacher, on the other hand, seriously regretted the fact that teachers in her town are not encouraged to educate themselves further, although a large amount of interesting courses are offered. The money is simply allocated to other objects. Consequently, she has had to finance expensive study trips abroad herself.

> *I have attended a lot of different courses aus Liebe zur Kunst, and most of them I have paid for myself. It's a great obstacle.* (Cell D)

Heterogenous groups

Three teachers mentioned heterogeneous groups as a restriction, posing methodological challenges not only with regard to the cultural content but to teaching at large. Since the students may be on entirely different levels linguistically speaking, the teachers feel frustrated about not being able to meet everybody's demands completely. In the same class, there may be students who would require training in basic grammar structures as well as students that are capable of reading advanced English literature and who feel understimulated by the regular activities. According to one of my respondents, grouping the students by ability would be one way of solving the problem and making sure that the students receive the type of teaching they need. However, she is well aware that

in today's educational climate where integration, individualisation and inclusion are key terms, it would not be wise to suggest going back to the level division that was customary in the comprehensive school of the 1970's. It is obvious that all teachers referring to heterogeneous groups as an obstacle assume that culture teaching requires a certain level of linguistic proficiency, and that it would be wrong to impose culture on students who more than anything need to learn how to string sentences together.

Lack of motivation

One teacher confessed frankly to his own lack of motivation when it comes to introducing cultural aspects into his teaching. He feels it would require efforts that he has no enthusiasm for. This he attributes to a certain degree of laziness when it comes to preparing, what he calls, sensible exercises, but also a fear of failing to achieve the desired results. Consequently, he prefers to continue the way he has always done, following the course book and alternating reading texts with practising grammar. Previously in the interview he had expressed views of culture according to Category 1b, that is rules of behaviour associated with specific situations as well as sociolinguistic features. Interestingly enough, his description of his classroom practice reveals that he does in fact touch upon cultural aspects without himself being consciously aware of it, by discussing the appropriate use of certain phrases. This highlights the point discussed by Valdes (1990, 20), namely that there is no way to avoid teaching culture when teaching language. As she sees it, culture is at the forefront from the first day of the beginning class. Whatever approach, method or technique is used, greetings tend to be first on the agenda. The way people greet each other, if anything, is of a cultural nature.

One single teacher referred to immature pupils not motivated by cultural issues as a factor preventing her from realising her ambitions. All the others, however, talked about their students' positive attitudes towards everything that does not involve reading from the textbook or doing grammar exercises. The students tend to enjoy learning about ways and traditions in other cultures, and role-plays and project assignments are generally considered fresh and inspiring working methods that enliven the lessons.

Pressure to conform

Pressure to conform to the traditional way of teaching, with focus on LC, was mentioned by one teacher, who felt dissatisfied at not being able to implement her own ideas in her school. There, all English teachers are supposed to follow the textbook at the same pace, because at the end of term, all classes do the same test regardless of who has taught them. As a teacher you do not want to risk lagging behind the others as a consequence of bringing in elements that the others choose to leave out. She feels that the English course books do not deal with cultural aspects well enough, and that the teachers at her school should co-operate to create new material, which in a natural way would combine both cultural aspects and all the obligatory things that her colleagues are afraid of neglecting. A lack of motivation or time tends to come in the way for collegial discussions concerning how cultural aspects could be integrated into the teaching. This young teacher strongly emphasises that she does not want to teach

her students the way she herself was taught English, and therefore sees an urgent need for innovation.

All interviews were wrapped up with a question concerning whether the respondents have reflected a lot on the intercultural dimension of their teaching of English, either alone or with their colleagues. Interestingly enough, differences between male and female respondents can be discerned. Most men said they had not given much thought to the topic before it was brought to their attention in the interview; neither could they recall many collegial discussions specifically focussing on cultural aspects. A multitude of practical matters tend to come in the way for pedagogical and didactic reflections with other teachers. Admittedly, cultural issues had come up in relation to theme days on internationalism, but within FLT the topic has obviously not been on the agenda.

Among the female respondents, the situation is more varied. One teacher said she does not plan or prepare the cultural content of her teaching beforehand, and consequently has not contemplated the issue to any great extent. Cultural aspects, as indicated earlier, are addressed by her more or less unconsciously and in a sporadic manner. A novice teacher said she and her fellow students were often engaged in discussion about culture teaching during their teacher training period. Since she began working, however, collegial collaboration has been limited to the occasional exchange of material, following hasty teacher-room questions like "Do you have anything about Scotland?" Three female teachers informed me that they often sit down with their colleagues to discuss ways in which cultural aspects could be sensibly integrated in their teaching. Unfortunately, the discussions tend to remain on the "We should do something about this"-level, with scarce results in terms of ideas and concrete working methods. It should be brought in mind in this context that few of my respondents had been actively working with the new National Framework guidelines at the time of the interview. One female teacher informed me that up until then they had been concentrating on the general principles, and that the curricular objectives of FLT were to be dealt with at a later stage.

It appears as if those teachers who have indeed discussed the intercultural dimension of FLT, have done so with a view to finding solutions to methodological problems. One highly experienced teacher was the sole respondent who indicated that she and her colleagues have actually tried to problematise concepts such as "culture", "intercultural competence" and "intercultural understanding". The others give the impression of knowing fairly well what they want to achieve, but not how to go about it. This, together with the obstacles presented above, leads me to believe that the primary concern of the teachers in my study is how their teaching could be improved, whereas issues that should precede methodological considerations – the complexity of culture as a phenomenon and the cultural objectives within FLT – are less frequently reflected on. It seems as if what was said generally in Chapter 1.2 about the *hows* being focussed more often than the *whats* and *whys* holds true also within the intercultural dimension.

5.4 Review of the results from three perspectives

In this chapter, the most essential findings presented above will be illuminated from three perspectives:

1. Research on teacher cognition (outlined in Chapter 2.2)
2. Previous research on language teachers' thinking on the intercultural dimension (outlined in Chapters 2.3.1 and 2.3.2)
3. The cultural objectives put forward in the Finnish National Framework Curriculum (outlined in Chapter 3.2.3).

The results in the light of teacher cognition research

In Chapter 2.2, some characteristics of teachers' cognitions were presented. It should be recalled that the concept "cognition" is used to cover a wide range of mental processes and structures, such as conceptions, beliefs, principles, theories and attitudes, as well as thoughts and reflections that teachers have before, during and after teaching.

My results largely support the findings from general research on teacher cognition, as well as research on language teacher cognition. Firstly, my informants tended to discuss culture teaching from a *practical* point of view. Their views of what culture in FLT is were often determined by practicality or, what could be called, teachability. What is taught in terms of culture are aspects that the students tend to be interested in, aspects that are "easy" to teach because of their concrete nature (such as factual knowledge); in other words, aspects in which the teachers are likely to succeed. The majority of the teachers preferred to describe cultural objectives as transmitting knowledge, which is a much easier undertaking from a practical point of view than promoting tolerance and empathy. A practical approach also permeated their thinking on assessment. The cultural or intercultural component of their teaching is seldom assessed in formal tests, because the teachers lack a clear notion of how to do it. Most of the factors preventing them from fulfilling their ambitions concerning culture teaching are also of a practical nature. Lack of motivation, discussed by some teachers, can be seen as the only obstacle that does not have a clear practical component. The fact that many teachers showed more interest in culture-teaching methodology than in contemplating the deep and often complex what- and why-questions suggests that they consider their profession first and foremost a practical undertaking that calls for concrete rather than philosophical considerations.

The *personal* character of teacher cognition also finds support in my data. Several teachers spoke about how their personal experiences as language learners, student teachers, teachers as well as travellers abroad have affected their approach to teaching in general and culture teaching in particular. One teacher only emphasised that she would not like to teach her own students in the same way as she was taught at school. This she attributed to her vast experience of living and working abroad, which has opened her eyes to the fact that learning a foreign language is so much more than picking up a linguistic code detached from its sociocultural background.

My informants' statements also contain examples of both *dynamic* and *static* conceptions and beliefs. Many informants let me understand that they think they should change their teaching practices and brush up their methodology, and that they are also willing to do so. This appeared to be the case for teachers well into their teaching career but still far away from retirement. With such a small data it would be unwise to make any far-reaching generalisations, but one could assume that novice teachers, who are in the process of creating a solid base for their professional thinking and actions, want to hold on to their newly formed beliefs. Establishing your own theories and personal working principles – and also sticking to them until you feel confident enough to put them to the test and then modify them – is certainly important for young teachers. Teachers with only a few years left of working life, again, may see no point in altering their principles and routines at such a late stage, especially if these have proved to be working.

What is clear, however, is that on-going professional development does influence teachers' cognitions, but in different ways. A female teacher in my study spoke about how her views of the aims of teaching have changed, as a result of increasing experience, whereas her routines concerning classroom management and giving instructions have remained the same over the years. Another experienced teacher referred to his changed attitudes towards grading students. His maxims and pedagogical knowledge, however, appear not to have been affected by didactic trends or research findings. He has his own personal theories about what his task as a teacher is, what subject content should be taught and how it should be taught. Feelings of uncertainty or fear of failure may underlie some of his reluctance to change safe and ingrained working methods. This again points to the attitudinal aspect of teacher cognition. Similar findings have been made by Hansén (1997, 65), who has interviewed 19 class teachers in a Finnish comprehensive school about their work. Their career descriptions reveal that increasing experience has entailed a shift in emphasis away from details and teacher achievement towards broader perspectives and greater focus on the pupils.

My data also shows that many teachers have *conflicting* beliefs, another finding that has arisen from research on teacher cognition. On the one hand, they want to devote more time to culture teaching, have more appropriate teaching materials, more up-to-date working methods, deeper personal insights and hence better opportunities for in-service training. On the other hand, the majority prioritise linguistic and communicative competence higher than intercultural competence. When asked about how the reduction of English lessons will affect their teaching, most teachers stated that it will inevitably lead to even less time being devoted to culture teaching.

Finally, part of my data also reflects the *subconscious* nature of teacher cognition. Several issues discussed at the interviews appeared to have been unarticulated by the teachers up until then. For example, several teachers said that they had not given much thought to their aims of teaching English, nor to their perceptions of the English language as such. Many also claimed that their teaching lacks a cultural or intercultural dimension. On closer inspection, however, it turned out that they do in fact include cultural aspects, but that they have never actually reflected on the nature of these aspects, nor on their reasons

for teaching them. In this respect, one could argue that the interviews provided at least some insight into what normally lies beneath the tip of the iceberg.

The results in the light of previous research on teachers' thinking on the intercultural dimension

Chapter 2.3 contained an overview of some empirical studies focussing on teachers' thinking about cultural aspects in FLT. Many of these studies also find support in my data.

My interview inquiry shows that Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers today find culture important, but that they often feel unsure about how to teach it appropriately. Most of them tend to view culture as a traditional paradigm with focus on national cultures associated with the TL area, and relatively few of them reflect upon how cultural issues could be dealt with to develop the learners' general understanding of and respect for otherness. Although language and culture are generally perceived to be inseparable, most teachers direct their teaching towards linguistic or communicative competence rather than intercultural competence. Culture teaching is defined mainly in terms of the passing on of knowledge. The promotion of the acquisition of a substantial body of knowledge is considered important since, in the long run, more knowledge is believed to lead to more tolerant attitudes. Similar observations have been made by Byram and Risager (1999), Sercu et al. (2005), Lundgren (2002) and Gagnestam (2003). However, contrary to the teachers approached by Byram and Risager, my informants show great awareness of the depth and complex nature of the concept "culture", but their approach to the teaching of culture appears to lack the high degree of systematicity and consistency found among the teachers in the large quantitative study co-ordinated by Sercu (2005).

Most of my informants can be characterised as "favourably disposed" (cf. Sercu et al. 2005), but the majority feel that they are not appropriately equipped to carry out up-to-date teaching from an intercultural perspective. Just like the upper secondary school teachers in Gagnestam's study, most of my informants recognise an urgent need for a change, but, at the same time, point to several obstacles preventing them from developing their teaching practices. The lack of time (both lesson time and time for self-reflection and reflection with colleagues), lack of appropriate material, lack of resources for exchanges, study trips and in-service training, as well as their own ignorance and uncertainty play a part. Similar constraints are also discussed in both Gagnestam's and Lundgren's study, which indicates that the conditions are very much the same in Finland and in Sweden. What is interesting to note is that the teachers in Lundgren's study regard the students' immaturity, narrow-mindedness and lack of empathy as major obstacles. In contrast, the majority of my informants spoke about their students' positive attitudes towards learning about other cultures, although some of them also referred to deeply rooted stereotypes[39].

[39] Of great interest in this context is a survey carried out by Smeds (2004), the purpose of which was to chart attitudes towards national identity and xenophobia among Finnish and Finland-Swedish ninth-graders. His findings show that Finnish-speaking pupils, boys, and pupils with no intention to continue secondary education reveal higher values

Naturally, the approach taken to the teaching of culture will induce different student reactions. Teachers remaining at the Pedagogy of Information level are less likely to be confronted with negative, defensive and egocentric responses than teachers venturing into Pedagogy of Encounter. Since the former primarily involves the transmission of factual knowledge, it poses a limited threat to the students' emotions, attitudes and prior beliefs. Thus, the students may easily remain emotionally detached and choose to simply learn the facts in the same way as they would memorise mathematical rules or chemical symbols. Pedagogy of Encounter, on the other hand, challenges the students' taken-for-granted perspectives by encouraging them to decentre and to try to look at their own culture, their way of life and their values from another, more objective angle. This, as pointed out by Forsman (2004b), may lead to frustration and uncertainty, and could, at worst, result in negative attitudes towards the Other, which is seen as representing all that is new, strange and unfamiliar. In such situations, Forsman (2004b) writes, the teacher should point out that the students are free to continue to like their own culture and lead their lives as they are used to.

Forsman's (2004a) interviews with Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers suggested that they find their students' insights into other cultures one-sided and shallow, and that they therefore think it is important to bring in representatives of other cultures to the classroom. Hardly surprising, in view of the fact that both groups of teachers stem from the same context, this was also an ambition discussed by many of my informants. This could be taken as yet another indication of the insufficiency that teachers feel when it comes to setting up intercultural learning situations in the English classroom on their own.

Let us finally take a brief look at to what extent guidance is provided by the NFC.

The results in the light of the Finnish National Framework Curriculum

In Chapter 3.2.3 it was established that the objectives of EFL-teaching, put forward in the NFC, represent a fairly restricted view of culture. Culture is discussed in terms of "target language culture" and "subject culture", thus implicitly referring to the national cultures of relatively few Inner Circle countries. The objectives can be described as socio-cultural and socio-linguistic. The students are expected to get to know and learn to communicate and behave appropriately, specifically in the TL culture, rather than develop intercultural awareness in general, with empathy and respect of difference and diversity as foundation stones.

As became clear above, many of my informants think along similar lines. The majority of the teachers understand culture as knowledge about countries where English is the first language (L1), as well as social and socio-linguistic skills that should be acquired to facilitate contacts with, primarily, British and American people. It is pleasing to note, however, that some teachers also appear to go beyond the NFC, by referring to attempts to increase their students' general

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for xenophobia than Swedish speakers, girls, and pupils with the intention to continue education at upper secondary school.

intercultural competence. In the interviews, these teachers also spoke about the importance of providing the students with facts about other cultures, but stressed that their ultimate goal is to foster tolerance and empathy towards other cultures in general, by reducing ethnocentricity and stereotypical thinking. These particular teachers thus appear to perceive themselves as cultural go-betweens, to use Kramsch's (2004) expression, rather than transmitters of static facts about a handful of countries, which is the teacher role implied by the NFC.

This raises hopes that teachers in the future will also make efforts to develop intercultural understanding through EFL-teaching, provided that even more attention is directed to this important issue in various pedagogical fora. Here language-teacher educators, producers of teaching materials as well as in-service trainers are in a key position. Naturally, the teachers themselves will have to have a genuine interest in keeping up with time and acquiring and implementing instructional activities that will adequately prepare the learners for the society of today and tomorrow.

6 Concluding Remarks

6.1 Summary

The aim of this study was to deepen the knowledge about how teachers at the upper level of the Finland-Swedish comprehensive school think with reference to the treatment of culture in EFL-teaching. My research questions were: 1) How do teachers interpret the concept “culture” in EFL-teaching?, 2) How do they specify the cultural objectives of their teaching? and 3) What do they do to attain these objectives?

Both research and international curricular documents advocate intercultural education as a cross-curricular theme that could and should be given particular attention in the FL classroom. I thus set out to explore whether teachers make use of this potential embedded in FLT, and especially in EFL-teaching, in order to promote intercultural competence and understanding.

13 teachers were strategically selected and interviewed. The interviews were conducted in a phenomenographic spirit, and the verbatim transcripts were analysed following hermeneutical principles. The findings were presented according to three orientations: the cognitive orientation, the action orientation and the affective orientation.

Within the first orientation, “culture” is conceived as factual knowledge, and the teaching methods aimed at providing the students with background information about English-speaking countries are of an informing and mediating character. Within the second orientation, “culture” is seen as skills of a social and socio-linguistic nature, and the teaching is aimed at preparing the students for future encounters with representatives of the target language and culture. Within the third orientation, “culture” in EFL-teaching is seen as involving a bi-directional perspective. Students are encouraged to look at their own familiar culture from another perspective, and learn to empathise with and show respect for otherness in general, not just concerning representatives of English-speaking countries. Learning situations are arranged where the students are invited to experience simulated or authentic intercultural encounters here and now, as well as reflect upon the insights gained through these. This holistic approach to culture teaching, essentially encapsulating the previous two approaches, is the one that can be characterised as genuinely *inter*cultural.

Few of my informants represent the third approach. Those who do, tend to be novice teachers with a fairly extensive experience of living abroad. Teachers taking a more traditional view on culture teaching will find limited support in the NFC, which uses vague concepts and offers meagre assessment criteria concerning cultural issues. Many teachers in my study feel they lack the appropriate knowledge and skills to successfully teach about culture. Some also express criticism towards language teacher education and teaching materials, which, in their opinion, do not pay enough attention to this dimension of FLT.

All this accentuates the need for a more focussed, in-depth debate concerning the content and methodology of intercultural foreign language teaching in the future.

6.2 The contribution of the study

This study may be justified in the light of at least the following two deficiencies in earlier research:

a) According to Tornberg (2000), there has been a tendency to ignore the didactic what-question in educational research. The substance itself has often been overshadowed by methodological how-issues. According to Byram, the challenging why-question should also be asked more frequently. This study addresses all three didactic questions.

b) On a more general level, teachers' cognitions in relation to specific curricular topics in FLT have been largely neglected. On a more specific level, there is practically no research at all in Finland concerning Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers' thinking about culture in EFL. The studies by Kaikkonen (2004) and Forsman (2004a) may be seen as exceptions. This study is an attempt to fill this void.

My findings will hopefully be of interest to anyone wanting to find out how FL teachers in a specific context view culture teaching, and how their views currently impact on their teaching. They may also help individual teachers reflect on their own conceptions and teaching practice, on where they stand on the "favourably disposed-unfavourably disposed" continuum discussed by Sercu et al. (2005) and which of the three types of pedagogies presented in Chapter 5.3.3 best describe their own approach. The findings may serve as a starting point for discussions with colleagues, for the exchange of ideas regarding the integration of an intercultural dimension in one's teaching and for initiatives to jointly reconsider existing teaching practices.

It should go without saying that the findings presented in this thesis call for a changed attitude towards culture teaching. The implications for various actors of the knowledge gained through my empirical study can be summarised in the following points:

For curriculum designers

As pointed out by Sercu et al. (2005, 179), official policies, as voiced in curricular guidelines or other official documents, tend to play an important role in developing teachers' implicit theories. It is therefore of great importance that curriculum designers in the future should base their principles on national and international research to a greater extent than appears to have been the case concerning the 2004 NFC. The lack of dialogue between, what Lundgren (2004) calls, authority and research discourse, could result in the reproduction of traditional views on what EFL is all about. It is often claimed that research does not reach the practitioners and the classrooms. The national guidelines could be an effective mediator. However, as a channel it is extremely slow, since the Finnish NFC is revised as seldom as approximately every ten years. It is

therefore important to turn the gaze towards other actors on the pedagogical arena.

For textbook authors and designers of teaching materials

Textbooks continue to constitute the guiding principle of many FL courses throughout the world, and Finland is no exception. The majority of my informants follow the textbook selected for their schools more or less strictly, although they also use additional materials like audio and video tapes, newspapers, magazines, the internet, song lyrics, maps and photographs. These are used for many different reasons, such as enhancing the motivation of the students, responding to the students' perceived need for authenticity, breaking the monotony of the classroom and providing the students' with fresh, up-to-date material. Many teachers in my study also reported that they are not satisfied with the cultural content of their textbooks.

This highlights the need for textbook authors to carefully consider the knowledge and skills that FL learners are to develop in today's post-modern society. As I see it, textbook authors and other designers of teaching material clearly have a responsibility in helping the profession evolve in a more intercultural direction. They too should turn to existing research in order to devise material that will provide the teachers with alternatives and assist them in their endeavour to teach culture with a view to promoting intercultural competence and understanding. They should also themselves be familiar with intercultural competence teaching methodology, and could benefit greatly from receiving positive and negative comments from teachers regarding the material they currently use.

For teacher trainers

Contemporary FL teachers as cultural go-betweens are in need for a complex and enriching education, which should provide opportunities for learning that are both cognitive and experiential. Teachers have great responsibilities for introducing their students to intercultural FL learning with everything it entails in the form of cognitive, action-related and affective aspects. Teacher education has to provide them with the practical and theoretical support for those responsibilities, but often it is not organised in a way that helps teachers accomplish their goals concerning the teaching of culture in a professional way. It is still mostly up to the individual teacher to introduce elements of culture learning, or to develop teaching materials in a pedagogically satisfactory way that allows for discussion, reflection and professional development.

The general opinion among my respondents was that more attention should be paid to the intercultural dimension in Finnish language teacher education. This applies both to the language studies and the subsequent pedagogical and didactic studies. My findings suggest that what should be added to the present system are methodology courses including introductions to culture learning theory, as well as demonstrations of how the teaching of the foreign language and the foreign culture can be integrated and which learning environments and teaching approaches have the potential of promoting intercultural understanding and

competence. It is vital that future FL teachers should to be trained and provided with tools for ILT if this is to gain a permanent foothold in our FL classrooms.

For the schools and the local municipalities

In-service teachers should be given increased opportunities to educate themselves further in order to be able to develop professionally and keep up the standard of their teaching. Professional development also presupposes more time for self-reflection and reflection with colleagues. This, however, is often overshadowed, for example, by practical problems related to classroom management and extra-curricular activities. Collegial co-operation is needed if teachers are to be able to develop teaching strategies that will also take local conditions into consideration.

For the teachers

In the end, the individual teachers are the ones responsible for what kind of FLT the students receive. Their conceptions, convictions and beliefs determine which aspects are practically implemented in their classrooms. It follows that trying to alter teachers' beliefs holds the best promise for altering teaching practice. For example, teachers can monitor how their own beliefs and practices change as a result of such activities as journal writing, case studies and other methods for reflective analysis.

Based on my own and others' research, discussed in this thesis, I would like to make the following recommendations as to how EFL could be developed in a more intercultural direction:

- The content of teaching, rather than the form, should be focussed on in the classroom.
- The role of English as a lingua franca should be emphasised, and EFL-teaching should aim at making the students cultural mediators and competent intercultural language users, rather than unsuccessful, deficient native speakers.
- The teaching of English should not have a restricted focus on the traditional national cultures, Great Britain, the USA and Australia. The language should be taught and learnt as a LWC, common to a large number of individuals in many different cultures.
- Culture should not be treated as a fifth skill, introduced sporadically when there is time. It should preferably permeate everything that is done in the English classroom, and be considered from a process perspective, instead of the traditional product perspective.
- Instead of pure information of facts, which language education has traditionally promoted, values and ways of thinking should be discussed.
- Classroom activities involving intercultural encounters should be promoted, as should reflection as a method for awakening the students' empathy and respect for otherness.

6.3 Analysis of the methodological approach of the study

In this study, I used semi-structured in-depth interviews to explore teachers' cognitions. It can be questioned whether it is at all possible to gain insights into other people's thinking, when the only thing that can really be established for certain is what they say or do. I believe that the statements made by my 13 informants reflect their thinking and that they had no reason to deliberately give false information. Naturally, interesting thoughts may unintentionally have been withheld, but I doubt that this could have affected the results to any greater extent. Throughout the interviews I made efforts to make sure that I understood the teachers correctly (in so far as that is possible), and in the subsequent analysis of the material I repeatedly questioned by own understanding until I was convinced that I had reached a plausible interpretation that gave justice to my informants' statements.

Admittedly, the number of interviewees is fairly small, which may raise the question of whether a larger group would have generated different results and a different set of categories. This is impossible to tell. What is clear is that a large-scale quantitative study would have been the most obvious methodological choice, had my intention been to arrive at findings that could be generalised to all Finland-Swedish comprehensive school teachers. However, my aim was not a representative selection, but one containing as many different qualities as possible. The group of informants found through Trost's strategic selection model (see page 82) covered a wide enough spectrum of teachers to enable me to shed light on how male and female teachers with various teaching experience and experience of life abroad think in relation to culture. Furthermore, since my study is anchored in both phenomenography and teacher cognition research, both of whom have traditionally relied on in-depth interviews of a limited number, this was a natural path for me to follow.

Validity and reliability aspects were already discussed in Chapter 4.2.4. I am aware that method triangulation, involving, for example, video observations and different forms of teacher diaries, in addition to interviews, might have contributed to an even higher degree of trustworthiness. Practical issues, such as doubts about teachers' willingness to invite a researcher to their classrooms or make regular diary notes, made me give up this idea. However, for future projects investigating this fascinating field, both method and source triangulation may well be worth developing.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

Two domains of inquiry were integrated in this study: a) culture in EFL-teaching, and b) (language) teacher cognition. Both domains contain plenty of interesting topics for further research. For example, valuable insights into factors influencing teachers' pedagogical and practical knowledge could be gained through longitudinal studies. How are their personal theories in relation to different curricular topics affected, for example, by increasing experience, in-service training and critical incidents in their own lives?

This study explores culture in EFL from the teachers' perspective, which is just one among several available perspectives. The voices of student teachers and teacher trainers would broaden the horizon considerably. Student views, for example, could be explored with the intention of comparing the implemented with the achieved curriculum. For her doctoral thesis, Gagnestam (2003) interviewed both teachers and students at the same upper secondary schools. As far as I am aware, there are no such studies set at the comprehensive school level, neither in Sweden nor in Finland. Studies comparing the teaching of culture at the lower and upper level of the comprehensive school as well as in the upper secondary school also appear to be lacking.

Gagnestam (2003, 237) encourages other researchers to adopt the novel research design used by her, namely to let the findings from phenomenographic interviews form the basis for questionnaires. Several topics touched upon by my informants – and hence just briefly discussed in this thesis - could very well be further explored through quantitative studies. These are, for example, the extent to which schools engage in international projects or virtual contacts to enhance the students' intercultural awareness, the use of drama and simulation games as well as the role of the textbook for teaching culture, as opposed to supplementary material.

As I see it, much remains to be done particularly concerning the affective approach to culture teaching. It is within this orientation that concerted efforts should be made to develop both teaching techniques and appropriate assessment tools. Our common concern should be the development of foreign language teaching at all levels. This is in order to ensure that our students are given the best possible training, not only to cope but to make a contribution in the intercultural world in which they are living. That pursuit will have to continue.

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Appendices

Appendix I: Letter of request (English version)

Eva Larzén **December 15, 2002**
(*My address, telephone number and E-mail address)*

(Name and address of the school)

Dear Mr/Ms *(name of the principal)*

My name is Eva Larzén, and I teach English and German at S:t Olofsskolan, the Swedish-speaking comprehensive school in Turku. I am a research student at the Faculty of Education at Åbo Akademi within the framework of a project entitled “Language and Communication in Times of Change”. My goal is a licentiate degree. My supervisor is Kaj Sjöholm, Professor of Foreign Language Education at the Department of Teacher Education in Vasa.

My field of interest is the intercultural dimension in the teaching of English at Swedish-speaking comprehensive schools. I wish to gain insights into what is dealt with as far as “culture” is concerned and to describe the aims and methods used by teachers at grades 7–9.

I plan to interview a total of 20 English teachers, both men and women, during the spring term of 2003. For practical reasons it would be preferable if more than one teacher from the same school could participate.

I now turn to you in hope of getting in contact with teachers willing to take part in my study. The interviews are estimated to last for 60 minutes, and they will be tape-recorded. All interviews will be dealt with confidentially, meaning that it will not become clear from my final report who has said what. Neither will the name or location of the school be revealed. I am interested explicitly in finding patterns in teachers´ views of culture in foreign language teaching, not to critically evaluate individual informants´ statements, conceptions or methods.

To be able to prepare myself for the interviews I would like to receive the local curriculum of your school. I would thus be grateful if you could send me your complete curriculum, by January 30, 2003, along with the names and contact details of teachers willing to be interviewed. I will happily provide additional information about my research project, should that be necessary.

Yours sincerely,

Eva Larzén

Appendix II: Interview guide (English version)

The following guide, inspired by Lantz (1993, 68-69), served as the basis for the interviews.

"TEACHERS´ THOUGHTS ABOUT THE INTERCULTURAL DIMENSION IN EFL TEACHING"

1. Introduction

- Presentation of myself
- The purpose of the interview
- The structure of the interview
- Estimated length of the interview
- Ethical aspects
- How the results will be used
- Possibilities for the respondent to give feedback

2. Background information

- Presentation of respondent: name and age
- Leisure-time activities, family
- Education: What? Where?
- Reasons for choice of profession: What role did your own language learning at school have?
- Work experience: How much? Where? Do you enjoy your work?
- Time spent abroad: How much? Where? Types of stay? How has this affected you and your work?
- Other direct contacts with the English language, e.g. native speakers among family or friends

3. Themes of interest

1. **What is the most important goal for your teaching of English? What would you first and foremost like to achieve?**

   Have your priorities changed during your teaching career? If so, what factors do you think have brought about a change in your aims and ambitions?

2. **How do you perceive the English language? As a language spoken as a mother tongue in certain countries or as an international lingua franca?**

   Is there a difference between how you perceive English and how you actually treat it in your teaching?

   Cultural identity and internationalisation are strongly emphasised right now, also in the newly released National Framework Curriculum for the comprehensive school.

   In this document cultural competence is mentioned as an important goal for the teaching of foreign languages, including English.

3. **What is then, in your opinion, "culture" in foreign language teaching? What is "culture" in the teaching of English?**
4. **What do the concepts "Intercultural competence" and "Intercultural understanding" mean to you?**
5. **What is your goal as far as culture teaching is concerned?**
6. **Is this, in your opinion, an important goal to work towards? Why?**
7. **What *would you like* to do to achieve this goal?**
8. **What *do you actually do* in the classroom with regard to culture? Tell me about your practical work!**
9. **How would you characterise the preconditions for working towards this goal?**

   Do you see any obstacles?

10. **Do you think your education meets the demands placed on today's "teachers-of- language-*and*-culture?**
11. **Do you personally feel you need in-service training? What kind?**
12. **Do you think you achieve your goals? Do your students learn what they are supposed to learn?**
13. **How would you describe student attitudes, interest and insights in this area?**

    Do they know a lot about culture from before? If so, why?

    How can this be made use of in teaching? Do you do it?

14. **How aware are you of cultural issues when you assess your students?**

    How can cultural issues be tested?

15. **What kind of training do you think future English teachers should receive in this area?**
16. **Have your reflected a lot on the intercultural dimension of language teaching before? Have you talked about this with your colleagues?**

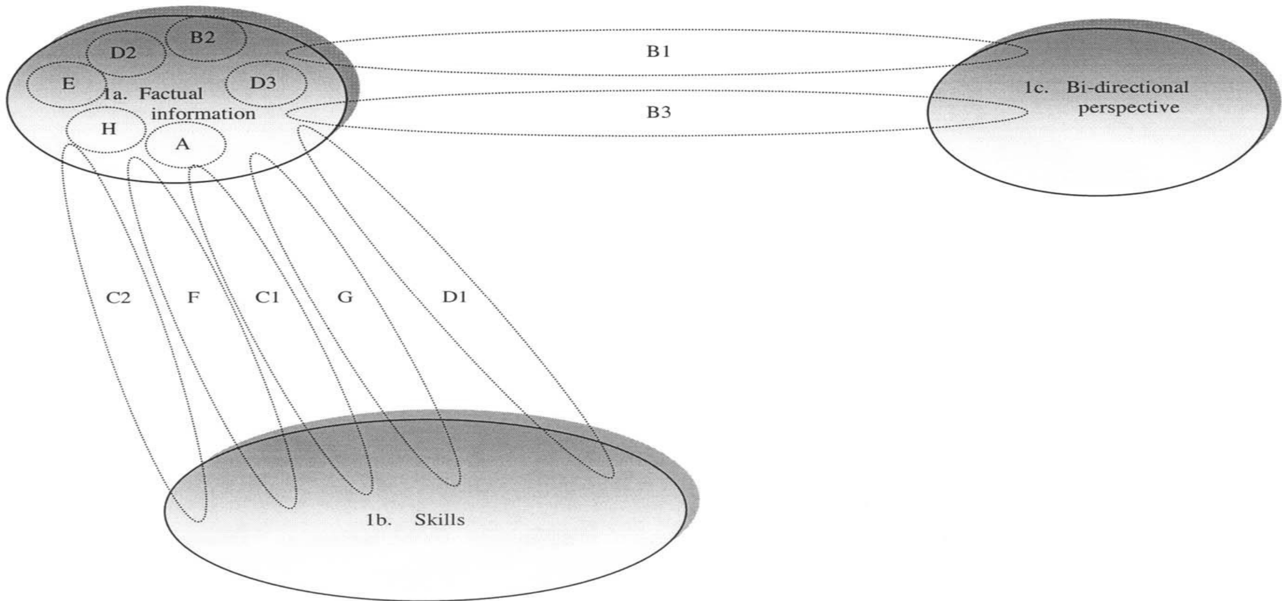
4. Conclusion

- Questions or comments?
- Plans for the near future?
- May I contact you, e.g. by phone or mail, if needed?
- Thanks!

Appendix III: Conception Patterns

Illustrated below is the distribution of the 13 informants over the three categories constituting conceptions of culture (RQ1). Each of the dotted circles/ovals represents an informant.

The cell from which the informant stems is indicated with the corresponding letter (see Figure 10). In cases where several informants stem from the same cell, a number has been added in order to clarify individual conceptions. Thus, B3 refers to the third teacher in Cell B, consisting of novice, female teachers with more than one year of experience of living abroad.



Today's society is becoming increasingly international, with abundant contacts between people representing different cultures. However, despite growing intercultural collaboration at different levels, phenomena such as prejudices, ethnocentrism and xenophobia appear to have become increasingly common. As a result, both research and international curricular documents advocate intercultural education as a cross-curricular theme that could and should be given particular attention in the foreign language classroom.

This study explores whether teachers make use of the potential embedded in foreign language teaching – and especially the teaching of English – in order to promote intercultural understanding. A total of 13 Finland-Swedish teachers of English were interviewed about their treatment of culture on grades 7-9. The results indicate that most of them view "culture" as a traditional paradigm with focus on national cultures associated with the target language area. Hence, the teaching of culture is defined mainly in terms of the transmission of information about English-speaking countries. Few teachers in the study reflect upon how cultural issues could be introduced to develop the students' general understanding of and respect for otherness.

Many teachers feel they lack the appropriate knowledge and skills to successfully teach about culture. Some also express criticism towards language teacher education and teaching materials, which, in their opinion, do not pay enough attention to this dimension. All this accentuates the need for a more focussed, in-depth debate concerning the content and methodology of intercultural foreign language teaching in the future.

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