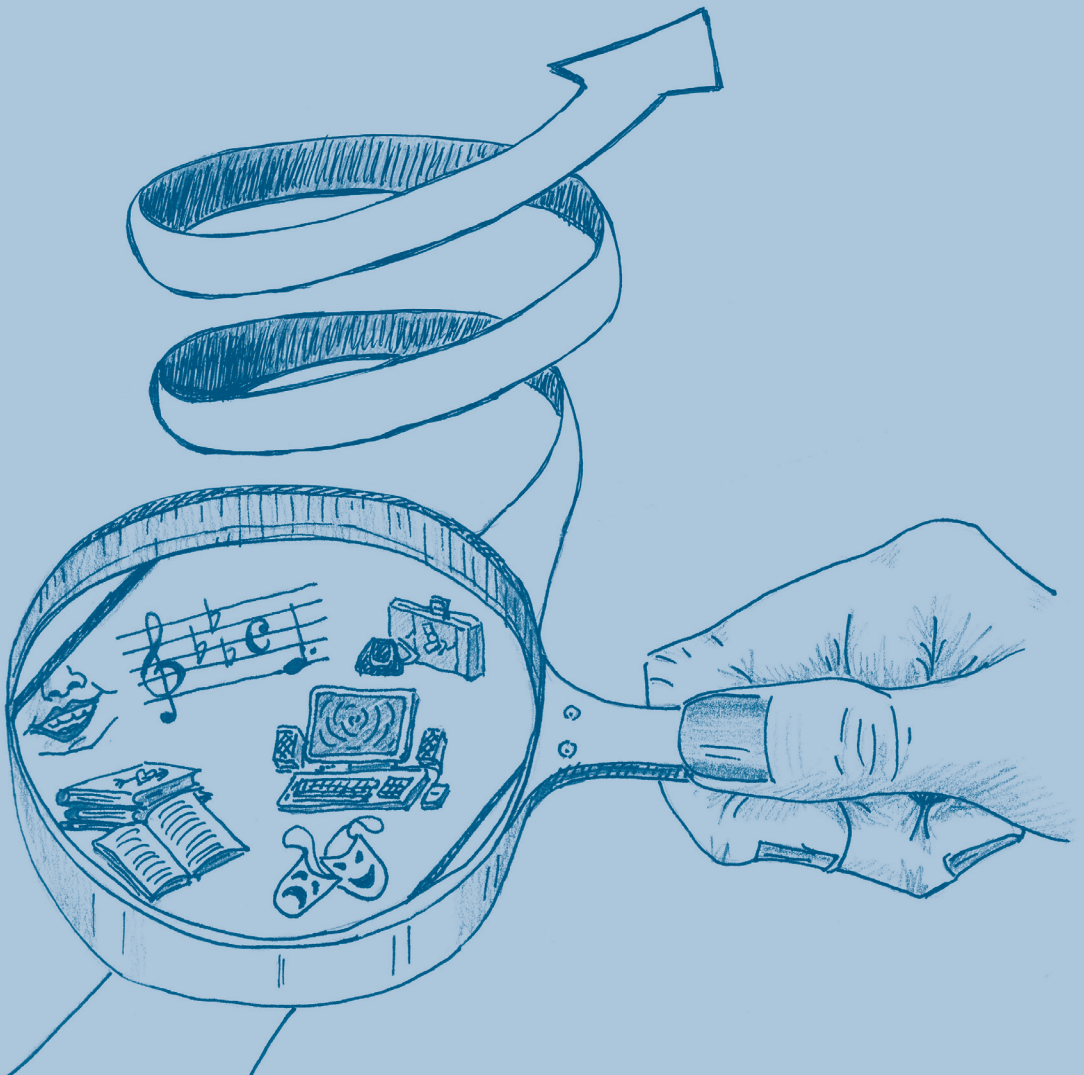Liselott Forsman

The Cultural Dimension in Focus

Promoting Awareness of Diversity and Respect for Difference in a Finland-Swedish EFL Classroom

Liselott Forsman
Born in Petalax in 1969
Matriculation examination in 1988
Master of Arts (English philology and Nordic languages)
at the University of Helsinki in 1996
Teacher education in 1996
Teacher of English at Närpes högstadium and Mattlidens högstadieskola, Esbo
Teacher of FLT methodology at the Faculty of Education
at Åbo Akademi University in Vaasa since 1999
Licentiate of Education at Åbo Akademi University, Vaasa, in 2003

Cover illustration: Sandra Bernas and Liselott Forsman
Cover: Tove Ahlbäck

THE CULTURAL DIMENSION IN FOCUS

The Cultural Dimension in Focus

Promoting Awareness of Diversity and Respect for Difference in a Finland-Swedish EFL Classroom

Liselott Forsman

Abstract

This study addresses the role of EFL education, its potential and shortcomings, and the challenges the future of EFL education will bring. It is argued that new societal demands and the limited time we have at our disposal in the classroom make it necessary to rethink goals and content and move away from the transmission of limited sets of facts and information to helping students develop awareness and competences that can be applied in many different situations, also in a perspective of lifelong learning.

The overall aim of the current study is to problematize and increase understanding of the implementation of cultural aspects in the language classroom by addressing the interrelated *what*, *why* and *how* of the cultural dimension within EFL education. This has been conducted by means of theoretical explorations into the area, alongside an attempt at promoting intercultural competence (IC) in a more systematic and insightful manner within my own educational praxis. The focus of the intercultural work in the classroom was on the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity, as well as respect for such difference through the ability to decenter from cultural norms and behavior that previously have been taken for granted. These are two elements that have been suggested as fundamental for other work with IC in the classroom and for the realization of important aspects of the underlying values of basic education. In the context of this study, IC comprises several interconnected components supporting each other in a variety of ways, with the further aim being interaction with and respect for difference *in general*, not only concerning e.g. representatives of certain English-speaking communities.

The methodology was informed by action research, with myself in the role of the teacher-researcher or the reflective practitioner. For the purpose of the project I was authorized to take on the EFL education for the three years of upper comprehensive school of one random class of students originally assigned to one of the language teachers of the selected Finland-Swedish school. Thus, the class of 17 students was not specifically chosen for the project, and the aims and contents chosen for the development project were placed within the framework of the ordinary curriculum.

By exploring the students' insights concerning different English-speaking cultural groups, mainly through a set of questionnaires, it was possible to outline the work with the cultural dimension in the classroom for the following three years. Work progress was evaluated at specific stages, and the final project evaluations were conducted through individual student interviews in grade 9. The interviews were focused on possible development of students' insights concerning different aspects of the cultural dimension. In particular this concerned awareness of difference and diversity, including modification of stereotypes, as well as the ability to decenter in order to be better able to respect such difference. I also explored students' awareness and views of the activities and approaches used in class, as well as affordances both inside and outside the EFL classroom in relation to these intended insights. A further focus area was the perceived relevance to students of different aspects of the cultural dimension.

The frameworks and approaches adopted for the work in the classroom all have in common that they are based on a constructivist framework, where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through interaction with one's social and cultural environment, including interaction with others. Reflective processes precede or are simultaneous with the learning of basic factual knowledge. This entails a view of learning as a progression from simple to more complex models rather than as a progression from facts to understanding and analysis. Here, the development of intercultural competence is seen as a cyclical process, or along a spiral curriculum, from simple to more complex levels through a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral elements within a framework of experiential learning.

This project has shown one possible way forward concerning the development of intercultural competence within EFL education through a more systematic and comprehensive approach regarding linguistic and cultural aspects. The evaluation of the educational process explored in the study suggests the possibilities for work with the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity concerning some specific context that, based on students' prior knowledge and preconceptions, would benefit from further work. In this case, the specific context primarily concerned different aspects of both cultural and linguistic conditions in the UK. It is also suggested that many students developed the ability to decenter, described in the study as integral to being able to respect otherness. What still remains to be explored are more individualized approaches considering students' different levels of departure. Further work also needs to be put into how to apply insights gained in these specific situations to more general contexts. It is also necessary to explore the use of the suggested approaches in a wider range of different contexts.

Acknowledgements

Contents

List of abbreviations

The following abbreviations are used in the thesis:

A-language	FL introduced at the lower levels of the Finnish comprehensive school
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
C1	The learner's own culture
C2	The foreign culture
C2...n	Foreign cultures in general
CEF	Common European Framework of Reference
IC	Intercultural Competence
ICC	Intercultural Communicative Competence
EFL	English as a Foreign Language
ELF	English as a Lingua Franca
ELP	European Language Portfolio
ELT	English Language Teaching
ESL	English as a Second Language
FL	Foreign Language
FLT	Foreign Language Teaching
L1	First language; language acquired as a mother tongue
L2	Second language
NCC	National Core Curriculum
SLA	Second Language Acquisition

List of Figures

List of Tables

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and the Finland-Swedish context

The main driving force behind this study is my own interest as a teacher and teacher educator in the role of EFL education[1], its potential and shortcomings, and the challenges the future of EFL education will bring. The empirical basis for the study is a teaching project informed by action research and set in an EFL classroom in a Swedish-medium school on the west coast of Finland, on the upper level of the comprehensive school (13-15-year-olds; from grade 7 to 9). It explores the development of the cultural dimension within language education, particularly regarding the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity and respect for such difference. These are two elements that I regard as fundamental for other cultural work in the classroom and for the realization of important aspects of the underlying values of basic education. At the same time the study is intended to be a contribution to the ongoing discussion of the future role of EFL education.

For the purpose of the current project consent was given for me to take on the EFL education for the three years of upper comprehensive school of one random class of students originally assigned to one of the language teachers of the selected school. Thus, the class of 17 students was not specifically chosen for the project, and the aims and contents chosen for the development project were to be placed within the framework of the ordinary curriculum (see further discussion in Section 6.1).

The reasons for choice of focus areas for the project are mainly to be found in my licentiate thesis (Forsman, 2004a), which constituted a more general exploration of Finland-Swedish students' knowledge and attitudes concerning certain linguistic and cultural aspects related to their EFL education, and thus provided the point of departure for the current study through the findings related specifically to the cultural dimension (see Figure 2 in Section 1.2). As a consequence these two studies share parts of the theoretical background. The findings from the previous study will be more extensively presented and discussed in Section 1.3, with only a brief summary in this section.

Finland has two national languages, Finnish and Swedish, and both of these language groups have their own schools within the same education system. Swedish is the mother tongue of 5.7% of the population, consisting of close to 300,000 people.[2] As can be seen from the map (Figure 1), the Swedish-speaking

---

[1] See Section 1.2 for the use of the term FL *education*. Note also that the study is specifically about *English* language education, although many issues discussed also concern FL education in general and will be discussed as such when applicable.

[2] In addition, the Sami are an indigenous people with their own language and culture, and the Roma population also constitutes an officially recognized ethnic and cultural minority in Finland. Sign language users are a third linguistic minority.

population mainly lives in two regions: in the south of Finland and on the west coast, with more urban areas in the south of Finland. These are also the two regional groups that were discussed in Forsman (2004a).
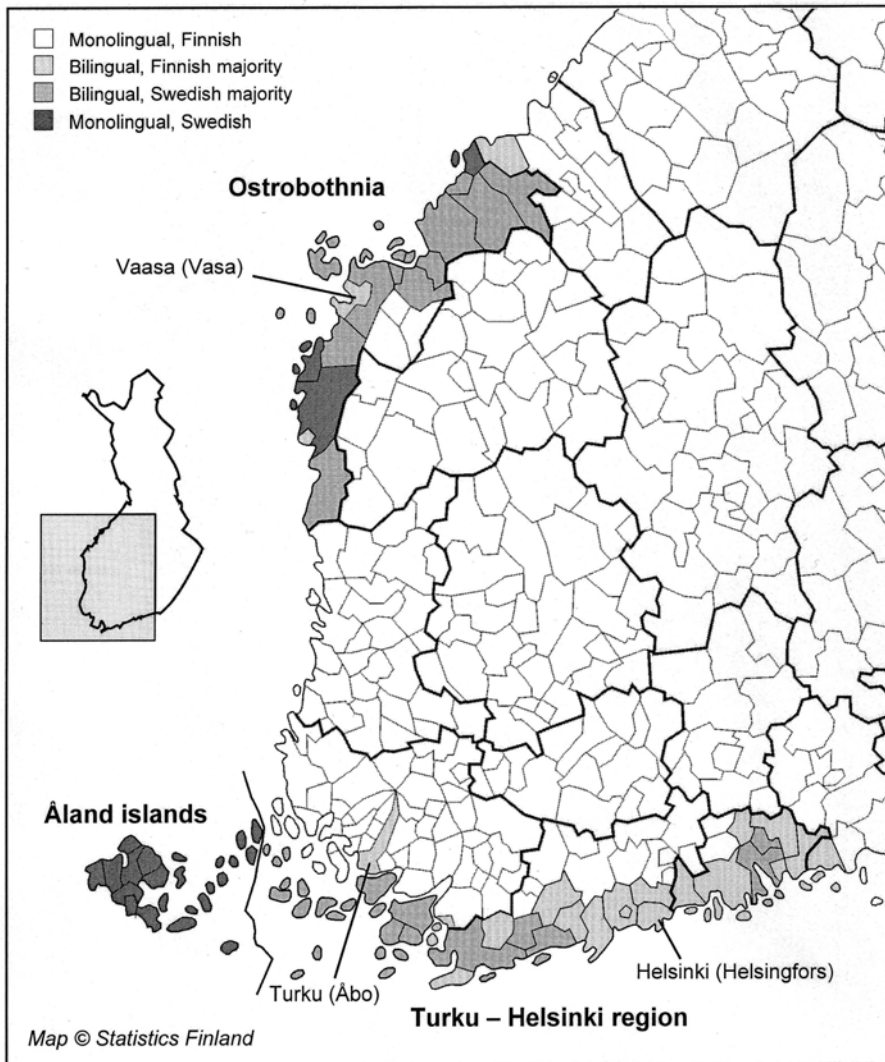
Figure 1. Map of southern and western Finland showing monolingual and bilingual areas concerning Finnish and Swedish (from Sjöholm, 2004: 640)

In 2004, 83.4% of students in Swedish-medium comprehensive schools studied English as a so-called A2-language (Sajavaara, 2006), meaning that the study of English is begun during grades 1-6 together with the study of Finnish, the A1-language, which is initiated during grades 1-6 even before English because of its

role as the national majority language. However, beyond this linguistic situation, Finland is largely a homogeneous society when we consider the relatively low proportion of foreigners (about 113,000 out of 5.2 million in 2005) and asylum seekers and refugees (together about 25,000 in 2004) in the country.[3] On the basis of this context it can be argued that students need opportunities to develop their ability to interact, both locally and globally, also in more international and diverse settings.

In recent decades, it has regularly been suggested that school has remained a modernistic institution within a complex and changing postmodern society (e.g. Hargreaves, 1994; see discussion in Sections 2.1 and 2.2 below). Among the specific challenges for EFL education in most contexts today, including Finland, we might mention the fact that linguistic and cultural impact e.g. from the media and through different international encounters is increasing, which means that the language classroom is no longer the only or even the major source of linguistic and cultural impulses for most language students.[4] The consequences of increasing media influence in particular have become very noticeable: Students are drowned in fragmented pieces of information and clashing value systems that they need to be able to come to terms with. At least in the Finland-Swedish context, the result of these changes is that many students seem to experience a gap between what they learn in the classroom and outside it, which sometimes may lead to negative attitudes towards the language education at school (Forsman, 2004a).

Different media, family and friends, school education and teaching materials can all be among the sources assumed to affect students' linguistic and cultural knowledge and attitudes in a variety of ways, sometimes in directions that are not aimed at in the curriculum. In Forsman (2004a) I explored the situation at the upper level of the comprehensive school (14-15-year-olds), among other issues regarding the students' knowledge of and attitudes to different English-speaking cultures and their representatives.

Although the results of Forsman (2004a) on the whole suggested a satisfactory situation, it was concluded that there is still room for development both concerning cognitive and affective aspects of the cultural dimension. For example, many teenagers gave examples of stereotyped conceptions of British teenagers and seemed to lack insights into the multicultural nature of British society. Furthermore, American English was more popular than British English, which was often described as old-fashioned and lacking other than standard registers. Media influence was singled out as one of the main reasons for these results; other reasons suggested were insufficient treatment of cultural aspects in the FL classroom (cf. Byram, Esarte-Sarries, Taylor, & Allatt, 1991). It was suggested that increased knowledge can help modify stereotypes, although there is still a risk of the maintenance of negative attitudes towards representatives of

---

[3] These statistics and others related to different sectors of Finnish society can be found at *http://www.stat.fi/tup/suoluk/suoluk_vaesto_en.html*.
[4] Aspects related to this fact will be discussed in connection to the notion of *affordances*, see particularly Section 4.1.

other cultural groups unless there is also an affective dimension involved in the process. Consequently, approaches aimed at the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity as well as respect for such difference were chosen as the two main areas to be developed within the framework of the current study. Recent research by Virrankoski and Smeds concerning nationalism and ethnic prejudice among teenagers in Finland, presented e.g. in Smeds (2004), also shows the need for work with issues concerning cultural competence and attitudes.[5]

Thus, the reason for my focus of interest lies in the fact that the Finland-Swedish EFL classroom is in a period of transition: More English learning than before takes place *outside* the classroom itself because of the rapid development of the media and the internationalization of our society, a situation also creating a need for increased linguistic awareness and learning strategies (see Forsman, 2004a). Language teaching *inside* the classrooms has also changed because of an increased access to technical aids. Furthermore, it has become easier to bring in more authentic settings into the classrooms. The main emphasis within language teaching has shifted from the formal traits of the language to more communicative and functional aspects, i.e., closer to how language is used in real life, after linguistic disciplines such as discourse analysis, sociolinguistics and pragmatics increased their significance from the end of the 1960s (see e.g. Stern, 1992/1996: 162).

It is also generally agreed upon today that in order to interact successfully in a foreign language we need to be sensitive to different cultural aspects (see e.g. Byram, 1997; Doyé, 1999; Kaikkonen, 2001). However, culture is a complex, changing phenomenon, further emphasized by the postmodern media society. It could be suggested that what used to be of importance for the survival of one's own group and thus socialized between generations has taken on new forms in the global village: We need to consider what those culturally related abilities and skills to pass on to the next generation will be. As was previously stated, this study concerns the cultural dimension primarily within EFL education, although the discussions will show that several elements involved have connections to other parts of the curriculum such as the underlying values for basic education and key-topics or themes to be integrated across the curriculum. McGarry (1995), among others, suggests an integrated ESL and cultural studies syllabus where culture as meaning is stressed, on the grounds that students also need to know about the beliefs and values that underlie surface phenomena, i.e., the cultural forms. He points out that 'in the general educational context, an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity is coming to be regarded as a desirable aim of the school curriculum' (p. 11).[6] However, what the cultural

---

[5] It should be noted, however, that Virrankoski & Smeds found evidence of less xenophobia among girls compared to boys and among young people belonging to the Swedish-speaking minority compared to the majority population. In addition it was suggested that students intending to continue their education at upper secondary school displayed less xenophobia (see also Section 6.3).

[6] Graddol (2006: 87) suggests that elements of an ELF syllabus could be useful within an English-as-a-mother-tongue curriculum, considering the lack of skills of many native speakers of English e.g. regarding how to negotiate understanding in international communication contexts.

dimension can entail on a concrete level and how it can be implemented in the classroom is less than self-evident, considering the different contexts where English is taught worldwide. Additionally, as Kaikkonen (2001: 66) points out, the cultural dimension is part of a new FL pedagogy that is more interdisciplinary and allows greater emphasis on subjectivity than before. Thus, it is recognizable that the cultural dimension within EFL education merits further discussion.

In today's complex, international world, clear-cut definitions and distinctions cannot always be used to describe the linguistic and cultural situation of individuals and societies. Frameworks such as EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) have been the traditional ways of discussing English language teaching (ELT) and learning. A *second* language is then seen as having social and communicative functions in the community where it is learnt, e.g. English is the second language for immigrants to the US. A *foreign* language, on the other hand, is employed mainly to communicate with people outside the community where it is learnt, e.g. one might study Spanish in Finland to be able to communicate with Spaniards on a holiday trip to Spain. (See e.g. Oxford, 1990: 6, for a discussion of these terms.) Among other aspects, the type of language learnt in the two settings may differ: Conversational language proficiency (BICS) is often more commonly acquired in second language settings, while academic language proficiency (CALP) often dominates foreign language learning settings (see Cummins, 2000).[7] There is also a well-established dichotomy within bilingualism research denoting second languages that have been naturally acquired as *ascribed*, and languages institutionally learnt as *achieved* (Adler, in James, 2000: 31-32). Often, however, the terms second and foreign are used interchangeably with second language acquisition (SLA) as the overall term.

In Graddol (2006: 82-85, 87) the historic and present roles of these models are discussed, in connection to an interesting recent development of the increased role of ELF - English as a *lingua franca* - or Global English (see also Section 3.3). In Jenkins (2004) ELF refers to English used as a contact language among speakers with different first language and cultural backgrounds, although today this typically means non-native speakers of English, since English is now only estimated to be the L1 of around 25% of all the English speakers of the world.[8] In Europe ELF has largely been interpreted as a component of individual rather than societal bilingualism. But, as James (2000: 30-31) points out, to the extent that English is present in so many of today's European societies, not only within domains such as e.g. education and popular culture, the situation in many countries could more and more be described also as societal bilingualism (cf. House, 2002). And this bilingualism within many European societies consists of a mixture of ascribed and achieved bilingualism on an individual basis. However, Graddol (2006; cf. House, 2002) points out that the increase of ELF should not be equated with the triumph of English as a global language over

---

[7] See Forsman (2004a) on the relevance of Cummins's BICS/CALP distinction to the context of the Finland-Swedish comprehensive school; see also Section 1.3 below.
[8] Statistics from Crystal (1997/2003).

other languages,[9] considering that such a view of global English would be 'too ethnocentric to permit a broader understanding of the complex ways in which the spread of English is helping to transform the world and in which English, in turn, is transformed by the world' (p. 59). The emphasis in Graddol's analysis of key trends and future development of ELT lies on the changing of its nature. This includes e.g. more understanding of how non-native speakers use English among themselves, the target model being a fluent bilingual rather than a native speaker, and the inclusion of pragmatic strategies required in intercultural communication. Issues related to this current development will also be addressed in connection to the discussion of the future role of EFL education in a Finland-Swedish context.

1.2 Problem field and aims of the study

There has been a recent surge of interest in the discussion of educational values and humanistic education within different pedagogical fields, also in Finnish society (cf. the discussion in Section 2.2 below; for the Finnish context, see e.g. Hämäläinen, 2003; Suortti, 2003). The development of the intercultural dimension of language education can be said to constitute one specific part within this larger general educational framework. Concerning intercultural learning and education generally, Räsänen and San (2005) conclude that it is still a rather young and marginal field in Finland. However, in the light of present-day societal change, it is suggested in this study that the Finnish educational system needs to provide all citizens with the same opportunities for gaining knowledge and competences for encountering increasing diversity in terms of language and culture, competences that will be useful, even necessary, in the contemporary world and in the future (see also Kohonen, 2001b: 8-10, on societal developments; Kaikkonen, 2001).

Thus, against the background set out in the previous section I see a need to further problematize the aims, contents and methods of FL education in general and of EFL education in particular, within the Finland-Swedish context. New societal demands and the limited time we have at our disposal in the classroom make it necessary to rethink goals and content and move away from the mediation of limited sets of facts and information to helping students develop awareness and competences that can be applied in many different situations, also in a perspective of lifelong learning. Such learner autonomy is, of course, needed in many areas (see also Kohonen, 2005): In this work the focus will be on *intercultural*[10] *competence* (IC), mainly following Byram (1997) and the

---

[9] In Graddol (2006) it is pointed out that Mandarin and Spanish in particular are challenging English in some territories for educational resources and policy attention, mainly due to changing trade relations. Even on the internet, the proportion of English material is declining e.g. due to more non-English speakers than before using the internet and more languages and scripts now being supported by computer software.

[10] The term 'multicultural' is also widely used particularly outside Europe; however, in my view this term can be regarded as reflecting a more static relation compared to the reciprocity expressed through the term 'intercultural' (cf. discussion in Lahdenperä, 2004), which thus can be seen as more in accordance with recent educational aims.

different elements included in his comprehensive *Model of Intercultural Communicative Competence* (ICC; see discussion in Section 3.2). The cultural dimension within FL education has gained renewed emphasis in today's post-colonial and international world: People all over the globe find themselves in situations where the ability to encounter difference, diversity and ambiguity is of great advantage, both for personal and economic reasons, and, ultimately, for the sake of world peace (cf. Kohonen, 2001b: 8-9, 21; Kaikkonen, 2001: 70). In the light of this more holistic goal orientation to language learning, the term FL *education* is used in this study instead of FL *teaching* whenever relevant.[11] According to Lahdenperä (2004), *intercultural education* includes the study of processes connected to socialization, learning and teaching in a multicultural, multiethnic, global and intercultural context. The term *intercultural* in itself suggests process, border crossing, interaction and reciprocity, at the same time as qualitative and value-related aspects are connected with cultural encounters. In the context of this study, intercultural competence can be said to comprise several interconnected components supporting each other in a variety of ways, with one of the main aims being interaction with and respect for difference *in general*, not only concerning e.g. representatives of certain English-speaking communities (see discussion below).

With my own teaching experiences and my previous study of the situation in today's Finland-Swedish EFL classrooms (Forsman, 2004a) as my points of departure, the overall aim of the current study is to further problematize and increase understanding of the implementation of the cultural dimension by addressing the interrelated questions *what*, *why* and *how* of the cultural dimension within EFL education (cf. Larzén, 2005: 15, 60-61). This is conducted through theoretical explorations into the area alongside an attempt at promoting intercultural competence in a more systematic and insightful manner within the framework of my own educational praxis. The focus for the intercultural work in the classroom lies in the following set of closely connected cognitive and affective components that I see as fundamental in IC:

> The promotion of:
>
> • awareness of difference and diversity both between and within different groups to help prevent and modify stereotypes, and
>
> • a more distanced and relativized view of one's own taken-for-granted ways and values to be able to respect such difference.

The work process both within the classroom context and for my research as a whole has been informed by action research (see Figure 2), with myself in the role of the teacher-researcher or the reflective practitioner (see Sections 5.1 and 5.2). I initiated the three-year project in the fall of 2002 with a class of 17 seventh-grade students. By exploring their insights concerning different English-

---

[11] See Kohonen (2001b: 20-21) for an examination of differences between the two notions according to dimensions such as goal orientation and the role of the teacher.

speaking cultural groups mainly through a set of questionnaire questions (see Appendix II), I could outline the work with the cultural dimension in the classroom for the following three years. Work progress was evaluated at specific stages, and the final project evaluations were conducted through individual student interviews in grade 9.[12] The interviews were focused on possible development of students' insights[13] particularly concerning awareness of difference and diversity, including possible modification of stereotypes, as well as the ability to decenter (based on Byram, 1997; see Byram's *savoir être* in Sections 3.2 and 4.2 in particular) to be able to better respect such difference. I also explored students' awareness and views of activities and approaches used in class as well as affordances both inside and outside the EFL classroom in relation to these intended insights. A further focus area was the perceived relevance to students of different aspects of the cultural dimension.

Plan action to develop and evaluate practice in relation to ICC

Theoretical reflection and problematization of specific focus areas

Experientially oriented classroom

Starting point: Own practice raising questions around EFL education

Forsman (2004a): Identifying focus areas for further explorations

Analysis and re-flection on results

Presentation of results in doctoral thesis

Planning of new actions based on results
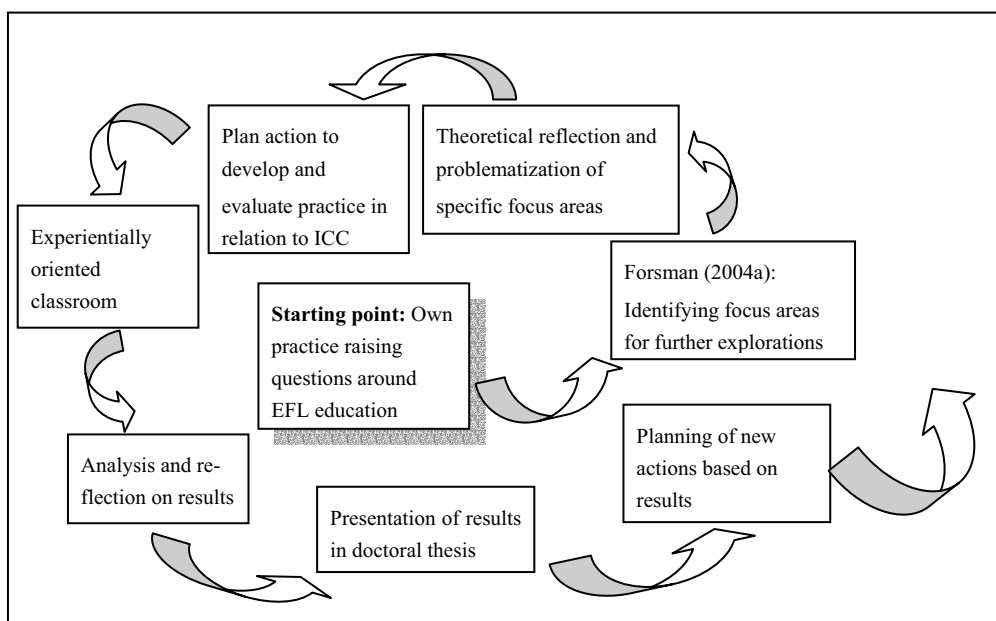
Figure 2. An outline of the action research process involving the current study

Ontologically I see reality as multiple and locally constructed, and epistemologically I see knowledge mainly as contextually created and situated in a certain time and place. Following Dysthe (1996), I consider learning in educational contexts taking place when individuals construct or reconstruct their knowledge through (spoken and written) interaction with the teacher, other

---

[12] See outline of key stages and events during the three project years in Table 4 in Section 6.1.

[13] The term *insight* is used here to refer to the development of a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects (cf. Larzén, 2005) beyond the level of factual information.

students and their environment, thus taking into account both a socio-cultural and an individual cognitive perspective within a constructivist framework (cf. Lahdenperä, 2004; Kyburz-Graber, Hart, Posch, & Robottom, 2006).

The descriptive and explorative study can be positioned as abductive, i.e., the researcher (here in the role of the reflective practitioner) has certain presuppositions about the research problem that become the focus of observation and discussion, but no theoretically derived hypotheses are tested. Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994: 41-49) describe abduction as a combination of inductive and deductive methods: Like the inductive method, abduction takes empirical facts as its starting point, but it is also close to the deductive method since it takes account of theoretical preconceptions. Thus, the empirical analysis can be combined with or preceded by theoretical studies so that both theory and the empirical material influence each other during the research process. According to Alvesson and Sköldberg, induction and deduction can easily be seen as one-sided and unrealistic compared to abduction when we take into account how research is actually conducted in practice. The work is hermeneutically grounded, as opposed to being positivistic, in the sense that my interpretations of the whole process have emerged through a dialectic interaction between my own theoretical pre-understanding and the different empirical parts of the process in the form of actions and evaluations of actions. The empirical material consists of a set of student questionnaires as well as final/evaluative student interviews, supported by my own written reflections (*Action Log*). In addition to hermeneutics, the qualitative analysis of student responses is also inspired by phenomenography. The reason for the phenomenographical approach is its interest in variations and possible changes in ways of experiencing the world by pointing to certain critical features in the form of variations in experience that learners need to simultaneously perceive or become aware of in order to learn and understand new aspects of a phenomenon, i.e., an educational point of view (Marton & Booth, 2000).[14] For Byram (2004), the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is a second-order distinction: Instead, Byram makes a distinction between *research* and *scholarship*, 'the former seeking for explanation or understanding of what is, the latter attempting to establish what ought to be, and sometimes attempting to implement and evaluate what ought to be' (p. 27). Thus, my work could also be classified as scholarship (see also Section 5.1).

Hopefully this study will show some of the challenges of today's EFL classroom. As a teacher-researcher[15] I fully agree with Kramsch's (1993) description of the many contradictions, dilemmas and factors that call for instantaneous judgment and action by the teacher, not as 'problems' but as 'the basic condition of classroom learning' (p. 13). As I see it, much (positivistic) research that is focused on one or a few isolated variables relevant to classroom learning does not automatically generate the most valid results for actual

---

[14] Cf. *transformative* and *emancipatory* processes of learning in Kohonen (2001b); see also Section 4.1.
[15] Issues connected to the double role of the teacher as a researcher will be further addressed along with the methodological considerations in Chapter 5, as well as in the concluding chapter.

application in the classroom, simply because factors that will always constitute the basic condition of classroom learning have been taken away. Instead, although lacking in generalizability, a thorough qualitative description of a classroom context can provide possibilities for at least some degree of implementation also in other contexts. A more thorough methodological discussion will follow in Chapter 5.

1.3 Point of departure of the study: Presentation of Forsman (2004a)

In this chapter, the findings of my previous study (Forsman, 2004a) will be presented as they constitute the empirical background and a point of departure for the current study. The findings of the two separate parts of the study, Part I and II (see Figure 3), are summarized below, with the subheadings *Language and context* and *Culture and context* for the two main topics discussed in Part II. The study explored the situation at the upper level of the Swedish-medium comprehensive school (14-15-year-olds), comparing two main regions of Swedish speakers: the more urban south of Finland and the more rural west coast (see Figure 1).

General aims:		Context:	Function of theory:
To explore students' linguistic and cultural knowledge and attitudes with particular focus on the influence of extracurricular activities in English.		Finland-Swedish EFL-classrooms in two regions	Abductive

Year:

1998

Quantitative

Pilot study:
Questions to 26 students in 2 schools

1999

Mainly quantitative

Questionnaires
to 429 students in 28 schools

Mainly quantitative

Part I:
Answers from 330 students in 22 schools

2000

Qualitative

Part IIa:
Interviews with 20 students in 8 schools

Qualitative

Part IIb:
Interviews with 8 teachers in 8 schools

Figure 3. The design of Forsman (2004a)

Part I

Part I of the study, on 330 student informants, showed that students in the south of Finland spent significantly more time on extracurricular activities in English than students in the western region. At the same time, students in the southern area knew significantly more of the vocabulary tested in the study, chose more American English vocabulary and less British English vocabulary. To summarize these findings, we see a strong indication that the more time spent on

extracurricular activities in English, the more American English vocabulary was chosen.

Choice of American English vocabulary was used as an indicator of what I have called unintentional learning, i.e. accidental learning of information without the intention of remembering that information (see Forsman, 2004a: 33-35, for further discussion of the term). It is improbable that all the learning that was manifested in the study is a result of such unintentional learning. Many students intentionally try to learn vocabulary during spare time activities in English, as language practice or because of their own interest in the topics at hand. The words and expressions they learn are sometimes of the kind that their teachers would never recommend; others can be seen as very useful. Irrespective of how intentional this learning is or how useful the knowledge, learning from the media can be an effective and enjoyable way to learn languages and all students need to be aware of it.

Judging from the answers to the open-ended questions in the questionnaires in Part I regarding students' views and awareness of English learnt at school versus out of school, most Finland-Swedish students seemed content with the English education they receive at school. However, among these answers, there were some comments that were found particularly interesting and consequently chosen for further exploration through interviews with both students and teachers. In particular, this concerned the spontaneously expressed preference for American English over British English in the southern region. Furthermore, nearly one fourth of all students spontaneously expressed a wish for more colloquial English at school.

Part II

Language and context

In general, the interview answers from the 20 students and 8 teachers in Part II of the study confirmed that the issues put forward in Part I were well worth pursuing in relation to curricular aims in the Finland-Swedish classrooms. The teachers generally recognized the issues brought up in the student interviews, although with a different perspective on part of them.

One conclusion to be drawn from this study as a whole is that most students seem to benefit from unintentional learning, although it can very limited for some. Some students learn more and are so much influenced by the language of the media that the contents of their language education is experienced as too easy or uninteresting. This influence can concern actual linguistic proficiency and knowledge of cultural aspects as well as attitudes towards certain varieties, registers, and modes of language or cultural aspects. It should be noted that even if a certain type of student profiled in this study were more common in one region than in the other, teachers in all regions naturally need to take account of all types of students in their teaching since there are still representatives of all different profiles in their classrooms. As a result we need different and more individualized approaches to address media influence: For example, we need to consider how to take better care of and benefit more efficiently from media influence that is in accordance with curricular goals, but we also need to be able

to balance and enhance awareness with regard to influence that is acting against curricular goals.

Thus, many students seem to spend time on watching TV in English without really learning very many words and expressions, for example because they only read the Swedish subtitles when watching TV without paying attention to what is being said. Some learn more because they compare speech and subtitles or are very attentive to what is being said to understand the message, i.e., they learn indirectly while watching TV, others even intentionally. Considering these results and the implications of the research discussed in the theoretical background of this study concerning the benefits of dictionary use and paying attention to form-meaning relationships, it is suggested that the strategy of comparing speech and L1 subtitles when watching TV could be an example of an efficient learning strategy to teach students of many different abilities.

It is a reason for concern if not all students are able to benefit from unintentional learning to the same extent, especially since studies show that differences in the level of students' proficiency in English are already great in Finland (see e.g. Tuokko, 2000). More heterogeneous groups than we have today would most probably cause difficulty regarding the possibility of creating a motivating classroom environment that can provide opportunities for learning according to the individual needs of students. One suggestion is to try to bring in more awareness raising into the classroom concerning possibilities and strategies surrounding learning that takes place in informal situations, e.g. how to make use of contextual cues, as well as reflections on different types of language that students learn from the media. These are competences that students will make lifelong use of as they go on learning also beyond comprehensive school. However, more research into the processes and outcomes of unintentional learning from the media are still needed, e.g. in the form of testing several language skills as well as more lexical items on a deeper level of knowledge.

Concerning knowledge of different varieties of English, the students interviewed felt that they knew most about American and British English, the former as a result of media influence and the latter through its frequent use within school education. Most students were reluctant to say that they would recognize any other varieties. Regarding their attitudes to different varieties of English, the most positive attitudes were expressed towards American English, often because of its familiarity through its frequent use in the media. British English, particularly as used in the classroom context, was not as popular. However, there were some more positive comments expressing views of British English as beautiful and even exotic because of its rarer use in the media, mainly from the groups in the western region. Also concerning students' knowledge of and attitudes towards different registers of English, the pattern from the questionnaires was familiar: School language was often more negatively viewed and described by many students as standard, written (British) English, whereas language used in the media was seen as more colloquial, spoken (American) English that students wished to learn more about. Many students lacked awareness of the existence of different registers particularly in British English, e.g. concerning the language use of young people in Britain, and thus expressed the view that they probably do not use slang at all. These views are summarized in Table 1. Note, however, that what students see as slang is not necessarily

commented on in positive tones only. Generally, there seems to be a need for more awareness of the existence of different registers in all varieties of English as well as awareness of the different benefits and drawbacks of these registers.

Table 1. The dichotomy of language varieties, registers, and modes according to school versus out-of-school context (Forsman, 2004a: 158)

CONTEXT:	**School** versus **outside school**
VARIETY:	**British** versus **American English**
REGISTER:	**Standard** versus **colloquial language/slang**
MODE:	**Written** versus **spoken language**

As could be seen in Part I of the study among the quantitative results, students do not receive very much *written* input *outside* school since they do not spend much of their spare time reading literature in English. This was also obvious from their interview answers in Part II, as reading literature in English was seldom mentioned as a strategy for learning the language. From my own classroom experience, I recognize the situation described by some teachers that besides the heterogeneity we often meet in the classrooms, there are also (at least) two types of students among the fast learners. These two types both learn a lot, but different kinds of language, outside school, and they could be described as 'readers' and the more 'streetwise'. Of these two types, the 'readers' can develop their academic language proficiency, CALP (Cummins, 2000), through the reading of texts that are cognitively challenging and at the same time providing both linguistic and contextual support. Corson's notion of the Lexical Bar (e.g. Corson, 1995) is at work here: The 'readers' learn more Graeco-Latin vocabulary, typically rather abstract and more low-frequency words, whereas the 'streetwise' learn more Anglo-Saxon vocabulary that native speakers use for most everyday purposes (BICS). Obviously, it becomes more difficult for the 'streetwise' students to cross this barrier and become successful in formal education, since they do not come into contact with the type of vocabulary needed for such purposes very often. Lundahl (1995, 1998) sees the development of reading skills in English, or rather the development of a willingness to read, as a complement to the listening skills that dominate English language outside school. Through reading learners can deepen and enrich the type of language they otherwise learn in their spare time. Lundahl also sees this as a way of ensuring that learners keep up and even continue to develop their English after they have finished their compulsory education. But he also wishes to change the attitudes of students who rely completely on their school education for their language development by making them see the possibilities instead of the difficulties connected with language learning. By encouraging our students to read many different types of texts – books, magazines, comic strips, song texts and texts on the computer – we can start building a bridge between the English language that students meet at school and outside school and provide our students with more opportunities for becoming skilled readers.

Evidently, good reading skills are important for further studies. It is also necessary if one wants to be able to handle the ever-increasing amount of information in today's society. We can teach students how to use comprehension strategies that they might also use in their spare time. Eventually, they can start developing their academic language proficiency through further reading in the foreign language (see e.g. Cummins, 2000).

Thus, Lundahl is a proponent of learner autonomy. His reasons for fostering learner autonomy in his group of students (Lundahl, 1995) were the following: The students were all at different proficiency levels, they were also very different in terms of maturity level, and they had different interests. To me these aspects all seem to be very common in today's comprehensive schools. In fact, among the aims teachers share with many students, backed by the curriculum, is more individualized teaching according to student needs.

The conclusion from what the teachers expressed and from what students have said about their needs in relation to the theoretical discussion of the study is that language education needs to be experienced as meaningful for all students, but at the same time students also need to develop more awareness concerning what, why, and how they learn. Students react differently to the specific types of language they hear being used in different situations. There is a need to motivate students by enhancing their awareness concerning the usefulness of what they learn at school as a complement to what they learn from the media and other spare time activities. Thus, routine teaching is not enough, e.g. taking for granted that all students understand the reasons behind what is taught in the classroom. This easily leads to misunderstandings of the kind found in this study in terms of British English being a variety with no slang that should be taught and used at school. At the same time, unintentional learning could be encouraged and treated as the resource it really is to further reduce the gap that many students experience between the language offered at school and the language they encounter on a daily basis in the media.

I see the enhancement of students' awareness of different registers and their usefulness as an important educational aim that ties together different subjects and thematic areas, e.g. communication education both within foreign language and mother tongue education. Even if students know about the differences between written and spoken language as well as between dialect and standard varieties in their first language, this knowledge could be more consciously connected to the reality of the foreign language community since all students cannot apply this knowledge on their own. For example, to discuss and compare the situation with that of the use of dialects in certain situations in the native tongue can serve to make the students more aware of the fact that there are a variety of registers in all languages, in written as well as in oral modes, and perhaps change their attitudes towards the English taught at school into a more positive one by realizing that different registers are simply useful in different situations. If different foreign language varieties, registers, and modes are treated with more variation, including necessary reflection, in the classroom, the dichotomy between school and out-of-school language that many students perceive might be reduced or at least given less negative connotations. Evidently, this does not help students to know exactly *what* and *when* words and expressions are appropriate to use, but they might become more observant about

what they learn in different situations and thus they might also hopefully become more aware of how to use the language themselves. Only students who know about the existence and use of British English youth language can have a real choice concerning whether they should learn it and use it in different situations or not.

Although not discussed in depth in the study, there was a tendency for girls to want more knowledge about representatives from other cultures as opposed to factual information about different countries compared to boys. These gender-related comments concerning cultural aspects lead to a discussion of the results of culture and context in this study.

Culture and context

The other main area of concern in Forsman (2004a) was cultural aspects within foreign language education. To summarize these findings, the students taking part in the interviews generally expressed the following: Concerning attitudes towards and concepts of representatives of English-speaking cultures, there were many examples of stereotyping, even if not always negative ones. In particular, this stereotyping concerned British teenagers, whereas their images of American teenagers in general seemed more varied, modern, and positive, although not always realistic. Many students claimed that they receive more cultural input from the media than in the classroom, mainly through American TV-series and movies, and that what they know about other English-speaking countries mainly comes from school education. Thus, the role of the media as a powerful influencing factor was further emphasized. There were some, but not many, indications of a certain degree of cultural awareness in this study. Cultural awareness was here defined as understanding of and respect for other cultures, including the recognition of diversity within different cultural groups and sub-groups, resulting in the avoidance of stereotyping and generalization of certain features to whole cultural groups. If the findings of this study reflect what has been expressed about cultural education in the curriculum so far, it seems that further emphasis of cultural aspects is needed.

Even if Forsman (2004a) cannot claim to offer an exhaustive description of the knowledge and attitudes of all students, there seems to be evidence enough that there is a gap between the curricular aims concerning the cultural aspects discussed and the empirical findings. I am aware of the fact that both the students' knowledge and their attitudes may vary, depending on the popular cultural phenomena that happen to be emphasized in the media, meaning that e.g. British English is more popular at times because of its use by certain stars within sports or the media. However, since these attitudes are subject to change, one of the most important conclusions to be drawn from both the theoretical discussion of cultural education and the empirical results of this study is that cultural knowledge and attitudes should not be left to the vagaries of unsystematic media influence. Instead, school education can contribute to the development of cultural competence as long as certain prerequisites are met. As Byram, Morgan and colleagues (1994) have pointed out, students have preconceptions: No student is a tabula rasa that can be filled with the knowledge and attitudes we hope to foster. Thus, they state that the students' background

knowledge, including prejudices and stereotypes, has to be confronted at an early and important stage of their development towards more cultural awareness.

Also regarding cultural issues, the teachers generally recognized and commented on the issues brought up by the students in the interviews. They suggested that we could try to find more systematic ways of bringing in positive role models in the form of representatives of other cultures into the classrooms, as well as helping students meet with them outside the classroom. These meetings would probably be most successful if the representatives were people as close to the students' own age as possible so that they have a better possibility to identify with them. Through such experiences students could gain more knowledge about people from other cultures than via the conveyance of superficial facts and information.

Studies conducted in Finland by Sjöholm (2000) and Lintunen (2001) seem to suggest that the attitudes towards British English are more positive among students in their later teens and above compared to younger learners; at least students seem to use and express preferences for American English less often as they become older. Whether this age difference mainly depends on a common tendency among teenagers to be more affected by popular youth culture, or whether these results also reflect a difference between what type of further education students choose after comprehensive school would be an interesting topic for further research (cf. the 'readers' and the more 'streetwise' students referred to above). It would be natural to assume that more students who are content with the language teaching received at comprehensive school and more interested in British English language and culture choose to go on to upper secondary school and further on to study English at university. If this is the case, the aim of enhancing cultural awareness at comprehensive-school level becomes all the more important.

1.4 Outline of the thesis

Against the previous background discussion, which presents both the context of the current study and its points of departure regarding theoretical assumptions, problem formulation, positioning of the study in a research paradigm and some introductory methodological considerations, this section will briefly outline the contents of the following chapters.

Chapter 2 presents the larger theoretical framework of the study, starting with a more general discussion of education in postmodernity, and then moving on to a discussion of values and competences for a changing society. The latter section brings us closer into what will be the focus of **Chapter 3** and the topic of interest of this study, i.e. the cultural dimension within FL education. This chapter moves from a more general discussion of the relationship between language and culture via a discussion of the changing aims of FL education and the changing nature of ELT to a consideration of the cultural dimension within the two latest versions of the National Curriculum in Finland, including issues related to assessment. **Chapter 4** looks more closely at some methodological approaches for the inclusion of the cultural dimension within FL education, beginning from some more general theoretical frameworks of relevance for this

study, and then moving on to more specific approaches concerning the two focus areas of the intercultural work in the classroom: the ability to decenter as a basis for intercultural competence, and issues related to the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity. The issue of learner autonomy, particularly as it relates to the cultural dimension of FL education, is also addressed. **Chapter 5** constitutes a discussion of methodological considerations in relation to educational research in general and this study, informed by action research, in particular. **Chapter 6** presents the empirical part of the study, including both practical considerations concerning the classroom work conducted in the study and presentations of findings from the evaluative interviews that concluded the work in class. Finally, in **Chapter 7**, the study is summarized and discussed, also from the point of view of implications of the study and suggestions for further research.

2 Larger theoretical framework for the study

2.1 Education in postmodernity

The discussion of postmodernity and its implications for different sectors of society have been widely discussed in recent decades.[16] In educational[17] contexts Andy Hargreaves (e.g. 1994) has been particularly influential on these issues, both among researchers and practicing teachers. Although not all phenomena described in his work are relevant in the context of this study, a discussion about some of the issues he brings up will form the basis of this chapter.

According to Hargreaves, the amount of societal changes within diverse fields that have been taking place simultaneously point to the end of one socio-historical period and the beginning of a new (cf. Graddol, 2006: 18-22). This entails changes that cannot be regarded as irrelevant, although he also points out that the break between modernity and postmodernity cannot be described as either 'absolute, clear cut or universal' (1994: 44). He discusses the context in which today's schools function (pp. 47-61): It is a description of the confrontation between, on the one hand, a more postindustrial world characterized by an escalating rate of change and an intensive compression of time and space, cultural diversity, technological complexity, national insecurity and scientific uncertainty and, on the other hand, a modernistic, monolithic school system that to a great extent tries to keep on working according to aims that are out-of-date within impenetrable and inflexible structures (cf. Schön, 1983: 329-336). Eventually the gap between the world of the school and the world outside becomes more and more evident.

However, in such a complicated and complex context qualitative changes are not easy to bring about. According to Hargreaves, schools try to adapt to new demands but the unwieldy and cumbersome administrative apparatus is also reflected in the teaching itself in different ways. The teachers' workload appears close to impossible considering all the new problems, tasks and responsibilities that are constantly added on without any space being created for all the changes, and with the implementations of change always under a tight schedule. In the Western world the Judaeo-Christian tradition seems to be giving way as a basis for education in a context marked by a greater religious, cultural and ethnic diversity, something that is giving rise to questions concerning the moral purposes of education. Added to this is the uncertainty created by the breakdown and questioning of established scientific truths. This is also why Hargreaves and others point to the importance in postmodern society of setting educational aims and using methods such as the gathering of information, research processes and analyses alongside the ability to learn how to learn in an engaged as well as

---

[16] See Forsman (2006) for a discussion in Swedish.
[17] For a specific discussion of the role and future of *EFL education* in postmodernity in the light of recent developments of global English, see Graddol (2006).

critical manner, as opposed to a curriculum based on a set of given knowledge and facts in a world where scientific knowledge seems to take on more and more of a tentative character. I would like to suggest that such changes are already visible both in national and local curricula in the form of stated aims and visions of how educational needs could be fulfilled. Changes are also visible in practical classroom work in some schools. However, in most contexts and subjects we still need to reach a balance between and agreement on different types of aims and content, between the "old" and the "new": What will these aims and this content be, what will have to go, and on what grounds will this priority work take place?

Hargreaves (1994) points out that modernity has created many of the conditions that today's educational systems work under, meaning that what we see as 'real education' and take as the normal, natural and reasonable is nothing more than products of a specific socio-historical period. The implications are that a specific set-up does not necessarily answer to the demands of another time and place in the most optimal or reasonable way. This can be compared to Burbules' (2004: 9) suggestion that students' *why*-questions concerning educational aims and contents deserve better answers than 'Because it is on the test' or 'Because we have always done it this way'. Taking such questions seriously could transform much of the curriculum. But we also know how difficult it is to question what we normally take for granted and leave safe ground for something new with possible unforeseen consequences. Also Hansén and Sjöberg (2006) discuss how teaching, assessment and quality issues within education are connected with individual, social and political interests. There is a need for an open dialogue concerning what interests we want to have represented within education since different choices will have different outcomes, e.g. risk of segregation if only specific cognitive knowledge is valued at the expense of affective development. They point out that people's interpretations and understanding of the world around them, although dependent on their social background and cultural traditions, do not constitute unchangeable values.[18] Furthermore, Hargreaves stresses that no such seemingly simple solutions as the replacement of a modernistic school system with postmodern organizational structures will work, since there are enough contradictory and inadequately developed possibilities within postmodernity. Thus, rather than having a single inherent meaning or value, postmodernity merely offers a new social arena and new opportunities for the realization of moral and political values and commitments in education, but at the same time also new constraints. In his opinion, it is at the point where these contradictions clash that the teachers' professionalism will come into play - and by professionalism Hargreaves refers to the practicing of a wise and independent capacity for judgment in contexts where teachers themselves have the greatest insights (cf. Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006).

---

[18] See also Tornberg (2000: 29ff, 2001) on Cultural Studies as a starting point for the awareness of the fact that educational practices are a result of the interests of dominating groups, and that practices have a historical and sociocultural basis.

2.2 Values and competences for a changing society

What then is suggested to be in educational focus for a changed and changing society? Hargreaves (1994: 50-51) refers to Schlechty's description of the skills and qualities that citizens in a postindustrial society will need, as well as the new educational structures required to promote them. Among these skills and qualities we find adaptability, responsibility, flexibility as well as the capability to cooperate with others. Hargreaves also sees the importance of having such educational aims, but stresses the risk of them becoming buzzwords[19] both economically and pedagogically and in practice only work to increase productivity, whereas aspects such as caring about other people and environmental issues as well as justice and equality might be forgotten. It is also important to foster active citizens who can take part in political life and make a social contribution by e.g. influencing how technology could be used for the good of society in a postindustrial era (cf. Kohonen, 2001b: 10). As a concrete example, Hargreaves discusses the concept of 'flexibility' and points out how this can lead to both exploitation and enrichment, both limitations and diversity, and therefore we need to consider different consequences of flexibility for different people in the labor market e.g. in terms of underemployment. Thus, flexibility has to be seen as an open democratic possibility demanding participation and critical commitment, not something to be uncritically embraced. In this context it should be mentioned that among the scholars included in this study e.g. van Lier (2004) and Tornberg (2004) address the need and possibilities for democratic experiences and democracy education in the language classroom (see e.g. Section 4.1).

Hargreaves (1994: 52-55) brings an interesting and important issue into the discussion: the paradox of globalization. This paradox entails that the anonymity, complexity and uncertainty connected with the process of globalization also bring about a search for meaning e.g. in the form of the strengthening of more local ethnical, religious and linguistic identities (see also Graddol, 2006). From a national point of view, and especially under the pressures of economic globalization, this paradox is visible in many areas, e.g. in the development of national curricula, where the national cultural heritage receives a central position. (See also Risager, 1999, included in Section 3.3 in the discussion of the intercultural speaker replacing the native speaker.) Concerning contradictory linguistic contexts such as China where increasing proficiency in English exists alongside the implementation of a nationwide standard spoken language, Graddol (2006: 21) suggests that, whereas a postmodern outlook is comfortable with the complexity and contradictions inherent in such a situation, those hanging on to modernist values may be driven into more fundamentalist or repressive responses. Hargreaves admits to the importance of reconstructing and reflecting over local and national cultures as well as experiencing a spirit of community in such situations, but stresses the significance of young people developing an awareness and responsibility for

---

[19] Cf. Kubota (2004: 32) on how the notion of *multicultural education* easily turns into 'a token social protocol that everyone has to endorse whether or not they agree', an empty concept unable to elaborate on actual visions of multicultural education, just like different forms of political correctness.

more global dimensions. According to Hargreaves, global education should not be an additional school subject but a *perspective* which challenges potential ethnocentricity both within the limits of traditional school subjects and in society at large.[20] A great part of teachers' future work will consist of finding ways to resolve this paradox.

Thus, education should be guided by the underlying values stated in both national and local curricula. However, it is not all that evident *how* this set of values is realized in schools and in each individual subject, particularly since what we regard as the actual subject matter, e.g. linguistic aspects within FL teaching, usually ends up being more than enough in terms of what we have time for in the classroom. It will be suggested in this study that at least within the context of European FL educational research, an expansion of the subject content has taken place in several steps: from mainly linguistic aspects to the inclusion of different cultural aspects, all the way from cognitive knowledge to affective aspects, but also an even further extension of the cultural dimension from a culture specific content to a more general cultural competence including respect for difference on many levels, i.e. aims in accordance with the set of values included in the comprehensive school curriculum. For example Linnarud (2006: 142) concludes, regarding FL education today, that 'the goal of foreign language teaching has an added dimension of being an integral part of the general aims for all education in school' (see also e.g. McGarry, 1995; Kaikkonen, 2001; Graddol, 2006). In the European context the latest stages in this development have been promoted by the work of researchers such as Michael Byram, Claire Kramsch, Karen Risager, and Ulrika Tornberg, and more specifically in the Finnish context by Viljo Kohonen and Pauli Kaikkonen. The work of these and others will be further discussed in Chapters 3 and 4.

Within this larger framework of FL education, most present-day students of English will use their new language in a variety of different situations where no native speakers in a traditional, modernistic sense of the term are involved (see discussion in Section 3.3; see also Crystal, 1997/2003). Instead, as was previously mentioned, there is an increasing interest in the use of English as a lingua franca (see e.g. Jenkins, 2000, 2004; House, 2002; Graddol, 2006), and in such contexts there is need for other cultural competences than what e.g. only a native Briton or American can convey.[21] The question is also why e.g. Indians with their Indian variety of English as a common language would need to aim at learning linguistic and cultural norms consistent with some British standard (cf. Canagarajah, 1999). Such considerations might not be important issues in our

---

[20] Cf. Kemp (2005) on how our ability to be cosmopolitans, or citizens of today's globalized world, with responsibility for sustainable development, depends on our capacity to see different phenomena not only from a national perspective but from a global viewpoint.

[21] However, see e.g. Kramsch (2004: 37) on the paradox that at the same time as English as an international language is making other languages seemingly superfluous, geopolitical tensions make the learning of foreign languages even more necessary than before. This can be compared to Graddol's (2006) suggestions that as (global) English becomes a near-universal basic skill, the need to maintain personal, organizational and national advantage will require skills in additional languages, particularly Mandarin and Spanish.

Finnish context where most learners still want to learn one or some of the more traditional varieties of English. Still, by reflecting on the above examples we can draw the obvious conclusion that it is no longer self-evident as to what linguistic and cultural norms to include among the educational aims in the classroom. Concerning cultural competence we can point to an increasing need for a more general intercultural competence including openness and respect towards difference at the cost of, or rather as a complement to, the more culture-specific competence connected with certain traditional target-language countries (cf. Bennett, 1998, on culture-*specific* vs. culture-*general* approaches; also Jokikokko, 2005a, on the attitudes dimension as a general orientation towards diversity; see also Byram, 1997). Consequently, such curricular changes can be motivated from the point of view of instrumental aspects as well as considerations related to the underlying values for education.

I wish to give some further examples of how value-related issues of late have been placed in focus within different pedagogical disciplines. Fritzell (1999) suggests that the emphasis on pedagogical value orientations and integrative tasks seems to take on particular importance when regarding societal development in late modernity, i.e. considerations on a more general educational level. Nilsson (2001) discusses a more specific didactic discipline: the legitimacy of the history subject within postmodernity in a Swedish context. He argues that there are no given answers concerning what the subject is to be about since specific subject content is always a question of choice with certain purposes in mind. Nilsson sees the role of the history subject not in the transmission of factual knowledge but in its potential to change the worldview of the students, their view of what humanity is and can be.

Modern criticism of postmodernity has, in my view, been about it not being able to offer alternatives in its critique of the modern project and its failures. Stating that the progress of modernity did not lead to welfare for everybody does not necessarily mean that one has to offer solutions to the problem, but Nilsson's (2001) thoughts do offer at least a possible way forward. He leads an interesting discussion about postmodern approval of multiculturalism, suggesting that postmodern emphasis on there being no value-neutral history writing actually entails a greater moral responsibility, not a lesser one.[22] Thus, he suggests that the contents of the subject work as a tool for reflections instead of being in themselves the main aim in the form of factual knowledge to be transmitted to the students. And as a consequence, postmodernity does not have to mean a dissolution or destruction of the history subject, but rather the emergence of another form of history subject. He further suggests that we need to get rid of a lot of the payload of modernity, e.g. its ideals of objectivity and neutrality, together with its monopoly on *one* type of rationality, while we need to hold on to the dialogic potential latent in modernity. This comes close to what Fritzell (e.g. 2003) and also Tornberg (e.g. 2000, 2004), both with a background in e.g. Habermas, discuss in the form of the language classroom as a potential for democratic deliberation, including students developing respect for difference in

---

[22] Cf. Kemp (2005) on how education and *Bildung* never are value neutral but of necessity entail a vision of what is good in life, of human relations, of global equality.

all forms.[23] Such democratic competence becomes all the more important in this age of cultural relativism when the issue of agreeing on common underlying values has reached new topicality.

In Nilsson's tentative summary in Table 2 over the legitimacy situation of the history subject within modernity and postmodernity respectively, I see many common points of reference with EFL education (my translation from Swedish). Some of these will be discussed below.

Table 2. The legitimacy of the history subject according to Nilsson (2001)

	Modernity	**Postmodernity**
What is being acknowledged?	Subject content	Tools for reflection
By whom?	The teacher	The transmitter, the producer
Whose approval is asked for?	State, middle class	The user, the market
What principles are referred to?	Education, *Bildung*	Empowerment, moral guidance

What is being acknowledged? Following societal changes and the limited time at our disposal in the classroom, the English subject could also benefit from a displacement from contents mainly relying on facts to contents providing more tools for reflections in the perspective of lifelong learning, i.e. competences that can be applied in many different situations as opposed to specific, contextually limited factual contents, both concerning linguistic and cultural aspects.

By whom? From the acknowledgement of the state and the educated middle-class to the needs of the learner and the market, e.g. language courses for differing specific purposes such as 'English for businessmen', in other cases it can be about students' need for new learning strategies in times of increased media exposure.

What principles give legitimacy? Here we can see a transition from central criteria like education and *Bildung* within modernity to moral guidance and empowerment within postmodernity. This is, according to Nilsson, about providing each student with tools for being able to handle their own lives starting from their needs and experiences in a complex and demanding time. Within the English subject this can e.g. concern the previously mentioned

---

[23] Tornberg (2004) refers to Englund on deliberative communication emanating from at least two traditions of thought, one within political science as deliberative democracy and communicative rationality, following Habermas in particular, the other within education through the sociocultural perspective of learning.

demands of a general intercultural competence to be applied in different situations, not only knowledge specific to a limited cultural context. Naturally this includes more than being able to live in and handle existing circumstances: It is of the utmost importance for a society to have active citizens who are willing to take on their responsibilities, e.g. by taking part in the debate concerning the creation of the society of today and tomorrow (cf. Hargreaves, 1994; Kohonen, 2001b: 10). This means that we cannot go too far towards what Graddol (2006: 72) describes as the changed nature of knowledge in the form of wider frameworks and disciplinary knowledge being replaced by more pragmatic and fragmentary approaches to knowledge.

Hargreaves (1994: 75ff) discusses the dangers of letting the spectacle and superficiality of the visual 'instant culture' of postmodern societies suppress the necessary moral and ethical discourse and the thoughtful reflection of a more oral culture. The waves of images and impressions rushing in over both students and teachers can at best provide experiences and resources for learning, but the challenge lies in creating a serious, consequent ethical discourse and thoroughly considered judgment of aims and values.

The Finland of today, in my view, could be described as a largely modernistic society, not only in relation to the structure and functions of the school system but also through the relative homogeneity of our society in cultural and linguistic terms, as well as a rather technocratic view of decision making. At the same time, however, our students need to be able to interact, both locally and globally, also in more postmodern environments. Different global as well as societal conditions and changes (cf. Kohonen, 2001b: 8-10), the limited time we have at our disposal in the classroom, as well as students' differing needs and wishes all give reasons for an increased dialogue around the focal points of EFL education and the need to question already established practices for the schools of today and tomorrow. In Nilsson's (2001) thoughts I can recognize many similarities in relation to the potentialities and challenges for the Finland-Swedish EFL classroom in a time and age when it no longer can be taken for granted what its aims and content should be, particularly considering the potential of language education to contribute to general intercultural educational aims such as students' development of empathic abilities in terms of relating to otherness. This leads us to examine closer the more specific but complex area of focus for this study: the cultural dimension within FL education.

3 The cultural dimension in FL education

3.1 The relationship between language and culture

When exploring the cultural dimension in FL education an obvious starting point is to consider the relationship of *language-culture*. Byram et al. (1994) emphasize the strong relationship between language and culture in the context of FL education by naming and hyphenating the title of their work "Teaching-and-Learning Language-and-Culture". Also Doyé (1999) discusses the importance of not separating language from culture within language education (cf. Kramsch, 1993). However, he states that the relationship between language and culture is a complex one, since language is both part of culture and a representation of culture, i.e. both substance and medium.

According to Byram (1991: 17ff) the metaphor of language as a key to culture is not valid, partly because this would imply a separation between them, partly because 'language is not simply a reflector of an objective cultural identity'. Instead, he suggests that language both shapes and is shaped by different socio-cultural actions, beliefs, and values. Here it is relevant to bring up Tornberg's (2000: 61-62, 2001: 182-183) discussion of the influences of the Sapir/Whorf-hypothesis from the 1950s on the view of the connection between language and culture within FL education, although few would subscribe to this hypothesis in its totality today. In its strong interpretation this hypothesis claims that the language we speak determines our thinking and our conceptions of reality. A weaker interpretation entails the possibility of breaking free from this initial dependence, so that language, thought, and perception instead are interrelated (Bennett, 1998). Tornberg (2001) suggests that a possible consequence of the Sapir/Whorf legacy is the way curricular texts in Sweden have often described a foreign language as an expression of a different way of thinking. She argues that although it is true to some extent that words and concepts do not always carry the same meaning in different languages more than on a superficial level, there are hardly any conceptual meanings that are culture-specific in the sense that they would be common to all group members.[24] She underlines the individual variation caused by influence of personal experiences in the past as well as change over time as a result of new personal experiences being added. Similarly, there can be said to be more than one varieties of a certain language within different language communities. As an example Tornberg brings up a special case in the form of differing female and male grammatical forms in Japanese, but the existence of different language of different social groups is, of

---

[24] Cf. Section 6.1.3 on the use of the exploration of such 'semantic fields' as a didactic tool.

course, a more extended phenomenon.[25] Thus, as e.g. the English language with all its varieties and registers is spoken by representatives of many different national cultures as well as by representatives of a great variety of different (sub)groups at different levels, it is self-evident that we do not automatically become familiarized with the culture of all the people who use English as their L1 by learning some variety of it.

Holme (2003), in a discussion of five views of culture within language teaching, notes that cognitive linguists have recently revisited Whorfian relativism, but that the assumptions about the relationship of language on culture is being overturned: Instead of language influencing culture it is now suggested that language, at least to a certain extent, is a cultural construction through conceptual metaphors. Kaikkonen (2001: 64-65, 75, see also 2004c) discusses the use of certain words and idioms to express certain meanings connected with the culture behind the language, expressions that have their origin in the experiences of prior generations. Although it might be suggested that Kaikkonen comes close to describing conceptual meanings as culture specific in the sense Tornberg warns against[26], the point in his claims lies, as I see it, in the importance he places on sensitizing learners to noticing differences[27] and similarities regarding different linguistic and cultural standards, thus constituting a step in the process of becoming aware of and respecting difference and diversity, as well as learning about such features on one's own. Räsänen and San (2005: 215) suggest that becoming sensitive to differences can challenge ethnocentric and monocultural worldviews, thus making individuals more conscious of their own background and biases, which might even inspire transformative learning processes (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). To conclude, I recognize the possibilities for influences to run both ways between language and culture but also the existence of variation within groups on several levels. However, following Tornberg (2000: 58) on the reasons for discussing 'culture' before 'communication' in her doctoral thesis, I see culture as the wider, more comprehensive notion that encompasses language and communication. Here I wish to refer to Bruner's notion of 'culturalism', suggesting that culture, although created by man, is superorganic and thus moulds the minds of individuals: Learning and thought always take place in a specific cultural context (Takala, 2002: 322-323). Kramsch (1993) suggests that

---

[25] This leads on to the question of who the native speaker whose norms are prescribed in curricular texts really is or should be, see the discussion in Section 3.3 below.

[26] Kaikkonen (2001) naturally addresses the existence of different subcultures in all national cultures (p. 90) and e.g. the many levels of communication with members of any single culture (p. 89), as well as the process of cultural change over time (p. 79), although in most of the discussion cultural heterogeneity is not explicitly problematized but must be inferred. However, he also notes that individuals growing up in similar circumstances still have different sociocultural backgrounds. Despite this fact, interestingly enough, we behave as if we are similar, possibly due to the feelings of security we experience when there are enough common factors between people (p. 74).

[27] Lahdenperä (2004: 18-19) also addresses the notion of *intercultural sensibility* as described by Kaikkonen, i.e. as an ability to observe cultural differences: Without this ability cultural differences will be ignored and instead interpreted from the point of view of one's own culture, as identical phenomena.

if language is, indeed, seen as social practice, culture becomes central within language education and not a fifth skill that one can just choose to add on or take away as one sees fit.

If, however, language and culture *are* separated in the learning process and all cultural aspects left out, in my opinion students cannot be said to be learning a foreign language in the proper sense, but a codified version of their own mother tongue. I still see the separation of target language and target culture traditionally connected to this language as possible if it is done for specific reasons and one is aware of the consequences and limitations inherent in such a procedure. One of the most obvious examples would be the previously mentioned use of English as a lingua franca[28], e.g. Finnish and Japanese businessmen using English as their common language of communication. Obviously, language use in such a case is never totally separated from cultural aspects, but the interaction will probably be affected mainly by the speakers' own cultural behavior (C1). The influence of L2 cultural behavior (C2) will depend on how much the speakers are influenced by such cultural competence and whether they make use of it, either consciously or unconsciously. Byram (1997: e.g. 112-115) points out that speakers cannot possibly acquire knowledge of all the national cultures and identities that they may encounter when using a language as a lingua franca; in such situations, for example, general cultural competences such as observational skills are of more importance. To take an example from the field of FL education, if the aim is that students develop respect towards foreign cultures in general and not only towards a specific target culture, the class will not be able to discuss different cultural aspects for all specific cultural groups concerned. A different example of the separation of language and culture would be the inclusion of cultural aspects at such early stages of students' linguistic development that some issues need to be discussed and explained in the learners' L1. Generally the use of L1 in the language classroom is not considered the best way to teach a foreign language. However, if attitudes in the form of respect towards other languages and cultures as well as students' cognitive development at an early age can be promoted by meta-discussions in L1 (see e.g. Byram & al., 1994: 16-40), such a procedure will have its defenders.

3.2 Change of aims: Linguistic knowledge into intercultural communicative competence

In e.g. Doyé (1999; cf. Kaikkonen, 2001: 61ff[29]) the development of the aims within foreign language teaching is outlined, starting from the end of the 19th

---

[28] See also Byram (1997: e.g. 70-71) on the possibility of separation of IC from ICC in specific situations, also discussed in Section 3.3 below.
[29] See also Kaikkonen (2004a: 22-24) on examples of changes within FL teaching as a result of it always being a product of its own time. So, for example, the use of the term *FL education* is a reflection of a more holistic, experiential, socio-constructivist view of language learning, also adopted in this study except when other researchers use other terminology.

century onwards with merely *knowledge about* a language turning into *Linguistic Competence*, i.e. the ability to use and to understand the language. With the emergence of pragmatics in the 1960s and 70s, teachers eventually began to realize that the ability to produce well-formed sentences was in itself not enough; this ability had to be used in communication. Consequently, the aim of foreign language teaching became *Communicative Competence*. This meant that lists of language functions to be taught replaced the grammatical structures listed in the curricula of many countries. After this, however, a further step was needed, since during this emphasis on the performance of speech acts, teachers tended to neglect that communication is always *about* something, and this topic is inseparably embedded in the context of a particular culture. At least part of this culture has to be understood if we want to be able to communicate. In the realization of this, German *Landeskunde* and British *Cultural Studies* were established, although a cultural element in the form of a static product view of culture had been present as the predominant tradition since the teaching of Greek and Latin in European universities in the late Middle Ages, a cultural view which was later transferred also to the teaching of modern languages (see also below).

Particularly since the beginning of the 1990s, an integration of these more recent aims into *Intercultural Communicative Competence* (ICC) has been taking place. Michael Byram, who is often referred to in the discussions of cultural issues in this study, has made considerable contributions to the development of ICC (see below in this section). According to Doyé (1999: 11-12), this comprehensive competence integrates the cognitive (knowledge of languages and cultures), the pragmatic (the competence to perform speech acts) and the attitudinal domains (open-mindedness and tolerance as in political education) within FL teaching and learning. Consequently, it entails more than the knowledge and skills required for communicative competence, since it also focuses on personal and social attitudes and abilities: 'Whereas communicative competence related primarily to the individual's knowledge and skills in communicative situations, intercultural competence also focuses on the language user's personal identity, social abilities and attitudes, such as risk-taking, ambiguity tolerance and respect for cultural and individual diversity' (Kohonen, 2005: 129).[30]

Systematic and consequent teaching of cultural attitudes, knowledge and skills is recommended in the Council of Europe's language program, "Language Learning for European Citizenship" (see also e.g. Byram, 2004, on considerations concerning FLT in the political context of the European Union). In 1994 Michael Byram, together with Geneviève Zarate, took part in the Council of Europe's project on developing a "Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning and Teaching" (Council of Europe, 2001), hereafter CEF. In the CEF, common reference levels of language proficiency are presented, together with concrete issues to consider in terms of aims, content and methodology for the planning of curricula and language courses. Byram and Zarate were invited to clarify issues concerning socio-cultural competence (see

---

[30] See also Kaikkonen (2001: 64) on the task of FL education calling for a holistic approach as learners are involved with their whole personality as knowing, feeling, thinking and acting individuals.

particularly pp. 101ff of the CEF), since preparation for democracy, both in terms of students developing 'skills necessary to communicate in an interactive Europe' and 'respect for identity and cultural diversity' (pp. 4-5), is one of the educational aims in focus in this document.[31]

It is noteworthy that intercultural education has undergone a considerable development from being initially aimed at integrating foreigners into multicultural societies to being aimed also at students of the majority population in different societies.[32] However, according to Doyé (1999: 15-16), this general acceptance of intercultural education today is not only a consequence of the changing ethnic compositions of our societies[33]: There is also a growing awareness of the global interdependence between peoples and nations, as shown e.g. in such important documents as UNESCO's "Recommendation Concerning Education for International Understanding, Co-operation and Peace and Education relating to Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms" from 1983 (cf. Lahdenperä, 2004).

Doyé (1999: 17) concludes that although intercultural education is not a specific task for FL teachers (cf. e.g. Lahdenperä, 2004), he suggests that FL teaching is in a particularly favorable position to contribute to this important goal as other cultures and nations form a constituent part of it, and on the grounds of the impossibility of teaching language independently of culture. Kaikkonen (2001: 63-64) suggests that there are increasing demands for intercultural learning to enrich FL teaching in its more holistic, educational role, whereas on the other hand there has also been much discussion regarding the possibilities of FL teaching to promote intercultural learning. This interdependence is visible in the position of intercultural education as a cross-curricular issue and part of general education due to the importance attached to the concept.

I would like to suggest that intercultural education is particularly well suited for the EFL classroom because of the position and increased role of English as a global language (cf. House, 2002), implying that using English is essentially about encountering otherness. It can further be argued that the EFL subject is particularly suitable in our local context because of its great importance and extension on all levels within our educational system, thus with the possibility of causing even greater educational impacts. Additionally, because of its relatively early introduction into the educational system and its international use and influence through the media, students can often use English on higher levels to discuss relevant topics compared to other foreign languages.

The previously mentioned global outlook has also become more visible in ELT contexts: For example, IATEFL (The International Association of Teachers of

---

[31] However, see Faas (2006) on the need for citizenship education encouraging the development of an inclusive rather than an exclusive understanding of citizenship to meet the needs of marginalized communities in the multicultural European context, under the notion of *multicultural European citizenship*.

[32] See e.g. Doyé (1999) for a useful résumé of this development; see also Kaikkonen (2001: 85); Lahdenperä (2004) includes the Swedish context.

[33] And increased international contacts within the European context on many levels (my addition).

English as a Foreign Language), founded in the UK in 1967 with more than 3500 members in about 100 countries, also has fourteen different Special Interest Groups ('SIGs') promoting the development of their own fields of interest beyond what the umbrella organization can offer by, e.g. arranging special conferences and publishing their own newsletters. One of the newest is the Global Issues SIG which according to the home page *http://dudeney.com/iatefl/gisig/* was founded in 1995 as a forum for stimulating awareness and understanding of global issues, and to encourage the development of global education within language teaching. The aims of the Global Issues SIG are worth stating:

> To assist in the exchange of information and ideas surrounding issues within ELT such as peace, justice and equality; human rights and social responsibility; globalization and world development; social identity; and the role of the English language and English Language Teaching in the world.

> To exchange ideas on integrating peace education, human rights education, development education and environmental education into language teaching.

> To help members fulfil the two roles a language teacher has in society: the conveyer of linguistic knowledge and the educator to enable students to understand better how the modern world functions.

> To equip learners with the knowledge, skills and values which can help them confront both local and global problems.

> To promote a less Eurocentric perspective within ELT.

> To provide a counterbalance to the idea of language teaching as necessarily high tech and profit generating. For example, we hope to provide a forum for those developing successful methods of teaching large classes with minimal resources - typically working within poorly funded state systems in the developing world, where the majority of students learn English.

On the grounds of its importance for the current study, the discussion will now return to Byram's (1997: 73, 31ff) comprehensive model of ICC (see Figure 4 below) first referred to in Section 1.2.[34] The ICC depicts the following competences: linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence as well as, in more detail, intercultural competence. The model further includes three locations of learning where the teacher and the learner have differing roles and relationships: the classroom, fieldwork, and independent learning (e.g. through the media).

In Byram's model, intercultural competence (IC) entails five different *savoirs* (knowledge, attitudes, and skills). These different elements will be briefly presented below:

---

[34] See Byram (1997) for a discussion of the model; see also e.g. Byram (2001); Lundgren (2001).
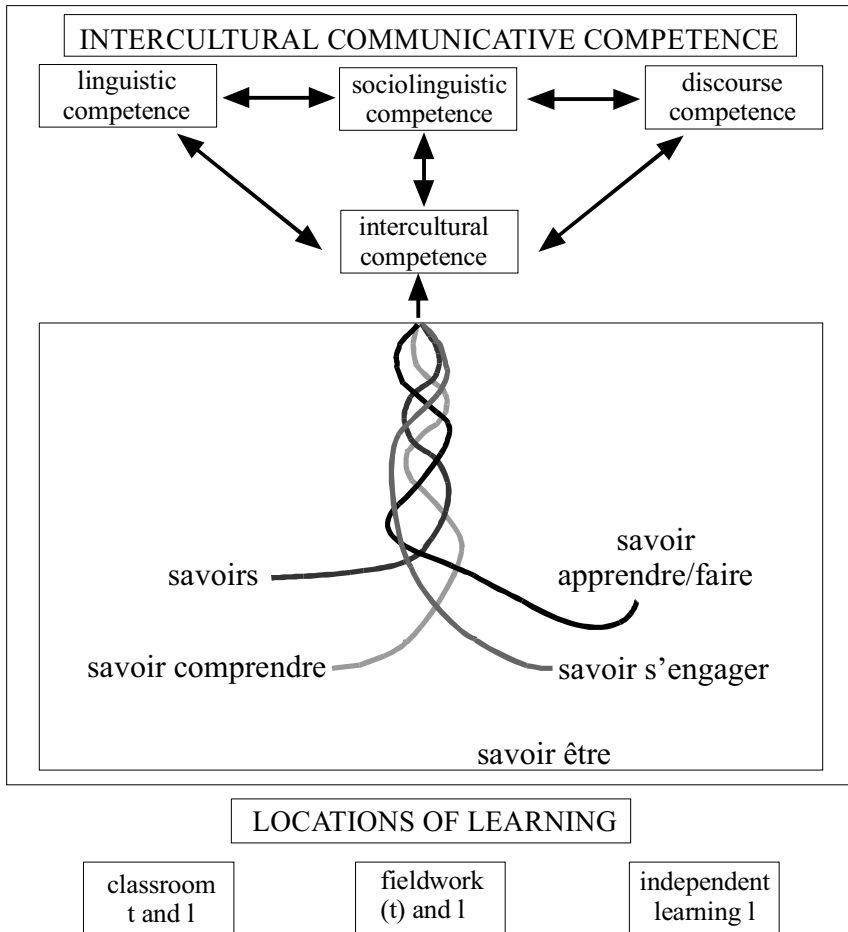
Figure 4. Byram's (1997: 73) comprehensive model of intercultural communicative competence

Savoirs: knowledge, e.g. of self and others, of interaction, of social groups and their products and practices;

Savoir être: intercultural attitudes, e.g. openness, a willingness to relativize one's own values, beliefs and behaviors and value those of others;

Savoir comprendre: skills of interpreting and relating, e.g. the ability to interpret an event from another culture and relate it to events from one's own;

Savoir apprendre/faire: skills of discovery and/or interaction, e.g. the ability to acquire new knowledge of cultures and cultural practices and also use it in interaction;

Savoir s'engager: critical cultural awareness/political education, entailing the ability to critically evaluate perspectives, practices and products both in one's own and other cultures.

Cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects often influence each other in different ways and can be difficult to separate. For example, attitudes towards different cultures and their representatives as well as towards different aspects of language are assumed to affect each other and thereby also the outcome of language learning (see e.g. Byram et al., 1994, for a useful discussion; cf. also Section 4.2). In Byram's model of ICC, *intercultural attitudes* are placed as the foundation for, or perhaps rather embracing, the other elements of *savoir*. Furthermore, in a discussion of assessment of different cultural aspects, Byram (1997) distinguishes between 'deep' and 'shallow' learning, where the former includes the ability to interpret, to use ideas in new situations, and to relate factual knowledge to argument, whereas the latter simply refers to the ability to reiterate facts. Thus, a more comprehensive and systematic approach to the treatment of the cultural dimension would be to include different aspects such as awareness considering values and everyday behavior, i.e., the way of life of the people, and also address the issue of how to relate to these, instead of only transmitting detached factual information about e.g. historical events, artefacts, and typical tourist attractions.[35] It should be noted that aspects of all the different elements of Byram's model have been included within the scope of my three-year classroom project to some extent, although the study will focus on EFL education from the point of view of awareness of diversity and respect for difference, which most closely correspond to certain aspects of *savoirs* combined with *savoir être*.[36]

Following Lundgren (2001; see also Forsman, 2004a: 55), the set of elements in focus in this study could also be termed *intercultural understanding*, entailing an insight into the fact that there are many different ways of constructing human living and that one's own way is only *one* of these, as well as to act according to this understanding. Thus, by *insight* I refer to the development of a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects (cf. Larzén, 2005: 125), i.e. culturally-related aspects beyond the learning of factual information. Lundgren sees this as general knowledge that can be used in the meeting with other new cultures, both locally and globally, to promote equality, democracy and peace[37] (cf. Lahdenperä 2004). Risager (2000) also divides intercultural competence into an affective, a behavioral and a cognitive dimension, at the same time stating that these dimensions are very strongly connected in practice. She sees the affective dimension as the most fundamental, since it is developed very early in childhood in the form of e.g. a sense of self and trust in other people (see also discussions in Doyé, 1999: e.g. p. 38). It is suggested to be a prerequisite for openness and curiosity as well as for the willingness to modify stereotypes and

---

[35] The former aspects are often referred to as 'little c', or 'behaviour culture', and the latter as 'big C', or 'achievement culture', see e.g. Tomalin & Stempleski (1993).

[36] In the CEF, these *savoirs* are presented under the heading "General competences".

[37] Lundgren's (2001) study illustrates an intercultural perspective on language teaching from a Swedish point of view. In line with both Risager and Byram, her basic assumption is that there is an unutilized potential within language education that, if given more attention, could contribute to interhuman understanding and peaceful coexistence.

prejudice.[38] Also Lahdenperä (2004) stresses the importance of affective elements for the process of the development of intercultural competence; however, she points out that the process is neither automatic nor effortless, since it is not only a question of becoming aware cognitively of one's own cultural preconceptions and limitations. It can be concluded that the suggested interconnectedness of these different dimensions points to the challenges at hand.

Lundgren (2001) refers to Tornberg on how a lot has been written concerning *how* to teach languages, but the questions of *what* and *why* have seldom been problematized within language education. Furthermore Lundgren considers whether we usually mean linguistic forms when we talk about contents within language methodology. As was previously discussed, however, we have seen an emphasized interest in a widening of the concept of culture within language education, from culture seen merely as a product to be reproduced and transmitted by the teacher to culture as a process where e.g. one's own values are called in question. Still, this change is not self-evident, whether looking at different guiding or controlling documents, or when considering what is happening in the classrooms (see e.g. Tornberg, 2000; Lundgren, 2001; Gagnestam, 2003, all regarding the situation in Sweden; Forsman, 2004a, and Larzén, 2005, regarding the Finland-Swedish context). According to Lundgren (2001), Byram, Zarate, and Risager are all scholars who represent a new perspective of culture within FL education on the international scene. Byram et al. (1994: 39) point to the important role language teaching can play by referring to research stating that teachers can, in fact, 'have influence over cognitive, affective and moral development, and thereby play a significant role in young people's education in an international world' (see also Baker, 1992: 43; and the discussion in Forsman, 2004a, Section 2.3). In much of the recent theory on the role of culture in language education, more systematic and consequent approaches to the teaching of cultural aspects are asked for (see suggestions for *how* this can be done in Chapter 4).

In this study a lot of the theoretical considerations regarding the cultural dimension within FL education have been made in relation to work by Tornberg (2000, 2001, 2004) on the grounds of her thorough discussion of the role of the FL classroom of the past and the present as well as of its future potential. Tornberg (2000) presents three analytical perspectives of culture that each have to be seen in relation to her purpose of discussing the potential they have for the creation of new meaning, of a new 'culture', in the FL classroom: culture as a *fact fulfilled*, as *a future competence*, and as *an encounter in an open landscape* (see also Section 4.3). She points to the possibilities of the third perspective, describing it (p. 284) as 'a discursive space between Self and Other, owned by nobody and therefore shared by all', concluding that this perspective may also offer an aspect of 'culture' that would vitalize the debate in FL education concerning its discursive meanings as expressed in different documents.

---

[38] See also Kohonen (2001b: 38-39) on the importance of the learner's self-esteem for the ability to tolerate ambiguity without feeling threatened in language learning situations that of necessity involve unpredictability and novelty because of the encounter with a new linguistic and cultural system.

Tornberg (cf. Sections 3.1 and 4.3) problematizes the generalization of national cultural traits and perceived differences, the practice to teach such generalized differences, and the importance such traits are given despite the fact that people's cultural positions cannot be definitively determined by their backgrounds and former experiences. She claims, however, that her purpose is not to question the existence of national cultural traits or suggest that one's upbringing in a specific country would lack importance. Instead, she stresses that the traditional use of the concept of 'culture' has become problematic in the light of the previously mentioned societal changes and the ensuing extension of the conceptual content. As a consequence she sees 'culture' not only as a result of one's background and past experiences but also as a continuous process that is present in all encounters between people as boundaries are crossed and new relations formed on a personal level.

In dialogue with work by e.g. John Dewey, Jürgen Habermas, and Claire Kramsch, she makes an interesting case for the Swedish multicultural FL classroom as a democratic meeting place and a place for creation of meaning and 'culture' through authentic dialogue and the formation of new common experiences, making individual identities visible and students responsible both for themselves and the Other by recognizing each other's voices. Although this aspect of the discussion will not be in immediate focus here, I agree that the democratic experiences in real time proposed by Tornberg is an important direction to work towards and I hope that my study will also be able to contribute to an opening of deliberative interaction both inside and outside the FL classroom. (Tornberg, 2000, 2001, 2004.)

I find Tornberg's (2000) historical, philosophical and analytical discussion of 'culture' and 'communication' in curricular texts and teaching materials within the Swedish school system both insightful and interesting, but also very challenging at times. Partly this is due to differences in the use of terminology. Her descriptions of the *encounter in an open landscape* seems abstract, even utopian in the way it leaves so much responsibility on each individual self in the classroom. She does state that her intention is not to discuss practical implications but to contribute to the ongoing debate on aims and content within FL education (pp. 292-293). Her intentions of offering new ways of thinking about cultural education have already been influential in particular in the Scandinavian arena, and on a personal level it has made me reflect on and even question my own work on many occasions.

Thus, Tornberg, among others, problematizes the common practice of generalizing cultural differences on a national, ethnic, religious, or linguistic background, to teach such differences, and to see them as the most important and defining determinants of a person's cultural position in fixed terms. Byram (1997: 39) states the following:

> We have to be aware of the dangers of presenting 'a culture' as if it were unchanging over time or as if there were only one set of beliefs, meanings and behaviours in any given country. When individuals interact, they bring to the situation their own identities and cultures and if they are not members of a dominant group, subscribing to the dominant culture, their interlocutors' knowledge of that culture will be dysfunctional.

Risager (2000) also emphasizes that intercultural competence within FL education cannot only be regarded as being between two cultures: Although national states try to uphold a sense of a common national culture and identity, all societies are increasingly culturally complex at many levels and in different combinations concerning e.g. age, gender, ethnicity, social class and linguistic background, and this actual complexity should be recognized (cf. Kaikkonen, 2004c: 73ff). Alred, Byram, and Fleming (2003: 3) talk about one's own and other social *groups*, i.e., in the plural, to emphasize that the formation of social identities takes place at many levels besides the national and the ethnic. Their interest lies in the extension of the concept of interculturality to the experience of all such different social groups (cf. Tornberg on inter*cultural* vs. inter*national* in Section 4.3). Also to Risager intercultural competence means the ability to associate with such cultural complexity both in a macrocontext and a microcontext, adding to this a critical cultural and political awareness (from Byram) about oneself as a citizen of the world, i.e. an ethical dimension within education.

Lundgren (2001) points to the important question of whose culture we should choose to bring into the classroom at a time when increased internationalization means more and faster interaction between what was earlier seen as separate cultures, both within and between national boundaries, with loans and changes of cultural aspects as a natural consequence. I see this as true in particular for younger generations: Teenagers and youth popular culture in and within different countries share many similar traits.[39] According to Lundgren, to look at culture as an active process of meaning making makes it difficult to even try to lock the concept into any static definition. However, by choosing to talk about culture as an active process of meaning-making used under different times and circumstances for different reasons, we actually do define and describe what we see as the essence of culture. This description of culture does not necessarily conflict with previous definitions; instead, I see this way of describing culture as adding emphasis to the fact that our view of cultural aspects within language education is in a middle of a period of transition: More and more people realize that culture cannot primarily be looked upon as a static list of facts and behaviors to be learnt by heart, especially not regarding only one or a few cultural groups. More important is to develop respect for different cultures *in general* as well as skills related e.g. to observing and interpreting behavior, so that we can learn to interact with people of many different origins in today's international world (cf. Byram, 1997).

Tornberg stresses the right of cultural self-ascription, defining cultures as 'hybrid, multi-vocally contested practices of narrative and negotiation between and beyond cultural borders' (2004: 134). Tornberg (2001), referring e.g. to Taylor and also Kelly, points to the roots of a more static product view of culture in the practice of European universities in the late Middle Ages of teaching Latin and the history of the Roman Empire in the form of a geographically as well as historically distant and static period in the past. Consequently this view was

---

[39] However, as Kramsch (1993: 227) points out, the fact that Russians now drink Pepsi-Cola should not be interpreted as the drink having the same cultural meaning for them as for Americans.

transferred also to the teaching of modern languages. Additionally, in connection to the emergence of the European nation states from the 1600s onwards, emphasis was put by the ruling classes on the creation of collective identities and on a homogenization of the originally heterogeneous population within what turned out to be the borders of a nation. This implementation was possible through education, language policies, the development of traditions and rituals, as well as by means of a common domestic market.

However powerful this heritage, it is not a useful tool for encountering diversity, since stereotypes and prejudices are both easily formed and consolidated through such practice. Bennett (1998: 6) states the following regarding stereotypes:

> Stereotypes arise when we act as if all members of a culture or group share the same characteristics. Stereotypes can be attached to any assumed indicator of group membership, such as race, religion, ethnicity, age, or gender, as well as national culture. The characteristics that are assumedly shared by members of the group may be respected by the observer, in which case it is a positive stereotype. In the more likely case that the characteristics are disrespected, it is a negative stereotype.

Although the two concepts are often used as synonyms and a distinction might be complicated to make in many cases, following the discussion in e.g. Doyé (1999: 45) the aim in this study has been to discuss *stereotypes* as the cognitive and *prejudices* as the affective aspect of how we look at other groups of people.[40] List (1994) discusses Lippmann's classic concept of stereotypes from 1922[41]: Lippmann talks about the 'pictures in our heads' that he suggests we use to categorize the world to be able to handle the overwhelming amount of impressions that constantly reach us.[42] With the help of (national) stereotypes we are able to identify ourselves as belonging to a certain group, meaning that critique of stereotypes also can be experienced as attacks on our own sociocultural identity and values. The problem is, according to List, that the either positive or negative values closely connected with stereotypes (i.e. rather *prejudices* according to this study) govern our expectations in certain directions and how we look upon the world, i.e., they do not merely describe the world but they *create* a world. Through this stereotypes work as barriers for the development of cultural understanding, as their formation takes place early during socialization, irrespective of experiences: One could say that we see what we expect to see (cf. *self-fulfilling prophecies* in Bennett, 1998; see also Kaikkonen, 2004a: 35). Also Bennett points out that both positive and negative

---

[40] *Discrimination* is discussed in Doyé (1999) as prejudice in action, i.e. the corresponding behavioral aspect to stereotypes and prejudice. Doyé leads a useful discussion around these and other related issues according to psychological and educational research in the context of the development of the cultural dimension within EFL education on the primary school level; also referred to below. See also Banks & McGee Banks (2004) for discussions of concepts such as prejudice, stereotyping, and discrimination, particularly pp. 782ff.

[41] See also Doyé (1999).

[42] See also discussion in Kaikkonen (2001: 72-74) and (2004c: 57ff).

stereotypes can cause misunderstandings[43] and problems because of the creation of false conceptions of the group in question.

Furthermore, all experiences with foreign cultures are not automatically perceived as positive, particularly not without some help and guidance (e.g. Byram & al., 1991). The media might convey images and notions of foreign languages and cultures that society, parents, or educators cannot accept. Byram et al. (1994: 3), among others, refer to empirical research showing how media can be found among the extracurricular forces that have great and insidious influence on the formation of stereotypes (cf. Bennett, 1998, on images through the media that we easily start generalizing from). Not only do the media influence students in ways that might differ from what is intended in the curriculum, but also teaching materials (see e.g. Kaikkonen, 2004a: 29; Byram & al., 1991) and teachers can sometimes create or convey stereotypes. In this respect the early teens seem to be among the critical years (see e.g. Baker, 1992). Stereotyped views, not to mention prejudices, are hard to change, in particular since the process of language learning in classrooms so often seems to deal with cultural issues in intuitive and unsystematic ways (Byram & al., 1994; Kaikkonen, 2001).

List (1994) emphasizes that her goal when including national stereotypes in her teaching is not to root out stereotypes, but to acknowledge them as opposed to ignoring or denying them: We need to discuss and problematize the roles stereotypes play so that we become more aware of them and how we understand social realities.[44] As I see it, the whole process of the formation of stereotypes and prejudices as well as how to address them points to the importance of both increased experience and guided reflection, i.e. experiential learning (see Section 4.1). List's suggestion to aim at students becoming more aware of stereotypes rather than rooting them out seems similar to Byram's point that it is unrealistic to develop positive attitudes towards all cultural groups or individuals; instead respect is a more realistic goal.[45]

List criticizes the general tendency to consider stereotypes almost completely as something negative, claiming that this has resulted in an unwillingness to even recognize them among ourselves. This she finds unfortunate because they simply cannot be avoided. However, List does emphasize the danger of stereotypes, and this is a posture that I also want to hold on to. I agree that stereotypes should be both recognized, confronted, and addressed, but with the outlook that they are

---

[43] See also Byram (1997: 34) on positive prejudice also acting as barriers to understanding.

[44] Cf. Kaikkonen (2001: 86) on how a consideration of stereotypes is a natural element in intercultural education, and (2001: 89, 2004a: 26) on how e.g. stereotypes and other cultural misunderstandings can be usefully brought to awareness and dealt with in intercultural education. In addition, see Kohonen (2001b: 31) and Kaikkonen (2001: 89) on the need to relate learning to prior experiences which are activated for conscious access.

[45] In fact, in Byram's (1997: 73) model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC), the ability *savoir s'engager* entails critical cultural awareness and political education, including being able to critically evaluate perspectives, practices, and products both within one's own and other cultural systems (see also Byram, 2004).

more harmful than useful in our efforts to try and make sense of the world around us, particularly considering their close relationship to prejudices. The world is changing, becoming more diverse and unpredictable at a greater pace than before. For many people such change seems to result in an even greater need to resort to mental concepts like stereotypes to make sense of our environment. However, there is also the possibility to try to adopt other strategies to cope with difference, ambiguity, and change; since we seem to be socialized into making use of stereotypes, it should also be possible to socialize children differently. Stereotypes cannot be defended since they are by definition impossible and thus erroneous, even more so as societies become all the more diverse. Risager (2000) points out that European language education has a long tradition of focusing on national languages and national cultural differences, e.g. in the form of discussions of what is 'typically American'. She draws attention to the language teachers' responsibility in developing their own intercultural competence to be able to bring in more cultural, ethnical, social and linguistic variation on a global level into the classroom and to recognize their own use of national stereotypes that lack substance in real life. Considerations of the implementation of a more diverse view of culture within EFL education can be found in Chapter 4.

3.3 The changing nature of ELT: The intercultural speaker replacing the native speaker?

As could be seen from the discussion in Section 3.2 above, there is an ongoing debate within the scholarly community concerning the cultural dimension within language education. This is closely connected with similar discussions concerning the development of linguistic aims and contents, particularly in the field of ELT. The fact that there are now more non-native speakers of English than native speakers (see e.g. Hughes, 2001) seems to have lead to an increasing insecurity regarding the role and status of the native speaker and culture. On what grounds do we choose a model for our English learners among all the different target communities all over the world, and why should we choose one English variety and sub-culture over another? These considerations are also connected with the sensitive question of the dominating status of English leading to the extinction of many minority languages[46], and the ensuing threat posed by western Anglo-Saxon cultures and values in different parts of the world.

Thus, the spread of English as an international or global language has led to the question of linguistic ownership (see e.g. House, 2002): It is asked who really owns English, only the native speakers or everyone who speaks it? As a consequence of these considerations, it has also been posited that the goal of a foreign language learner should no longer be the native but the intercultural speaker[47] (see e.g. Kramsch, 1993; Byram, 1997). In situations where a foreign

---

[46] However, see House (2002) on the suggestion that ELF and local languages also can continue to exist side by side as they each have different functions.

[47] Kramsch (2004: 37) points to the paradox that 'the very notions of "native speaker" and of "national standard languages" are being put into question by the research

language is used as a *lingua franca*, e.g. in e-mail communication between language learners in different countries, the intercultural speaker seems a more useful goal than the native speaker (see e.g. Jæger, 2001; see also Section 2.2). Graddol (2006), on the changing nature of ELT, even suggests the possibility that Global English or English as a lingua franca (ELF) may eventually replace EFL as we traditionally know it; however, he concludes that even if only a few adopt an ELF model in its entirety, some of its practices are still likely to influence mainstream teaching.

Kramsch (1993: 223ff), for one, questions the common view of the 'native speaker' construct as the end-point of a continuum towards which the learner should progress during his/her linguistic development: In contrast, she suggests a social, linguistic reality that is a third culture in its own right, and the learner thus a speaker in his/her own right. Furthermore, the native-speaker ideal acts against the view that representatives of different cultural and social groups within a communicative situation should be of equal status. She points to the fact that identities and allegiances today have become increasingly more complex both in terms of language and culture. Instead, the intercultural speaker with his or her linguistic competence in combination with knowledge and understanding of cultural and social phenomena in another culture (or cultures) can act as a mediator between cultures.

The native speaker can be seen as rather an unrealistic goal (also) in the sense that the language learner is asked to step out of or ignore his or her own social and cultural identity to become as 'native-like' as possible. Byram (1997) even calls such an attempt schizophrenic. Also Riley (2000), referring to Byram (e.g. 1997; see below), discusses a possible future approach within intercultural communication: Instead of trying to clone native speakers in the classroom, this approach puts emphasis on the competence of individuals to interact efficiently with others without damage to identity on either side.

As Jæger (2001) points out, the requirements of the intercultural speaker might at first seem less demanding compared to someone aiming at 'near-nativeness': As an intercultural speaker one is allowed to express one's own cultural and social identity in communication, e.g. by keeping an accent, and this communication is seen more as a tool for creating understanding, not a way for e.g. pronunciation or grammatical competence to be tested. However, when we look at the different abilities/*savoirs* entailed in the concept of ICC (e.g. Byram, 1997), the demands on the intercultural speaker should rather be seen as different, not as less demanding. One difference lies in the even greater emphasis within IC on learner autonomy and lifelong learning, since the aim is not only to be able to mediate in a certain context, between cultures that the learner possibly knows well, but in all kinds of situations that the learner might not be familiar with from before. Because of time constraints in the classroom and the innumerable situations learners might experience in a changing world,

---

community at a time when nationalism seems to be again on the rise'. However, considering the fact that the discussions of the loss of the native speaker mainly have seemed to concern English, and more specifically English in its new role of ELF or global English, this is perhaps not as much of a paradox as it may seem (see e.g. Graddol, 2006, on the changing nature of ELT).

the learner needs to be able to learn independently from observations in new situations and through different experiences as a process of lifelong learning; this learning is connected to (self-)reflection, since the learner needs to be able to create a context and a new understanding from his/her observations and experiences, thus constantly revising his/her conceptions of him/herself and others.

Jæger (2001) points to important considerations in her discussions of issues concerning the intercultural speaker. According to Jæger, the concept of the intercultural speaker can entail a view of a culture as a well-defined entity with certain manifest features, often a national culture, and this is why it is seen as possible to compare and mediate between different cultures. However, as Jæger points out (cf. Section 3.2), a more modern and far more realistic concept of culture would need to see cultures as complex quantities with both virtual and physical relationships, and in any given situation speakers can bring different dimensions of their own identity into play, e.g. ones belonging to a specific cultural, social, gender, generation or professional dimension. According to Jæger, in the future it will often be a question of communicating and negotiating common problems and concerns such as climate change and mass-immigration. To be able to mediate in such circumstances, the competence needs to be defined from a global, *transcultural* point of view, e.g. to be able to contribute towards placing the topic of negotiation or discussion in focus instead of the different agendas of the participants.

Since the intercultural speaker already has been described as a learning and reflective individual who needs to adapt to diversity and ambiguity in a changing environment to be able to encounter and mediate between differences in general, my view is that we can already be said to be taking account of a more complex concept of culture. Furthermore, I suggest that although the topics under discussion might be of global, transnational concern (referring to Jæger above), mediation is still to be conducted between people with allegiances to different cultural groups, albeit of a more diverse composition than the previous images of homogenous national cultures. These allegiances will still affect the outcome of such discussions. This also means that the competence needed can still in many cases be described as intercultural, not transcultural, competence. Thus, the conclusion is the same: The topic of culture needs to be treated more in the form of general cultural awareness instead of awareness of specific, unrealistically homogeneous, target cultures. We still aim at being able to mediate between people of different cultural belongings. Byram (1997) brings forward the possibility to distinguish Intercultural Competence from Intercultural Communicative Competence, since IC is a competence that also can be profited from in situations such as receiving guests from another country who speak one's own language, but where one still has the opportunity to draw upon knowledge about intercultural communication, attitudes of interest in otherness and skills in interpreting, relating and discovering.

According to Risager (1999), concepts such as 'internationalization' and 'globalization' that are used so often today, e.g. in all kinds of educational and media settings, are neither uncomplicated nor neutral. From a local perspective, globalization is often seen as a threat to local customs and ways of life, e.g. McDonald's spreading around the globe. The spread of English as a language of

globalization at the expense of other, national languages, is another often-cited example of the globalization process. However, Holme (2003) discusses how, within what he calls the instrumental or culture-free language view, English is contextualized in the learners' own region and culture in order to avoid the dangers of cultural contamination that may occur when learning such a dominant international language. Similarly Risager suggests that a localization of the English language is taking place as different local varieties of the language are becoming more and more identifiable and accepted: In her terms, the world is moving away from macrodiversity to microdiversity (see also Risager, 2001). Thus, globalization can result in both homogeneity and heterogeneity. It has also been discussed that 'internationalism' may be a limited concept since many processes today take place on a more global level than between two or some other restricted number of nations. These are just a few examples to show that both *internationalization* and *globalization* can have many different connotations depending on one's own perspective and interests (cf. Section 2.2). When deciding what perspective to take, Risager points to the importance of strengthening democracy on all levels in order to give people a maximum of influence on their own lives, including social, cultural and linguistic situations, thus giving people the prerequisites to be independent, critical and responsible in relation to their environment, both locally and globally. She calls this 'the democratic stance' (as opposed to a 'market oriented stance'), emphasizing the importance of 'producing' knowledgeable and experienced people who can work as the 'raw material' in global activities (p. 9).

Risager (1999) points to two different tendencies concerning internationalization strategies: one that concentrates around competence in the English language, another opening up towards cultural competence in general. However, although obviously in favor of the latter, she points to an important objection to this trend: Even if mobility and relativism are seen as important features within this competence, there should also be room for ethical and critical reflection. Thus, this could be seen as a stand for critical rather than radical relativism (cf. Byram's *savoir s'engager*). In connection to this I wish to point to the democratic and humanistic foundation that our curricula rely on, meaning that the basis for our education is not value neutral. Despite this fact, there are no explicit formulations of the inclusion of critical perspectives concerning treatment of cultural aspects in the national curricula. However, if all cultural aspects are presented only in a positive light and no elements of criticism are included, students will not develop the ability to critically evaluate perspectives, practices and products both in their own and in other cultures. It should be noted that the diversity of most cultural groups, including one's own, provides ample possibilities of presenting and exploring both "positive" and "negative" aspects on many levels.

In an article on language politics in the classroom, Risager (2001; see also Risager, 2000) emphasizes that all people, through their concrete use and choice of language and through expressed linguistic attitudes, contribute to a common practice of language politics. Language teachers are one important actor of language politics since they are taking part in the education of all future decision-makers and creators of public opinion by offering them the tools to develop their linguistic and cultural competence. To a very large extent, the

individual teacher chooses what language varieties and registers to use, teach and expose students to, and what kind of linguistic and cultural complexity the students will encounter in their language education. Furthermore, Risager points out that it is also a serious distortion of reality if the target countries are depicted as monolingual (and monocultural, my addition). She concludes by pointing to the importance of what some call *awareness of language ecology*, others *linguistic awareness*, including awareness of language use in different situations and awareness of language choice and attitudes also on a more global level (cf. Kubota, 2004). Replacing the native speaker by the intercultural speaker as the goal of FL education with all its implications such as changes in the power relationships in communication (see e.g. Byram, 1997) would be a major concrete step. Concerning the cultural content within IC, Byram (1997) suggests that a study of British and American societies could still be considered relevant also in contexts where there are strong feelings against western influences or where learners will have no need or opportunity to interact with native English speakers: These cultures are still so dominant[48] that ignoring them within language education would be less beneficial than not, but the study of these societies has to be put into a frame of critical cultural awareness, just as one's own cultural belonging will be the focus of more systematic reflections. My use of specific target language cultures, particularly the exploration of UK society, as tools for promoting general cultural awareness can be compared to this last suggestion (see Chapters 4 and 6).

3.4 On the assessment of the cultural dimension

Elliott (1991: 9-11) discusses the view of education and learning within the curriculum-reform movement in the UK in the 1960s. He puts forward a view of education as a dialectical process in which 'the mind "adapts with" rather than "adapts to" structures of knowledge.' Learning becomes an active production rather than a passive reproduction of meaning, and this in turn affects assessment criteria in that 'the manifestations of such qualities can be described and judged but not standardized and measured.' Elliott describes learning as active production as 'a manifestation of human powers, e.g. to synthesize disparate and complex information into coherent patterns, to look at situations from different points of view, to self-monitor personal bias and prejudice, etc.' These are all issues that can be considered also in the more specific context of language education, in particular the issue of how we view education and learning and how we value certain types of learning outcomes, since the issue of assessment is also dependent on these views.

It is generally agreed upon that the question of assessment of the cultural dimension within FL education is a problematic issue, considering the complexity of the aims and contents including cognitive, behavioral as well as affective elements. (See also discussion in relation to the Finnish national curricula in Section 3.5.2.) Kohonen (2005, 2006), arguing that a large part of

---

[48] However, see Graddol (2006: 112-113) on new trends pointing towards cultural flows no longer being as unidirectional as they were only a few years back; e.g. in China, viewers are becoming more interested in soap operas from Korea than from the US.

personal and social learning relevant for the aims of intercultural communicative competence remains invisible in language classes and testing procedures, emphasizes experiential learning and the need to explore the processes of FL education for a more holistic view of learning outcomes. He suggests inclusion of portfolio work in general and "The European Language Portfolio" (the ELP) in particular to promote such work (see e.g. Kohonen, 2000, 2001a, 2001b, 2006). For example, Kohonen (2001b) promotes portfolio assessment as a tool for authentic assessment, which presents new possibilities for language evaluation.

Finland, with Viljo Kohonen in particular at the forefront, is among the European countries that have worked quite extensively on the implementation of the ELP in the classroom on different educational levels. Together with "The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (the CEF), the ELP are two concrete results of the Council of Europe's language program, "Language Learning for European Citizenship", where systematic and consequent teaching of intercultural competence is recommended (see also Section 3.2). The program emphasizes a plurilingual competence in the context of pluriculturalism. Such a competence entails being able to make use of all of one's knowledge and experience, also partial competences, of different languages (and cultures) when communicating with other people. For instance, a learner can make sense of a written text in a foreign language by making use of previous knowledge in related languages, or people can communicate by each speaking their own L1 and understanding the L1 of others. In this light, the aim of language education is changing from mastery of an isolated language to the development of many linguistic abilities, as well as the promotion of skills that enable learners to face new language experiences also out of school. These documents support methods of learning and teaching that, among other aims, help learners to become more independent, responsible, and cooperative. Furthermore, the ELP provides a way to document and assess partial competences within the same language, i.e., both different receptive and productive skills, with the intention of facilitating mobility within the European community.[49] In addition to these reasons for developing the CEF, respect for cultural diversity has also been stressed. However, according to Lundgren (2001: 125), a new perspective of intercultural understanding instead of traditional cultural knowledge has not been expressed clearly enough in the CEF. In my opinion, even if many complicated issues such as the question of assessment of different cultural aspects remain to be solved and other issues are not emphasized enough, the CEF still raises a variety of important and even innovative issues in terms of educational aims, content, and methods both regarding cultural and linguistic aspects that are useful in the planning of curricula and language courses.[50] Graddol (2006: 84) notes that the ELP employs

---

[49] In taking more account of receptive skills as a separate proficiency, learners with good passive knowledge of a language despite weaker production skills can benefit more from the language proficiency they actually have, compared to the grading system used in our schools today with one single mark to mirror a student's complete proficiency in a certain language.

[50] Cf. Huttunen & Takala (2004: 340) on how the CEF is not intended to cover 'everything' or offer simple solutions; instead it contains a certain metalanguage that can

the concept of 'can do'-statements rather than focusing on aspects of failure. He suggests that this departure from the traditional EFL model illustrates how ELT practices are evolving to meet new social, political and economic expectations.

On the quality of educational experience, van Lier (2004: 98) notes some consequences that follow for language education from an ecological perspective[51]. Among these we find the two related issues that the quality of education cannot be measured by test scores and that some of the most important indicators of educational quality cannot be measured quantitatively. Here van Lier specifically refers to large-scale testing which he thinks will lead to teaching to the test, which in itself deteriorates the quality of education. He also states that the most important elements of a good and rich educational experience are not testable. He describes different activities in education as on the one hand those that reap and on the other those that sow, where the sowing activities 'tend to bear fruit much later, possibly in ways that can no longer be traced back to the original sowing event'.

Along similar lines, although not specifically concerning language education, Hansén and Sjöberg (2006) discuss how education primarily constitutes a continuous development of both societal competences and individual capabilities. The value basis of the schools aims at students developing universal capabilities of importance for human and cultural development and societal continuity. Hansén and Sjöberg point out that these qualities represent ongoing processes and as such they are difficult to evaluate. Individuals develop a readiness for acquiring knowledge and capabilities whose true qualities will eventually emerge, not in specific test situations, but in the form of how individuals are able to cope with their lives. They stress the risk of segregation if only specific cognitive knowledge is valued at the expense of students developing into harmonious individuals (cf. Dysthe, 1996; see also Section 3.5.2). Finland has been successful in international evaluations such as PISA, whereas research into students' mental well-being and quality of school life show less flattering results. Hansén and Sjöberg refer to Burbules (2004) on how our thinking about student achievement and education at large is strongly instrumental, mechanical and achievement-oriented. They conclude that the reliability of different principles of developing and distinguishing between qualities must be critically analyzed and questioned.

To conclude, the inclusion of educational objects aimed at values and other non-quantifiable, affective qualities can be seen as beneficial for both individuals and society. Still, it might also be concluded that all educational endeavors cannot be assessed by quantitative measures, nor can they all 'bear fruit' so as to be immediately evaluated. Kramsch (2004: 46) suggests that the teacher as educator and methodological go-between includes 'mediating between what can be taught and tested, and what must be taught but cannot be tested'. However, we can conclude that there is still room for the development of qualitative assessment of the cultural dimension within FL education to ensure its inclusion both in

---

be used for reflections and processes of decision-making within different educational contexts.

[51] See Section 4.1 for a discussion of an ecological-semiotic approach to language learning and classroom teaching.

curricula and classroom practices. Although the topic of assessment of the cultural dimension has not been in focus of this study, it will be further addressed on some points in the discussion of Finnish national curricula below.

3.5 National Curricula in focus: The 1994 and 2004 versions

The development of awareness of difference and diversity both between and within different groups to prevent and modify stereotyping together with the development of a more objective view of one's own ways and values to be able to respect such difference on a general level naturally includes many elements that concern basic education as a whole, but it can lend itself particularly well to all language subjects because of the relationship of culture-language (see also Section 3.1). Sections 3.5.1 and 3.5.2 mainly discuss the potential of the Finnish national curricula of 1994 and 2004 of promoting these aims, although the focus will be on the new 2004 version. A discussion of the 1994 version is relevant as it was the version which was to be implemented in the classroom at the time of the current project.

Nevalainen, Kimonen, and Hämäläinen (2001) give a review of curriculum changes in the comprehensive school in Finland up until 1994, from a centralized, subject-centered, rationalistic *Lehrplan* model towards a student-centered, school-based curriculum model. However, as opposed to the guiding nature of the 1994 version, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004 (hereafter referred to as the NCC) constitutes a regulation on the basis of which municipalities and local schools are to take decisions regarding their curricula. The 2004 version will be implemented in schools at the latest in the school-year 2006-2007. Communicative activities[52], the use of multimedia, and internationalization are aspects that have received increased emphasis in the latest versions of the national curriculum.

3.5.1 Framework Curriculum for the Comprehensive School 1994

The importance of the promotion of positive attitudes towards representatives of foreign languages and cultures is repeatedly stated among the guidelines for teaching goals in the Finnish national curriculum of 1994 ("Framework Curriculum for the Comprehensive School", 1994: 74), the version still in use during the completion of the actual classroom work included in this project. In Chapter 1.1, dealing with the need for curriculum reform, the issue is touched upon in the section entitled "Changes in Values" (p. 10), although not in exactly the previously defined terms. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations is mentioned as one of the main guiding principles that we can turn to in order to find directions in connection to value questions. Chapter 1.2 is

---

[52] When talking about communicative activities, it should be noted that communication does not only occur through speech, although people most often refer only to speech activities as communicative activities. It is even possible, although not very common, to let the curriculum as a whole be communicative; see Stern (1992/1996: 177-178).

about the responsibilities of the comprehensive school. Here, Section 1.2.2 treats the importance of clarification and realization of a set of values, the underlying values for basic education. This includes ethical discussions about human rights and equality concerning e.g. gender and race. Under a separate heading, "Cultural Identity, Multi-Culturalism, Internationalisation" (p.16), the students' ability to function as interpreters of their own culture as well as the importance of 'tolerance and openness towards different cultural backgrounds, viewpoints, and languages as well as an interest in them' for interaction to take place between students are pointed out, both in the increasingly international environments within our own society and in an integrated Europe.

Chapter 3.1 of the 1994 version is devoted to intercurricular issues, i.e., themes that can be integrated into different subjects. Among these, *international education* is defined (pp. 37-38) as aiming at 'increasing the students' knowledge and understanding of different cultures, at guaranteeing human dignity and human rights for all, at establishing peace'. I also want to quote from the rest of the aims (p. 38), since I think a lot of it is at the heart of what intercultural education should be about:

> that the student accepts the fact that people are different, knows different cultures . . . The contents of international education include becoming skilled in international interaction, peaceful solutions to conflicts, knowledge of different cultures, tolerance towards difference, elementary cultural literacy, ethics of humans' [sic] rights, getting ready for global citizenship.

However, the aims stated under the heading of "Foreign languages" in the 1994 version (pp. 73-77) do not put particular emphasis on the attitude aspects. Among the general objectives of the comprehensive school foreign language study, cultural aims representing skills, knowledge as well as attitudes are listed. The ones concerning attitudes suggest that the students have 'an open mind towards different cultures and its representatives' and become 'interested in foreign languages and cultures'. However, among the aims specified for certain levels within the comprehensive school (pp. 75-76), attitudes are not referred to. Concerning cultural aspects, only the assimilation of knowledge vaguely explained as being 'about the countries, peoples, and cultures of the language areas' as well as culture-specific communication skills are included.

However, if one goes on to read on page 76, it is notable that culture is defined as meaning, 'in this context, not only sciences and arts but also the way of life of a certain people or in a certain area', exemplified by traditions and values. This also includes comparative methods: 'the cultural atmospheres of our own and that of the culture being studied are compared. A part of a good command of a language is that the students learn to consider and, if necessary, to act according to cultural norms of the language area'. Still, the focus lies on skills, not on attitudes in the form of respect for the differences they find between our own culture and the target culture.

Furthermore, these aims only concern the representatives of the specific target cultures in question, not foreign cultures in general. Compared to the goals of international education, where e.g. the aspect of *global* citizenship is stated, it could be suggested that the potential of the FL classroom as a source for developing intercultural competence is not encouraged enough in this part of the

document. The development of affective skills has had to make way for the view of the language classroom as a place for gaining language skills. As e.g. Lundgren (2001) points out, the language classroom can be so much more. Still, the aims discussed above were the guiding aims in the 1994 version; what has been included in the local curricula developed by the schools themselves could at least in theory have been another matter. However, both the results in Forsman (2004a) and Larzén (2005) still point to a large unused potential with respect to the development of the cultural dimension within language teaching.

3.5.2 National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004: Focus on cultural diversity and respect for difference

Larzén (2005) includes an enlightening discussion of cultural aims and contents in the 2004 NCC (referred to as the NFC in her study). Her conclusion (p. 71) is that the language specific aims do not differ in any conclusive way from the ones in previous versions, 'although a strong blow is made for intercultural awareness and understanding in the general chapters of the NFC', since the 'guidelines, as least implicitly, represent a view of teachers as cultural transmitters of static facts'. She also notes that the language specific aims are not as much attuned to the promotion of intercultural communicative competence in general as to preparing students for interaction with people from the socio-cultural backgrounds where the target language, in this context English, is spoken as a national language.

Here, as was stated in the introductory paragraph of Section 3.5, the focus will primarily be on the potential given through the NCC for the *promotion of awareness of cultural diversity*, both within and between groups, to help prevent and modify stereotyped conceptions as well as for the *promotion of respect for such difference*. These are aims that I consider fundamental for comprehensive school education and regard as a basis for the successful inclusion of other cultural elements into FL education. The three sections of the NCC focused in the discussion are the following: section 2.1, "Underlying values of basic education"; section 7.1, entailing seven thematic entities that are not subject-specific but listed in the NCC to be integrated into different subjects across the curriculum, in particular thematic entity number 2, "Cultural identity and internationalism"; and section 7.5, "Foreign languages" ("The A-language"[53], meaning English for most schools).

Promotion of awareness of cultural diversity:

►The promotion of awareness of cultural diversity will be considered from the viewpoint of whether the NCC reflects a view of culture as *product* or *process*. A product view shows cultures as homogeneous, nationally defined, and possible to mediate by the teacher in the classroom, whereas a process view entails the notions of diversity and change.

Among the underlying values of basic education (section 2.1 of the NCC), next to 'human rights, equality, democracy', we find 'the endorsement of multiculturalism' (expressed as 'the approval of multiculturalism' in the Finnish

---

[53] See Section 1.1 for an explanation of this term.

original, and as 'tolerance and a will to safeguard cultural diversity' in the Swedish version, my translations). The text also points out that 'the basis of instruction is Finnish culture, which has developed in interaction with indigenous, Nordic, and European cultures', and that instruction must 'take into account the diversification of Finnish culture through the arrival of people from other cultures', besides the national minorities and the Sami as an indigenous people. Among the aims in the thematic entity "Cultural identity and internationalism" it is stated that students will 'come to understand the roots and diversity of their own cultures and to see their own generation as a continuer and developer of previous generations' ways of life' as well as 'get an introduction to other cultures and philosophies of life, and acquire capabilities for functioning in a multicultural community, and in international cooperation'. These are, to my understanding, the most explicit references to culture as process in the document.

It would be easy to draw the conclusion that the different cultures coming together today in a more diverse Finnish society are still seen as homogeneous entities, particularly when a process-view of culture is practically invisible in the language-specific section of the NCC (cf. Larzén, 2005). For example, one of the two cultural objectives for grades 3-6, under the heading "Cultural skills", is that students 'get to know the culture of the target language and will gain a preliminary introduction to the similarities and differences between that culture and Finnish culture', and in grades 7-9 'learn to communicate and act in normal day-to-day situations in a manner acceptable in the subject culture'. The problematic nature of such a task considering the complexity of each national culture involved simply never becomes an issue, let alone the fact that no foreign language studied as an A-language can be said to represent only one national country. I would prefer that my students gain insights that include the diversity of different national cultures where the target language is spoken. This would also include extended awareness of the variety of the English language used *within* each country to avoid the situation described in Forsman (2004a), where a large proportion of students described British English as lacking slang. Furthermore, the goal of students acquiring capabilities for functioning in a multicultural community and in international cooperation suggests the need for capabilities beyond what is stated among the aims in the FL section of the NCC, e.g. there is need for an ability to encounter and communicate difference on a more general level than what is stated concerning specific, homogeneously depicted, national cultures (see the discussion on independent learning skills below). To this end, the following which is stated among the language-specific objectives for grades 1-2 is one of the more suitable: 'The pupils will take an interest in learning language, and in life in various cultures'. Unfortunately, few students start studying an A-language at such an early age to be able to benefit from this aim.

In addition to what has been addressed above, the thematic entity on "Media skills and communication" includes important objectives such as learning to 'take a critical stance towards contents conveyed by the media, and to ponder the related values of ethics and aesthetics in communication' with core contents such as the role and influence of the media in society, and the relationship between reality and the world depicted by the media. This could include

awareness of how stereotyped cultural images are easily created and conveyed via the media.

My conclusion is that culture as process, including the notion of diversity on different levels, is neither explicitly stated nor problematized (cf. Tornberg, 2000: e.g. 65), although the section on underlying values for basic education and the thematic entities "Cultural identity and internationalism" and "Media skills and communication" give more hope than the language-specific section for the inclusion of aims and content that can help prevent and modify stereotypes. After this we move on to the second area.

Promotion of development of respect for difference:

►Does the NCC include affective goals such as attitudes of openness and respect, a willingness to look more objectively at one's own ways and values (cf. Byram's *savoir être*)?

The notion of difference and diversity in the 2004 NCC was problematized in the previous discussion due to its depiction of two seemingly homogeneous cultures (the culture of the students and the culture of the target language) to be compared and contrasted without further considering these implications. Furthermore, since 'different' often risks receiving negative connotations such as 'strange', 'abnormal' and 'less worth', the inclusion of 'difference' into the curriculum needs to be accompanied by education aimed at the development of affective[54] elements (see Byram, 2004, on comparison by juxtaposition versus comparison by evaluation). A further consideration is that students need to learn to respect difference not only in the form of representatives of those specific cultural groups that will be included within the FL education, but also difference in general through reflection on the specific examples used.

In addition to the statements on the endorsement of multiculturalism mentioned above, the section on underlying values states that the instruction 'helps to promote tolerance and intercultural understanding'. Although this aim can be seen as a step forward, the use of the terms 'tolerance' and 'understanding' are not completely unproblematic. Byram (personal communication, November 2003) has pointed out the need to be aware of the fact that 'tolerance' often entails a more or less passive acceptance of something that can even be disliked or looked down upon (and more suitable in connections such as 'ambiguity tolerance', my comment), thus suggesting the use of 'respect' as a more viable alternative. As for 'understanding', being able to transfer the foreign to one's own frame of reference is a myth according to Tornberg (2000: 65-68). She concludes that we might have to give up the ambition of 'understanding' in the sense of making something foreign into something familiar, something of one's own. What we do need to 'understand', however, is that it is impossible to understand everything. In Section 4.2 I problematize the notion of trying to use the perspective of representatives of other cultures based on the argument that to

---

[54] Since *respect* is usually regarded as an affective rather than a cognitive element, I will use the term *affective elements* below, although the insight reached through the ability to decenter combines both cognitive and affective elements (see discussion in Section 4.2).

do this one would need to be practically bicultural.[55] However, through the insight that one's own ways and values are not the norm, by actually experiencing some of the strangeness that can be found in their own behavior, students might become better equipped for encountering difference with respect also in relation to people whose ways of life they do not know very much about or expect to understand, simply on the grounds that 'different' does not equal 'worse'. In this sense the term *respect* could preferably be used instead of 'tolerance and understanding'[56]. However, this is not to suggest that awareness of and background knowledge about circumstances related to different ways and values should not be beneficial when it comes to the possibility of increasing at least some level of understanding and respect towards other groups of people.

Among the aims within the thematic entity number 2, "Cultural identity and internationalism", there is no explicit mention of affective elements. However, the previously discussed aim of students acquiring capabilities for functioning in a multicultural community and in international cooperation would, in my view, suggest the inclusion of such elements. The following affective elements are actually included not among the aims but among the core contents within this theme entity: 'human rights and prerequisites for trust, mutual respect, and successful cooperation among human groups'. What still begs an answer is what such prerequisites might entail. In my view, the ability to decenter included in Byram's *savoir être* would be one. Thus, I see the need for the development of respect for difference in general and an ability to encounter such difference by being able to mediate between cultural groups with a more objective view of one's own ways and values as the basis. Here we can refer to thematic entity number 1, "Growth as a person" for more support, since intercultural competence entails an important element of personal growth as a human being (see e.g. Kohonen, 2005). Within this thematic entity the NCC lists objectives such as learning to evaluate the ethics of one's actions and functioning as members of a group and community, with core contents such as equality, ethical observation and interpretation of ethical phenomena, consideration for other people, rights, obligations and responsibilities within a group and various ways of cooperation.

However, since the most salient references to affective elements in the language-specific section are not to be found among the aims but in the introductory paragraph for section 7.5, "Foreign languages", ('educate [pupils] in understanding and valuing how people live in other cultures, too'), and in the general text introducing grades 3-6 ('the pupil is to realize that languages and cultures are different, but not different in value'), the above will become relatively more important. One obvious reaction is that these statements would carry more weight if they were included among the aims proper. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that among the aims for grades 7-9, it is stated that students will 'learn to be aware of the culturally bound nature of values'. This is an important and fundamental awareness that may lead to attitudes of respect for

---

[55] As Tornberg (2000: 65) discusses, since social circumstances and ways of life are bound to change and can furthermore be seen from different perspectives, an additional question becomes *whose* perspective we should be able to understand.
[56] Cf. discussion of the notion of *tolerance* in Kaikkonen (2004c: 59).

such differences; however, my suggestion is that without support from affective elements the outcome will be less promising. It should also be noted that among the aims for grades 1-2, the previously mentioned statement that 'The pupils will take an interest . . . in life in various cultures' is promising in its reference to different cultures in general. Also, the notion of 'interest' is similar to 'openness' and 'curiosity' included in Byram's *savoir être*. As was discussed in Section 3.2, to set the aim at students developing 'positive attitudes' towards representatives of all different cultural groups that they will encounter is with all plausibility less attainable than openness, curiosity and respect towards difference in general. However, as was previously pointed out, only a minority of students can take advantage of education of a foreign language already in grades 1-2 where this objective would be utilized. Neither is cultural diversity problematized in the core content for these objectives: 'key general information on the target language's culture and language region'.

In connection to *savoir être*, the issue could preferably be raised for at least some element of *savoir s'engager*, i.e. the ability to critically evaluate perspectives, practices and products both in one's own and in other cultures (see also Byram, 2004). The importance of such critical cultural awareness/political education in order to avoid radical cultural relativism was referred to in Section 3.3. Since the education is based on certain underlying values such as human rights and democracy, a natural consequence would be to include some elements of critical evaluations of perspectives and practices that do not support these values, both in one's own and other cultures. Since this element is also lacking from the three sections of the NCC discussed here, such practice can at best be implied from the curricular text. However, elements within other themes among the seven cross-curricular thematic entities (see section 7.1 of the NCC) can also be seen as supporting *savoir s'engager*, particularly number 1, "Growth as a person", including objectives such as learning to evaluate the ethics of one's actions, and number 3, "Media skills and communication", concerning critical perspectives on the use of media and its contents in today's society (see above).

In addition, the exploration of diversity within different groups also lends itself well to such critical evaluation of perspectives, practices and products both in one's own and in other cultures. Just to give a random example from our own context, reflections on how tendencies within our drinking culture might seem to people with other experiences could be included in connection to decentering activities. Such discussions also need to point to the fact that although we know that there is variation regarding this tendency, this is something that can easily become stereotyped when looking at it from the outside. This insight can be drawn upon to help balance students' prejudiced opinions concerning certain tendencies connected with other groups, reminding them of the existence of both "good" and "bad" circumstances within all groups, while at the same time also providing them with a more diverse picture of the C2 (cf. Byram, 2004).

Further reflections in relation to the NCC

A process view of culture not only entails the discarding of a view that sees cultural content as homogeneous, static products to be transmitted from the teacher to the students, instead leaving room for a more complex view of culture signified by diversity and change as well as respect for differences encountered.

I wish to argue that it also requires the inclusion of the necessary aims of students developing autonomous learning skills, what Byram (1997) refers to as skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir apprendre/faire*), including the ability to explore, notice and interpret phenomena in other cultural groups on one's own as well as being able to mediate between difference in general. This need is prominent because of the limited time we have in the classroom, the infinite amount of possible content to include, and the changing nature of cultural circumstances. This aspect can be included through focus on the process of learning, asking questions and observing instead of serving pre-packed cultural products in the form of 'This is what the Scots do'. Similarly, learning 'to communicate and act . . . in a manner acceptable in the subject culture' (see discussion above) entails only the practices within one specific (level of a) cultural group, and students learn behavior in a manner that could almost be compared to parrots. In my view, the capabilities for functioning in a multicultural community and in international cooperation would necessitate the development of the ability for independent learning also concerning cultural aspects. The language-specific section of the NCC includes separate listings of objectives under the heading of "Learning strategies" for different grades, but the text never specifically refers to cultural content, although some parts are more open and could be interpreted as including more than linguistic information, e.g. 'learn to use a textbook, a dictionary, and other information acquisition tools independently' for grades 3-6. However, since learning strategies concerning linguistic aims are explicitly referred to in several instances, e.g. 'use new words and structures in their own output' for grades 3-6, it is less likely that most teachers would interpret them as concerning cultural content.

As was previously discussed in Section 3.4, the question of assessment is yet another complicated issue: Aims and contents that emphasize e.g. students' ability to evaluate their own process of learning and then act accordingly, as well as qualities contributing to their growing as human beings, abilities described in Sections 2.2 and 3.2 as being more in tune with the demands of today' societies, are set aside in the NCC at the end of grade 9 to give preference to common assessment criteria that eventually seem to be what really counts in accordance with experienced modernistic practice. These are the type of easily quantifiable goals that also have given Finland excellent results in different international evaluations such as PISA, goals that naturally are well worth pursuing. But what about other goals and competences that also will contribute to preparing students for a complex future? Reports on the future of European education frequently refer to Europe as a *learning society*, where e.g. capability, personal and shared values and team work are recognized *equally* with the pursuit of knowledge (Cochinaux & de Woot in Kohonen, 2005). Naturally aims related to the cultural dimension, particularly affective ones, are difficult to evaluate, but if they are neither included among the subject-specific aims nor in the criteria for assessment, then experience points to the great risk that such aims and content will not be systematically taught (see also Section 3.4).

In addition, the evaluation related to cognitive aspects of the cultural dimension within FL education would also benefit from development alongside a reformulation of such aims to include more emphasis on a process-view of

culture. Since content included within the scope of the Finnish matriculation examination is systematically taught, the inclusion of the cultural dimension within the matriculation examination would be a basis for ensuring it would have more emphasis within FL education in general. Karin Abbor (personal communication, spring 2006) has presented the idea of independent project work where students explore a cultural topic, e.g. aspects of *La Francophonie* within the education of French as a FL, and show that they can discuss it from many angles. The results of such work could even be included in the matriculation examination in a similar manner as the geography subject includes a presentation and discussion of a previously completed project. Such work can be marked on its merits concerning many aspects such as the quality of the contents and the ability to argue and discuss from several viewpoints, not only language. In addition to this, during regular teaching the assessment can be grounded on merits such as the development of the ability to work independently (cf. the discussion of portfolio work in Section 4.4). Since language development can actually be seen as a bonus from working in this manner it need not necessarily be given most prominence in the evaluation of this particular task.

To end on a positive note, because of the mandatory nature of the new NCC, underlying values and aims from the thematic entities connected to the development of intercultural competence are to be integrated across the curriculum so that their objectives can become the basis for other education. And if such aims are already mandatory through the sections on basic values and the thematic entities, the inclusion of the same or similar aims in the language-specific section might even be seen as somewhat superfluous. However, considering the risk of everybody's responsibility, e.g. underlying values, becoming nobody's responsibility, and the likelihood that the thematic entities will mainly be stressed during occasional theme days and the like, in light of what previously has been stated concerning the need for systematic and repeated inclusion of specific contents aiming at the development of intercultural competence, I would still want to argue for a reconsideration of the aims and contents of FL education to include intercultural elements just as naturally as the inclusion of grammar and vocabulary practice. That way, objectives and contents within underlying values, thematic entities and language-specific sections will be able to support each other in a comprehensive way to ensure that elements supportive of the development of intercultural competence are even more repeatedly and systematically included in the comprehensive education of all students. Unless cultural aims and contents, what they could and should entail, are seriously debated, explored, taught and evaluated, we will be left with what Kubota (2004) terms a *liberal multiculturalism*, an approach to multicultural education built upon cultural essentialism and superficial views of diversity that, although respecting and appreciating different forms of difference, e.g. through celebrations of festivals and customs, remains an empty concept unable to elaborate on actual visions of multicultural education, a type of political correctness with little or no substance. In the US school context, a liberal view of multiculturalism often, paradoxically, results in failing to recognize the social and economic inequalities that exist in schools and society[57]

---

[57] See also Byram's (1997: 17-20) discussion regarding the interactionist perspective that 'FLT should not attempt to provide representations of other cultures, but should

by emphasizing commonality among people, a focus on universality and nondiscriminatory practices, which, although it has mitigated e.g. racism through laws against segregation and discrimination, nevertheless fails to provide the necessary help to those in need since differences become obscured.[58] Here Kubota sees the need for *critical multicultural education*.

Furthermore, of importance for the great majority of Swedish-medium schools and students is an unintended side-effect in the form of the reallocation of the number of annual weekly teaching hours for the A2-language[59] between grades 1-6 and grades 7-9, which in practice will mean that the former grades will gain while the latter, depending on municipal resources, will lose the same number of English lessons. Naturally, this will have substantial consequences also for aims and content in the different grades. It remains to be seen whether the main result of this reallocation will be a greater emphasis in grades 1-6 on linguistic features that used to be taught in grades 7-9. Another possibility would be to let the additional resources in grades 1-6 support more systematic and extended work with the cultural dimension already with younger children. For grades 7-9, a closer integration of linguistic and cultural matters is called for besides the priorities we need to set to be able to devote more time on the cultural dimension with fewer resources than before. If we choose not to devote more of the content to cultural matters, we would still be missing out both on a useful competence for an intercultural world and a possible means towards realizing at least parts of the important set of values stipulated in the NCC.

---

concentrate on equipping learners with the means of accessing and analysing any cultural practices and meanings they encounter, whatever their status in a society', thus reversing the tradition of mainly providing only information about a society and furthermore information being representative only of a dominant powerful minority.

[58] Cf. Bennett (1998) on the 'minimization stage' of ethnocentricity, also referred to in Section 4.2.

[59] See Section 1.1 for an explanation of this term. For 83.4% of Finland-Swedish students this means English according to the statistics from 2004 (in Sajavaara, 2006).

4 Realizing the cultural dimension in FL education: A theoretical discussion of methodological approaches

As was previously discussed, research has suggested that cultural aspects have not been treated with enough systematicy, nor been seen as having equal importance as the linguistic content within FL teaching. When cultural aspects are included, this is often in the form of a static, product view of culture that even risks strengthening stereotyped views (cf. also Kaikkonen, 2001: 61, 67). Often, however, it is not so much a question of what we teach as what we do not address or problematize concerning contents and images that are already there in textbooks and teaching materials: Although this is not our intention, many students will be left with a (strengthened) stereotyped, one-sided image of some cultural aspect, also meaning that the students will lack tools that could help them modify stereotyped views transmitted elsewhere.

I will introduce this chapter with a random, authentic example from a textbook printed in 1994; a text describing a conversation around a breakfast table on a Sunday morning somewhere in Britain. Towards the end of the conversation the characters comment on the fact that they are out of milk, stating that since it is Sunday there is no milkman to expect. If left without further explorations or reflections on the content, this text neither gives very much information, nor can it be said to show a diverse and realistic image of today's Britain: It presents a somewhat stereotypical conception of all British people still depending on the milkman for their bottles of milk, despite the fact that many people today buy their milk much more cheaply from the nearest supermarket. Although seemingly innocent, this example adds to the amount of stereotypical views that eventually leaves the students with a homogeneous view of the UK and the "typical" British person; on the other hand, if such examples are problematized, students will have a more realistic view of different societies besides learning to become more critical towards one-sided, simplified cultural representations. Thus, an alternative approach would be to start out with the intention of explicitly pointing out and exploring diversity (cf. Räsänen & San, 2005: 216), rather than transmitting information that still needs to be modified before students can be said to have a realistic overview of the situation. In Chapter 4 this and other approaches relevant to cultural methodology, both within EFL education generally and in the current study, will be discussed from a more theoretical point of view, whereas the actual work within this project on promoting intercultural competence will be discussed in Chapter 6.

4.1 Possible frameworks for promoting intercultural competence

The focus of the discussion in this section will be on possible ways of working towards the development of intercultural competence in the language classroom. The frameworks and approaches discussed here have all influenced the approaches adopted in the study. They have in common that they are based on a constructivist framework, where knowledge is constructed and reconstructed through interaction with one's social and cultural environment[60], including interaction with others. Reflective processes precede or are simultaneous with the learning of basic factual knowledge. This entails a view of learning as a progression from simple to more complex models rather than as a progression from facts to understanding and analysis. (See e.g. Dysthe, 1996; Säljö, 2000.)

On a more general educational level I have found a lot of common reference points with Dysthe's (1996) suggestions concerning the multivoiced classroom: Following Vygotsky and Bakhtin in particular, she proposes a dialogical approach[61], both through the use of many different sources of knowledge for learning, but also through students being involved in written as well as oral interaction both with the teacher, each other, and with the subject and the contents of what they are to learn (cf. e.g. van Lier, 2000, 2004; Tornberg, 2000, 2004). Such an approach entails increased possibilities for students for personal integration of knowledge through encounters with new thoughts and by restructuring their own thoughts and knowledge through these encounters, e.g. through work processes that activate and engage. This is opposed to a one-sided monological classroom approach where learners can be said to be more or less passive receivers of information of the official discourse that is reproduced without necessarily entailing engagement or deeper understanding (cf. Elliott, 1991: 10). Additionally, a dialogical approach can create more common frames of reference for the educational experiences, and through continued interaction around students' expanding knowledge it is easier for the teacher to see what could be added, restructured or given new perspectives. Thus, more people than the teacher talking in the classroom is not enough to ensure a dialogical approach in the sense Dysthe proposes. Also, with reference to the dialogical approaches used in the 1970s, Dysthe points out that despite such an open dialogue, the teacher and the students will still have asymmetrical positions in the classroom e.g. through their differing levels of knowledge in the subject field, and that it is this asymmetry that is the main driving force for dialogue to begin with. Dysthe's conclusion is that a multivoiced, dialogical classroom is a necessity not only for learning subjects and developing independent thinking, but also because it is a model of a working democratic society: Students learn

---

[60] Cf. the *constructivist tenet* in Bruner, according to which we live in a 'reality' that we ourselves create, but to which culture, traditions and ways of thinking provide the foundation (Takala, 2002: 324).

[61] It should be noted that Dysthe's view is that both monological and dialogical approaches to teaching have their place within the classroom, but due to the traditional domination of teacher transmitted modes she sees the need for stressing the importance of adopting more socially interactive and dialogically based approaches.

how to listen to the voices of others, seeing their perspectives, asking questions and looking for answers together with others.

More specifically concerning the field of FL education, Byram (1991: 19ff) argues that cultural awareness is of great importance for the ability to make sense of cultural experience, in the same way language awareness can support language learning. Students should become aware of its importance, and one way of reaching this goal is to offer students possibilities to learn more about and become more aware of their own culture and culturally-induced behavior in relation to others. And since learners will always be affected by their own language and culture in different ways, this increasing knowledge and awareness can be seen as part of the learners' expanding understanding of the world, a changing of one's schemata in cognitivist terms. Similarly, Kaikkonen (e.g. 2004a: 29, 2004c: 171) stresses that the learner's own identity cannot be left outside the learning process, as we are dealing with issues that deeply touch their own personalities. In Kaikkonen (2001: 70) emphasis is put on consciousness and self-esteem of the learner's cultural identity as a kind of foundation for intercultural learning, and as a possible help when considering foreign cultural identities.[62]

However, according to Byram (1991), some schemata are inadequate to deal with phenomena in a foreign culture, and then learning can benefit from being *experiential* (see also Byram, 1997: 65-69). Byram (e.g. 1997) discusses the potential of the classroom for teacher-guided reflection on experiences inside as well as outside the classroom, both prior to and after such experiences.[63] Here we can point to sociocultural theory as well as Kolb's (1984: 42) Model of Experiential Learning (see Figure 5). Kolb's model has been an influential framework for the work with intercultural competence in this study, and also the choice of research approach can be said to be inspired by experiential learning through the adoption of action research strategies. Kolb emphasizes that this model is not a third alternative to behavioral and cognitive learning theories but rather a holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behavior, linking not only theory and practice but also the affective and cognitive domains.

---

[62] However, regarding Kaikkonen's (2001: 70) suggestion that this concerns considering and clarifying 'what makes . . . a Greek a Greek, a Finn a Finn', I would like to suggest that this process benefits from being about cultural identity at different levels, not only the national, and always include considerations of cultures at all levels as heterogeneous and changing.

[63] See Kaikkonen (2001) for a discussion of practical experiences from a teaching experiment with 16-17-year-old students of German and French involving e.g. reflective work around site visits abroad.
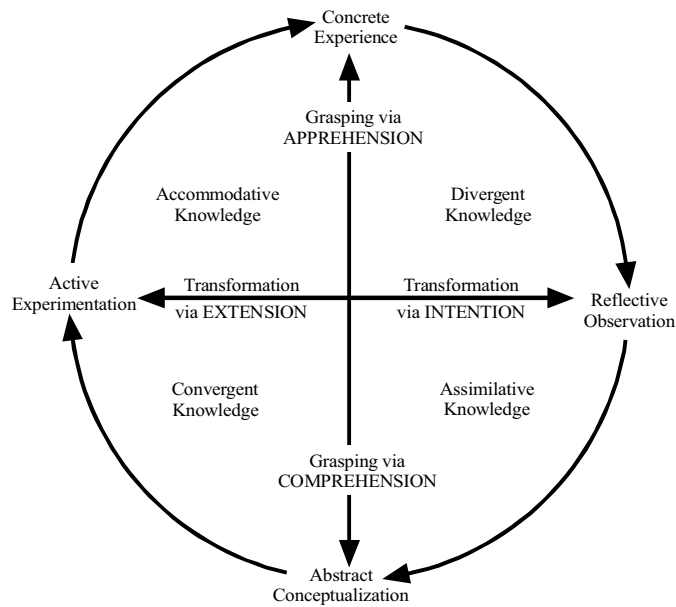
Figure 5. Kolb's (1984: 42) Model of Experiential Learning

Kolb (1984) presents and discusses three main traditions of experiential learning: approaches developed to meet challenges such as coping with change and lifelong learning through experiential learning in higher education as the legacy of the educational philosophy of John Dewey already in the 1930s; work within social psychology by Kurt Lewin on experiential learning in training and organization development as well as the methodology of action research in the 1940s; and the cognitive-development tradition of experiential learning through developmental psychologist Piaget that started to receive recognition in the US in the 1960s.[64] Kolb leads an enlightening discussion of the many similarities as well as some disagreements between these three models of learning in his book; suffice it here to point out two interrelated points connected to his definition of learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience' (pp. 38, 41): 1) learning is best conceived of as a process (of adaptation, e.g. disposing of or modifying old ideas, not only implanting new ones), and not in terms of content or outcomes (such as memorizing measurable facts or behavioral responses to specific conditions); 2) knowledge is a transformation process continuously created and recreated (through experience), not an independent entity to be acquired or transmitted.

---

[64] These traditions with both their common and separate themes as well as an outline of contemporary applications of experiential learning theory are summarized in Figure 1.2 in Kolb (1984: 17). See also Kohonen (2001b: 24-27) on the foundations of experiential learning.

In Kohonen (2005) on experiential learning as an approach to enhance education, and in Kohonen (2006) on experiential and sociocultural theories as a framework for the European Language Portfolio, experiential learning is described as the process of extracting personal meaning from experience through reflection. Thus, according to Kolb's model, experiences need to be processed consciously through *reflection*. Kohonen (see also 2001b: 32) describes this process as *transformative* when students revise their beliefs, assumptions or expectations into qualitatively new ways of seeing the world (cf. Pelkonen, 2005a: 79ff), and as *emancipatory* when students experience freedom from forces that previously have constrained their options or that have been taken for granted.

Kohonen (2005) points out that although the experiential learning approach is widely used in settings of informal learning such as internships and international exchange programs, its principles and practices can also be used in contexts of formal learning.[65] What such practices have in common is an element of learning from immediate experience by engaging learners intellectually as well as emotionally in the process through active participation. In traditional teacher-directed approaches learning takes place mainly at an intellectual level, with students in the role of more or less passive recipients of information. Thus, experiential learning entails students being provided with opportunities for all the following four learning orientations of the model with reflection acting as a link between practical experience and theoretical conceptualization:

1) concrete experience, e.g. through drama, the use of films and stories;

2) reflective observation, e.g. through reflective essays and thought

   questions;

3) abstract conceptualization, e.g. through theory construction and lecturing;

   and

4) active experimentation, e.g. through fieldwork, projects and games.

Consequently, this is unlike practice in traditional academic settings where emphasis has been on reflective observation and concept formation at the expense of practical action and experiences: The model stresses a necessary balance in pointing out that experience alone does not also automatically lead to learning. (See Kolb, 1984: 42; Kohonen, 2001b, 2005, 2006.) Kohonen (2001b: 29-30) finds it interesting to relate the four orientations to the historical developments in FL pedagogy: For example, whereas the grammar-translation method was strong on the abstract conceptualization, the intercultural leaning approach aims at an integrated and more balanced use of all four orientations.[66]

---

[65] See Kohonen (2001b) for discussions of several enlightening teaching experiments within a framework of experiential learning, e.g. one involving enhancement of learners' self-esteem, and a portfolio experiment aimed at exploring negotiated learning.
[66] See also Kaikkonen (2004a: 36-39) for a useful description of the language teacher's central role for the realization of possibilities for intercultural learning connected to encounters and experiential learning.

A further approach for implementing a more unified view of language and culture, including specified aims for the cultural content related to the promotion of intercultural competence and democracy, could be in the form of what van Lier (e.g. 2000, 2004) discusses as an ecological-semiotic approach to language learning and classroom teaching. The concept of ecology refers to 'the totality of relationships of an organism with all other organisms with which it comes to contact' (van Lier, 2000: 251). This concept has been borrowed from biology into psychology and consequently also into language learning. van Lier places this approach towards the contextual or situative end of the cognitive-contextualized spectrum alongside Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, although not necessarily denying a central role to cognitive processing.[67]

van Lier (2000) suggests that it is easier to say what language learning is not than what it is in ecological terms and offers among others the following explanations: Language and learning are relationships among learners and between learners and their environment, not words transmitted from a sender to a receiver through the air, on paper or along wires, nor does learning exclusively happen inside learners' heads. It is not a migration of meaning to the inside of a learner's head, but the development of increasingly effective ways of dealing with the world and its meanings.

Here the notion of *affordance*, originally used in psychology, comes into play.[68] It refers to 'a particular property of the environment that is relevant - for good or for ill - to an active, perceiving organism in that environment' (van Lier, 2000: 252). In the context of language learning, it is nowadays often used to replace 'input', and refers to the 'relationship between properties of the environment and the active learner' (p. 257). van Lier states that language emerges out of semiotic activity, i.e. the focus is on the opportunities for meaningful action that the situation affords, not on the amount of available or comprehensible input. For example, when two persons in a conversation use not only words but also drawings, gestures and other contextual clues to help convey meaning, the totality of meaning-making is semiotic and not only linguistic. An active and engaged learner will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action. From a pedagogical perspective van Lier (p. 253) suggests the provision of a rich 'semiotic budget', and to structure learners' activities and participation so that access is available and engagement encouraged.[69]

van Lier (2000) does not explicitly refer to the cultural dimension of language learning, but the ecological approach lends itself well to the inclusion of e.g. awareness of diversity and respect for difference to prevent stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination, since an ecological perspective is rooted in a world view that stresses the importance of our relations to others and our environment. In fact, van Lier (2004) discusses the inclusion of democracy education in the language classroom from an ecological, semiotic and sociocultural perspective.

---

[67] Here, van Lier refers to Neisser (1992); cf. Säljö (2000: e.g. 231).

[68] van Lier refers to Gibson (1979).

[69] Cf. van Lier (1996) on 'autonomous learning'; 'activity' and 'scaffolding' in van Lier (2004); 'guided reflection' in this study; also Forsman (2004a) stresses the importance of language learners becoming more aware of how to make use of different resources available for learning e.g. outside the language classroom.

Here van Lier describes four basic organizing structures of ecology (pp. 85ff): perception (multimodal, multisensory), action (activity), relation (self and identity) and quality (of educational experience). For example, from the point of view of learning cultural content, learning to make use of (particularly, but not exclusively) auditory and visual information can help learners to interpret and make qualified conclusions in new situations. van Lier suggests that the importance of learning how to perceive and relate various kinds of perceptual information generally has received scarce attention both in theory and practice within the field of language learning, besides noticing linguistic features such as phonology and morphology. However, especially concerning the cultural dimension I draw parallels to the skills of interpreting and relating within Byram's comprehensive model of ICC (e.g. 1997; see Section 3.2).

Tornberg (e.g. 2004: 127; see also discussion in Sections 3.2 and 4.3) argues for the possibility of the FL classroom to offer 'an opportunity for cultural identities to co-construct a social space, where normative conflicts and different viewpoints could be dealt with through multivocal[70] deliberative communication'. Through the experiences such involvement could bring, students might 'change the way they know the world and their attitudes towards the otherness of the other as well as towards themselves' (p. 135). However, in a discussion of the meaning of 'intercultural' and 'interculturality', Alred et al. (2003: 2ff) conclude that although virtually any human encounter can be described as intercultural, if the concept is extended too far it risks becoming vacuous and unlikely to provide insights into educational practice. Because of the relative homogeneity in many Finland-Swedish and Finnish classrooms, Tornberg's suggestion, although highly interesting and hopefully possible to implement, might be too abstract as a point of departure, and experiences gained might be difficult to apply in new cultural encounters outside the familiar environment developed in the classroom (cf. discussion in Kaikkonen, 2005: 94). Furthermore, although not very clearly emphasized and lacking further elaboration, Tornberg (2001) states that FL education still has to aim at developing awareness of and respect for difference and diversity on an international level through increased knowledge about the countries of the target languages, e.g. by letting students analyze specific circumstances and relating this analysis to knowledge about one's own and other countries (see also Section 4.3). Possibly the development of respect for difference on an international level would be easier to accomplish with the democratic experiences made in the FL classroom as a basis. Generally it could be suggested that the best way would be for different approaches to support and complement each other whenever and wherever possible.

Considering the possibility to experience some aspects of different cultures also inside the language classroom, we consequently have the exploration of the multiple voices already present among students to help us (cf. Dysthe, 1996), and, of course, the use of literature. Kramsch (1993: 130ff) discusses the renewed interest in the individual and particular voices of writers that has emerged after years of functional approaches within language learning that has had to content itself with helping the learners to approximate the voice of the

---

[70] Cf. Dysthe (1996).

target speech community. The foreign language teacher can help the learners to find models of particularity and opportunities for negotiation of meaning through the reading of literature. Through the use of a pedagogy of dialogue which can elicit and value both diversity and difference by opening the minds of the readers to alternative world views and putting stereotypes into perspective by taking into account the discourse of the narrative itself, teachers can guide readers instead of limiting the responses to what she calls 'the non-committal pluralism of opinions that . . . does justice neither to the text nor to the students' search for meaning'. This pedagogy of dialogue can be compared to the concept of *Pedagogy of Encounter* (Kaikkonen, 2004c), used in Larzén (2005: 121-126) about intercultural education as a reciprocal, dialogic process where both the C1 and other cultures interact either in simulated[71] or authentic encounters, with the purpose of making changes in perspective possible.

What if students are not able to discuss cultural topics in the target language? Tornberg (2004: 137, also 2000) discusses what she labels the 'curse' of language pedagogy, namely the persistent argument that you have to learn a language before you can use it, something that she finds to be an overemphasis on competence and skills to be developed for future needs.[72] She states that the emergence of culture in the classroom through authentic, meaningful communication cannot be created through communicative exercises, referring to Hans Eberhard Piepho on communication as an aim versus communication as a principle of education. She further stresses Kramsch's suggestion that language learners can start using the foreign language as speakers in their own right. She admits that students may lack the skills needed to take part in all kinds of discussions, in particular involving controversial, value-laden questions, at the same time suggesting that this also depends on how teachers value the language in process that students are using. I recognize how students often can be reluctant to express themselves in the foreign language on the grounds that they 'don't know how to say this in English', and wonder how far this is influenced by the common practice, or rather imbalance, within language education of always marking the mistakes and gaps in students' written and spoken repertoire instead of listening for the message and drawing attention to what students actually can do (cf. the approach adopted in the European Language Portfolio, referred to in Section 3.4). Still, for more abstract levels of work with the development of intercultural competence in the classroom, I have made use of the principle of encouraging students to express their opinions in the language of their own choice, thus prioritizing message over medium.

---

[71] Larzén (2005: 122) describes simulated encounters as mental constructs or role-plays, which aim at giving the students the possibility to experience what it might be like to meet members of another culture.

[72] In this respect Tornberg also offers criticism of Byram (1997).

4.2 A basis for intercultural competence: The ability to decenter

It is useful, if not necessary, for us as teachers to have insights into issues that can be of relevance for the educational process of our students, e.g. prior knowledge and attitudes, learning and life experiences, as well as work habits, to be able to help them develop new learning in connection to their prior understanding (see Kaikkonen, 2001: 90-91; see also Section 3.1). In this study I started by exploring issues related primarily to students' EFL learning experiences with the use of a set of questionnaires (see Appendices II-IV). At the same time, the process of helping learners become more aware of their own knowledge, attitudes, and habits related to learning the English language and its cultural dimension had been initiated so that prior knowledge and attitudes later on could be related to new insights[73] through a process of reflection and abstract conceptualization on a metacognitive level, making both me and the learners more aware of their individual progress and also enabling a consolidation of what had been learnt (see also e.g. Sections 5.4 and 7.2).

For the purpose of this study, the following definition of subjective culture[74] by Brislin in Doyé (1999: 19) is seen as central:[75]

> Culture refers to widely shared ideals, values, formation and uses of categories, assumptions about life, and goal-directed activities that become unconsciously or subconsciously accepted as 'right' and 'correct' by people who identify themselves as members of a society.

Since the above could be said to describe what constitutes one's own culture and cultural belonging, at the same time pointing to a common practice of regarding other ways and values as less correct, even strange or wrong at times, it will be suggested that this subconscious foundation is also what needs to be questioned,

---

[73] The term *insight* is used in this context to refer to the development of a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects beyond the learning of factual information, particularly related to awareness of difference and diversity within and between groups as well as respect for such difference through the ability to decenter (see Byram below) from the taken-for-granted and what we regard as "normal".

[74] Subjective culture refers to psychological features such as everyday thinking, behavior and values, as opposed to objective culture which refers to institutions of culture such as art, literature and classical music, as well as social, political, and linguistic systems according to Bennett (1998); cf. in Doyé (1999: 19).

[75] Although Brislin's definition is useful for the awareness of the importance of questioning our own ways and values, it deserves some comments: The notion of cultures as *process* entailing diversity and change on different levels could well have been more emphasized. In its use of 'society', the association automatically goes to the notion of culture on a national or possibly ethnic level, and as a homogeneous, fixed entity. However, as e.g. Tornberg (2000) points out, these are not the only defining characteristics since other groupings based on e.g. language, region, social class, religion, gender, and age exist at the same time, none of which are homogeneous in their turn, and change as people meet, influence each other, and develop new ways and values. This aspect and its consequences for the teaching of the cultural dimension within FL education will be explored in Section 4.3.

sometimes even "shaken", in order for us to be able to gain new perspectives on what we take for granted. Through such insights we might also eventually be able to develop respect for difference. The suggested approach in this study will be based on what Byram (1997) discusses as the development of the *ability to decenter* (see Byram's *savoir être* in Section 3.2; see also below).

The focus of Alred et al. (2003) is also on how we form different in-groups because it gives us a sense of security, and how this practice often leads to the assumption that the conventions and values that we live by are the "natural" ones (see also Kaikkonen, 2001: 72-75; Byram, 2004; Bennett, 1998). To begin to become intercultural is to have an experience that leads us to question these given conventions and values and recognize the arbitrary nature of the given - without necessarily rejecting our own way of life. Alred et al. suggest that such experiences may take place in many ways but is most often a consequence of stepping outside the boundaries of the familiar and experiencing the conventions and values of other groups (cf. Bennett).

Unlike the suggestion in Larzén (2005: 115-116) of intercultural understanding developing as stages in a cumulative process with 'Knowledge about other countries' at the bottom of the stairs, via 'Skills for intercultural encounters' to the eventual goal of 'Tolerance[76] and empathy' at the top, I rather see the development of intercultural competence as a cyclical process (see Figure 6) with learning as a progression from simple to more complex models: In this process cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects of culture can be combined and develop simultaneously.[77] My suggestion is that the development of respect for difference through the ability to decenter (see below) could even form the basis for this educational process in the same sense as the underlying values of basic education do for the other educational aims. The approach of Jerome Bruner's idea of a spiral curriculum may support students to eventually reach the intended insights as "the message" is revised through different approaches within an experiential framework (Kolb, 1984; see Section 4.1), with the use of more in-depth reflections and abstract contents over time (cf. Byram & al., 1994). Fleming (2003: 88), on the role of drama in intercultural experience, even states that 'an overemphasis on knowledge may have little impact on the transformation of attitudes'.

Thus, as was suggested in Section 3.2, there are complex relationships between the cognitive and the affective: For example, according to Byram et al. (1994: 40ff), a cognitive element is often suggested to be necessary for empathetic understanding. However, they add that 'mere exposure to acquisition of the linguistic competence is insufficient' with respect to the development of openness to new perspectives from different cultures. As was previously suggested, even exposure to experience of a different culture does not guarantee either respect or understanding. Furthermore, when suggesting that knowledge about different countries is important for the process, it is also crucial to consider what type of knowledge and how it is used in the classroom. I would like to suggest that there is an important qualitative difference between e.g.

---

[76] See discussion of the notions of *understanding* and *tolerance* in Section 3.5.2.
[77] See positioning of the study in a constructivist framework in Section 4.1.

mediation of knowledge about sights or generalized traditional celebrations that conveys a homogeneous cultural image on the one hand, and knowledge intended to help modify stereotyped views through reflective work on the other. Still, it can be useful to remember that stereotypical views do not out of necessity equal prejudiced views, and, similarly, awareness of diversity does not equal respect for all such diversity (see discussion in Chapter 6), although such awareness certainly is more insightful and in accordance with reality and for many could be an important stepping stone towards developing more respectful attitudes.
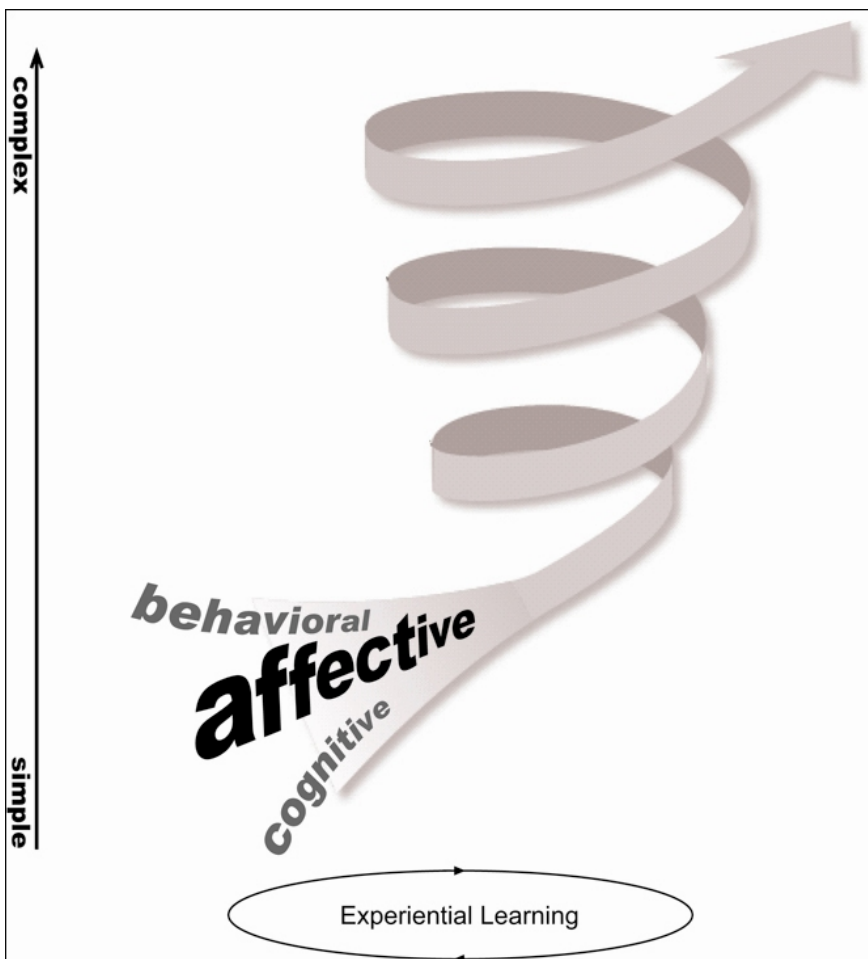
Figure 6. The development of IC along a spiral curriculum[78] from simple to more complex levels through a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral elements within a framework of experiential learning

---

[78] Spiral graphic adapted from Costa & Kallick (1995: 27).

Similarly, Byram (1997: 34-35) describes the relationship of attitudes, cognitive and behavioral factors as one of interdependence, stating that the relationship between attitudes and knowledge is 'not the simple cause and effect often assumed, i.e. that increased knowledge creates positive attitudes'. However, he suggests that *the ability to decenter* is essential for the development of intercultural competence (cf. Heusinkveld, 1997: 489). This ability is defined as 'a willingness to suspend belief in one's own meanings and behaviours, and to analyse them from the viewpoint of the others with whom one is engaging' (p. 34; cf. Alred & al., 2003). In other words, to attain a different perspective on and a more objective view of one's own taken-for-granted ways and values,[79] which to me entails an awareness that includes both cognitive and affective elements. Also Lahdenperä (2004) suggests the importance of developing reciprocal thinking, entailing both an affective and a cognitive ability as well as a willingness to treat others with respect as a result. Byram refers to Kohlberg et al.[80] who argue that the ability to decenter is an advanced stage of psychological development, and Melde's suggestion that it is fundamental to understanding other cultures. This can be compared to the transition from ethnocentric stages (Denial > Defense > Minimization) to ethnorelative stages (Acceptance > Adaptation > Integration) through the experience of difference according to Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (e.g. 1998; see also Räsänen & San, 2005: 211). Also Bredella (2003: 228) puts forward being able to reconstruct other people's frames of reference and seeing the world through their eyes as an indispensable feature of the intercultural experience. Here Byram (1997: 35) suggests that 'it is probably easier to relativise one's own meanings, beliefs and behaviours through comparison with others' than to attempt to decenter and distance oneself from what the processes of socialisation have suggested is natural and unchangeable'.

Kramsch (1993) suggests that systematic training of learners in insiders' and outsiders' views of cultural phenomena should start early on with activities that require them to adopt different ways of seeing. However, she also points to the difficulty of using a dual perspective, 'given the layer of self-perception on which the outsider's look is based' (pp. 222ff). Given the difficulty of changing frames of reference, she concludes that 'one of the primary tasks in the development of cross-cultural competence should be not so much to fill one frame with different contents, but, rather, to make explicit the boundaries of the frame and try out a different one.' In attempting this, considering that the C1-C2 duality might prevent one from having the necessary distance to both cultures, she suggests that we seek a 'third place' from where to look at both cultures (p. 223).

---

[79] Cf. Kaikkonen (2001: 79) on our relation to time, and how becoming aware of different 'hidden time-tables that make us do something on certain days, at certain hours' can be an eye-opening experience.

[80] Fjellström (2004: 45-50) discusses some of the criticism Kohlberg's theories have received, e.g. on the grounds of the normative character of the postconventional stage - in particular from a feminist point of view the theories can be seen as projecting a male perspective only - as well as their lack of empirical foundations.

What, then, is a 'third place'? According to Kramsch (1993: 223ff) it can e.g. be a place where learners create their own meaning and find their own relevance of what is taught in the language classroom. It is to identify and explore cultural boundaries and to find oneself in the process. Such an approach involves dialogue in trying to see the world through the other's eyes without losing sight of oneself, 'a paradoxical irreducible confrontation that may change one in the process' as a third culture emerging through such a cross-cultural dialogue is different from either the C1 or the C2. Such an approach requires a gradual move towards using metadiscourse and aesthetic reflection in the classroom.

What remains somewhat unclear to me is whether such a third place emerges through cross-cultural dialogue or whether we actively seek it; both formulations are used by Kramsch. Possibly both approaches can be valid in different situations. She suggests role-play activities that require learners to seek distance from their own culture, through which the realization of a third culture can emerge (pp. 229ff). However, these activities still contain a certain amount of duality, including knowledge and understanding of the C2, since the learners are asked to take what they know about certain aspects of the other culture into account in their efforts to gain a different perspective on their own culture. Kramsch admits that these activities are not easy on the grounds that they require learners to step into an outsider's shoes. She emphasizes that the objective of these exercises is not to find any right or wrong solutions: Such a process does not in itself offer certainties or resolve any conflicts. Thus, the process can be said to include development of tolerance of paradox as well.

Inspired by Kramsch's (1993: 223) discussion of seeking a third place in order to have the necessary distance, I would like to suggest the usefulness of developing the ability to decenter from one's own taken-for-granted point of view first, without trying to reconstruct other people's frames of reference, using their point of view, or looking at other cultures. Thus, my suggestion is that as a first step in the process I need to be able to look at myself and my own culture (see Figure 7).
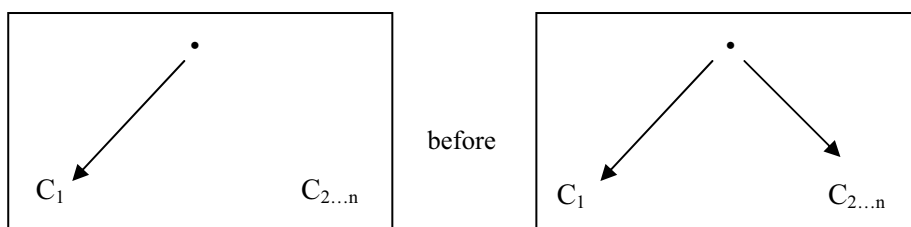
Figure 7. The ability to decenter used to look at one's own culture before looking at other cultures

There are several reasons for the previous suggestion. First of all, as Sen Gupta (2003: 160-162) maintains, it can be an uncomfortable process for some students to be forced to challenge deeply held beliefs, or feel that they are asked to

evaluate their own taken-for-granted views in terms of right or wrong. Heusinkveld (1997: 489), citing a handbook for international studies, brings up the following: 'Indeed, the greatest shock of an intercultural experience may not be in the encounter with a different culture but in the recognition of how our own culture has shaped us and what we do.' Thus, this experience could be described as a type of reverse culture shock, probably affecting different individuals to differing degrees. This approach can have a similar function to what Pelkonen (2005a: 79) discusses as a precondition or trigger for change in intercultural learning contexts, such as a 'critical situation' or culture shock. This refers to the transformative learning model suggested by Edward Taylor, based on Mezirow's 'disorienting dilemmas' leading to critical reflection in the form of 'questioning of one's own cultural values, presumptions, and practices' (see also Jokikokko, 2005b). The concept of culture shock is one of the best-known intercultural concepts, originally referring to a disorientation that can occur in unfamiliar cultural contexts but that later on has been described as a five-stage-process ranging from the euphoria of the first Contact stage via rejection of the new culture to the stage of Independence with choice and responsibility accompanying respect for one's own and others' cultures (see e.g. Bennett, 1998). Also Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, which was previously referred to, contains elements which share similar traits with the stages described in a culture shock, e.g. Defense in the initial stages.

According to Bredella (2003: 227) the insecurity such confrontational processes with our own culture might bring is rarely mentioned, although, as e.g. in Kaikkonen (2001: 70), the importance of students' own cultural identity particularly in the form of consciousness and self-esteem is often emphasized in relation to aims within intercultural FL teaching[81] (see also Kaikkonen, 2004a: 29, 2004c: 171; cf. discussion of the role of a learner's cultural identity in Section 4.1). Kramsch (1993: 231) does point out that resistance towards exploration of oneself can often be found among teenage learners, an unwillingness to distance themselves from their native culture and familiar educational discourse.

Also in my own experience, students can react with frustration and even become defensive of their own ways and habits. This might result in negative attitudes towards 'the Others' supposedly providing this new and threatening perspective, whether the Others constitute individuals or a larger cultural group acknowledging certain ways and values. This is also why the use of some specific other cultural viewpoint can actually have the opposite effect to the one intended: Students might resort to focusing on perceived "strange ways" of the Others, while retaining their own familiar and "normal" perspective. Consequently, whatever perspective used, in the beginning of such a process it is important for the teacher to reassure students that their traditions are there to be enjoyed, just as they should let others enjoy their way of life,[82] although it can

---

[81] See also discussions in Doyé (1999) on the relationship between self-esteem and attitudes towards foreignness.
[82] At later stages it is possible to include elements of critical evaluation into the decentering activities, e.g. reflections on how tendencies within our drinking culture might seem to people with other experiences (cf. discussion e.g. in Section 3.5.2.).

also be very useful to help students to question and challenge these emotional reactions when appropriate: Kohonen (2001b: 26-27), on the importance of emotional intelligence as part of holistic, experiential education, suggests that by doing so it is possible to reframe the experience and perceive it differently.

Additionally, some students might have prejudiced views of the C2 from the beginning and then it is not easy to take the perspective of the other group or even look at the C2 at a distance without negative attitudes. This can also be seen as the risk with the following suggestion by Kaikkonen (2001: 86), although his main point is not to take the perspective of the C2 but to become more conscious of the C1. Kaikkonen suggests that the learning process is directed so the learner can compare e.g. behavioral routines in the C2 with the C1, thereby enabling increased consciousness of her/his own behavior and help in growing to understand that her/his own behavior also may seem strange to foreigners. Naturally, depending on the relationship between the C1 and the C2, there is more or less risk of using the viewpoint of C2 or looking at the C2 when trying to relativize one's own ways and values. Also the maturity level of the students determines what kind of value discussion is possible.

Furthermore, when discussing how to develop respect for difference in general we also need to be able to consider that there are different viewpoints in general, not first and foremost making use of some specific frame of reference. There is also the question of whose perspective we would choose to represent the C2.[83] Ultimately, actually being able to use someone else's perspective, especially in terms of values and not only conventions, requires that one is already more or less bicultural[84] (cf. Tornberg, 2000: 65-68, discussed in Section 3.5.2).

Thus, as a useful first step I would like to suggest decentering activities that allow students to start exploring the boundaries of their own cultural group(s) by realizing the arbitrariness[85] of their own ways and values without having to take a specific other perspective. Here, I find what Stevens (2003: 187) speaks of as the 'Martian' school, which aims to make the familiar strange, very useful. He points to Brecht's term *Verfremdung*, entailing 'a potentially liberating, even celebratory, de-familiarisation'. By using an "alien perspective" we have a more neutral viewpoint that we can use to distance ourselves from what we take for granted, a both captivating and humorous approach that works well for bringing up this serious topic also with teenagers. Through the relativization of their own cultural practices, such activities can bring about the emergence of a 'third place' from which students then more easily can go on exploring boundaries between specific groups with a more distanced, possibly even more objective

---

[83] In connection to curricular goals such as students developing an understanding of other people's way of life, Tornberg (2000: 65) argues that since social circumstances and ways of life are bound to change and can furthermore be seen from different perspectives, the question becomes whose perspective we should be able to understand.

[84] In which case we could also argue that it is no longer a question of using the perspective of someone else!

[85] In Excerpt G of the Action Log (see Appendix I) I reflect on the following: '(...) by realizing the randomness of how we end up behaving the way we do, that it is more a question of "cultural sense" than "common sense", it might be easier for us to tolerate the "strangeness" of others.'

stance, e.g. concerning phenomena that can cause misunderstandings or possible value clashes. This can hopefully result in students becoming more open to authentic communication and work towards negotiating common ways and values when encountering difference.

In an article published on the internet, Pulverness (1999) discusses the background and use of de-familiarization techniques among writers and literary critics, particularly Tolstoy and Russian Formalist critics from the beginning of the 1900s. His article explores ways in which such techniques can be used in the language classroom to promote greater intercultural awareness:

> The value of such writing for learners of language-and-culture is the way in which it may encourage them not simply to observe the difference in the Other culture, but to become less ethnocentric and more culturally relativist - to look at their own cultural environment through fresh eyes. Once students have got the idea of 'making strange', they could try their hand at writing their Martian anthropology or futuristic archaeological notes. To build a bridge in the classroom from the literature of cultural third places to the learner's own inter-cultural experience, students could be asked to experiment with various kinds of textual intervention . . . and imitation. They could be invited to 're-centre' an immigrant narrative from the host community's point of view, to imagine dialogues, not included in the original text, between representatives of the two cultures, to imagine themselves as immigrants in their own society.

Obviously, using the alien point of view does not give the students insights into any other specific point of views or e.g. acquaint them with different value systems per se. This means that this point of view cannot be used to prevent specific misunderstandings between cultural groups or empathize with the views of a specific cultural group. On the other hand, because of its generic nature, it can be applied in different contexts as a basic stance or attitude of respect towards difference, thus constituting an ability that can be built upon in more specific contexts as needed.[86] In addition, I see this approach as a means of trying to balance the power relations created through a common discourse of the Other as e.g. exotic, irrational, illogical and thus inferior. Such conceptualization is discussed in Kubota (2004) on Pennycook's discourses of colonialism, together with other examples of culture as a discursive construct involving power relations, resulting in the need for critical multiculturalism in education to address such issues: 'Teachers and students need to critically reevaluate the taken-for-granted conceptions about cultural groups, Self or Other, and understand how these conceptions are produced and perpetuated' (p. 45). Using the alien perspective, it is possible at least for some students to reach a critical insight into how everyone can be both the norm and the inferior depending on the point of view and values coloring one's views (cf. Byram, 1997: e.g. 113-115, on critical cultural awareness).

Finally, according to e.g. Kaikkonen (2001), fears and anxieties related to foreignness are completely natural, and he states that 'the purpose of intercultural learning is to prevent these naturally existing feelings growing out

---

[86] Pelkonen (2005a) points out that one should be able to apply intercultural competences in different contexts provided that learning has been transformative and taken place also at a meta-level (cf. Section 4.1).

of control by developing a healthy curiosity towards diversity' (p. 73). Thus, as curiosity is also deeply rooted in us humans, he sees possibilities for putting curiosity in the service of intercultural learning. My suggestion is to develop methods which integrate the development of new perspectives through a questioning of one's own taken-for-granted ways and values and the opening towards feelings of curiosity towards different cultural expressions. To fulfill the criteria of joining different aspects of the cognitive and the affective with learner experiences both inside and outside the FL classroom for the development of intercultural competence, the notion of experiential learning according to Kolb (1984) is stressed in this study (see discussion in Section 4.1). In relation to this model Kohonen (2001b: 29, see also 2005: 128) argues that 'theoretical concepts will become part of the individual's frame of reference only after he or she has experienced them meaningfully at an emotional level', but it should also be noted that experience and reflection need to be followed by the framing and conceptualization of phenomena through theory-building.

4.3 Awareness of difference and diversity

With the integral *ability to decenter* (see Section 4.2 above), i.e. to be able to look at ourselves at some distance, as the basis, I have found it helpful to make use of concrete examples of *difference* that students can relate to in the form of comparisons both between and within groups. These differences can consist of something 'we', at least many of us, do or recognize as opposed to other common conventions or values that we then work towards learning to respect. I have chosen to call these examples of difference *tendencies* to point out that there is also *diversity* concerning them.[87] These tendencies often concern behavioral conventions, e.g. greetings and traditional celebrations, more culturally embedded issues such as values, e.g. how young vs. old people are valued, or explorations into issues such as what can constitute an ordinary school day.

Naturally, tendencies need not be explored on a national level, although examples such as the tendency of saunas being more common in private homes in Finland than in other countries are relatively easy to think of. The problematic task is to be able to treat such issues without risking mediating an image of these tendencies as the defining characteristics of a certain group, or of groups as homogeneous entities (see discussions in Sections 3.2 and 3.3; see also Pelkonen, 2005a: 70). Since there are numerous such tendencies to choose from, it is important that students understand that although certain individuals adhere to one tendency, there are others that will not apply to the same individuals: There are no lists of tendencies that define a complete culture. In a society certain tendencies or characteristics might be applicable to a specific part of its

---

[87] Cf. discussion around 'axiomatic beliefs', 'widely held views' and 'trends and agreements' in Byram (2004: 24); and on the necessity of cultural generalizations while avoiding stereotypes through the idea of 'pre-ponderance of belief', and the use of 'central tendency' and 'preferred values', in Bennett (1998), cf. Pelkonen (2005a, 2005b).

population but not to others, and they can also cut right through different groups based on e.g. linguistic background, region, social class or age (cf. Byram, 2004)

The choice of what tendencies to bring up in the classroom can be based on different criteria. I consider one of the most important criteria to be to show diversity or a more realistic image concerning tendencies or other more peripheral characteristics that the teacher knows or notices are being stereotyped, or risk becoming stereotyped e.g. as a result of textbook contents, among students. Other criteria can be students' interests and, naturally, the teacher's own decision based on interests, access to good material and arguments. However, the practices suggested above need to be critically examined in relation to empirical findings.

Tornberg (2001: 186ff) discusses two possible approaches concerning how to bring about intercultural awareness. The first is to exchange experiences between different cultural positions formed by the background and experiences of different individuals. Using these differing positions, it is possible to reflect on similarities and differences and, she suggests, perhaps reach an insight that cultures are different rather than a genuine understanding of different cultures. However, Tornberg stresses the importance of this being an encounter between *people*, that the comparison is brought down to a personal level, because of the risk of falling back on the assumption that it is possible to make comparison between nationally homogeneous cultural patterns (Tornberg, 2000: 62, see also 2001: 182). She offers criticism of Robert Lado's structuralist approach (e.g. 1957) in which it is maintained that typical cultural traits of specific language groups can be used to contrast and compare different cultures with the purpose of avoiding cultural clashes through the treatment of such differences within language education. Tornberg does not question the existence of cultural clashes, the criticism is rather directed towards the assumption that a certain culture can be described in the form of a given set of structural phenomena or according to typical cultural traits. She puts forward as a thought whether the terms 'intercultural understanding' or even 'intercultural competence' that are in such frequent use today and the ambition to teach students to compare cultures are somehow connected to Lado's suppositions.

The second approach to interculturality, according to Tornberg, is to regard people not as culturally positioned but as individuals taking part in a process of change and border-crossing. This is the notion of the FL classroom as a place for *an encounter in an open landscape* (see also Section 3.2). This is in line with her problematization of the terms 'multiculturalism' and 'interculturality' against the background of the complex process view of culture that has become almost generally accepted today.[88] Thus, Tornberg sees intercultural awareness as developing on an intersubjective and personal level between human beings communicating and creating relations in the here and now of the language

---

[88] Concerning *multiculturalism*, Tornberg (2004: 128), referring e.g. to the sociological writings of Zygmunt Bauman, argues that it would also be possible to question the term even in its broader conception including complexity on levels other than the national and the ethnic, since the term might 'indicate that there was once a "normal" state of cultural homogeneity in society from which multiculturalism, no matter how we understand it, may be seen as a kind of deviation'.

classroom, each time as a unique experience. Here she refers to Kramsch on the emergence of culture in the language classroom as learners are using the foreign language as speakers in their own right.

Since, according to Tornberg's argumentation, inter*cultural* awareness can only develop on a personal level, awareness of circumstances in different countries is instead termed inter*national* awareness. She suggests this could be included e.g. by students analyzing the specific circumstances in the countries where the target language is spoken, and relating this analysis to their knowledge about other countries as well as their own. This is actually what Tornberg defines as 'an awareness of and a respect for difference and diversity'. Here Tornberg points to the importance of developing an international awareness (or an international orientation) within language education for a future co-existence over national borders. Unfortunately, she does not discuss how actual respect for difference will emerge from work with analyzing circumstances within different countries. She does admit, however, that, whereas this awareness would be possible to include as an aim in curricular texts, the intersubjective, unique intercultural relation involved in the process of cultural creation in the classroom is more difficult, if not impossible, to pin down in advance.

Furthermore, since cultural identities are primarily individual and encounters between individuals are always unique and unpredictable experiences, Tornberg argues that in this sense, interculturality is a *relation*, a creation of meaning, not a *competence* that can be described or assessed.

Although I can agree with Tornberg's arguments regarding the first approach to intercultural awareness described above and would like to see the possibilities for the second, it is difficult to make these two approaches emerge with my view of how awareness of diversity and difference within and between cultural groups on different levels, as well as respect for such difference, also on an international level, can develop in the FL classroom. Concerning the first approach, if we want to make use of cultural positions formed by the background and experiences of different individuals to point to cultural differences, I would like to point to the risk that the individuals in these encounters can easily turn into representatives of a whole cultural group in the eyes of many students (cf. Bennett, 1998, on the danger of generalizing from too small a "sample"). I suggest that this approach would also benefit from the development of the ability to decenter and also from discussions of tendencies including the problematizing of static product views of culture. Thus I prefer starting out by problematizing views of cultural groups as homogeneous, making comparisons between nationally *heterogeneous* cultures, although agreeing that personal encounters are more engaging, and I would therefore like to see them as an important complement. Regarding the second approach, to regard people not as culturally positioned but as individuals partaking in a process of change and border-crossing in the FL classroom as a place for *an encounter in an open landscape*, I would like to argue that there remains a gap between what Tornberg describes as inter*cultural* and inter*national* awareness respectively, since we both agree that FL education still has to aim at developing awareness of and respect for difference and diversity on an international level. How can we relate experiences on an individual level to what we need to address concerning differences between and within groups on an inter*national* level in the FL classroom? I still

see a need to bring in reflection on tendencies in a similar way to what I have tried to do within the framework of this study, unless we limit the international discussion to a neutral exploration of geographical and statistical facts (cf. Byram, 1997, also discussed below, on how 'method' and 'content' could be combined). It is obvious that different contexts can benefit from differing approaches. One could argue that many classrooms in our context still are not diverse enough to enable reasonable use of the existing individual differences (cf. Section 4.1). And even if they were, I would still stress the benefits from being able to question what I myself take for granted in order to be able to develop respect for difference, as well as reflective work on how to apply the insights[89] reached also to other contexts.

As for the discourse of differentiation between inter*cultural* and inter*national* awareness, it seems logical to differ between, on the one hand, education about specific conditions in different countries with the aim of enhancing awareness and respect for difference and diversity across national borders, and, on the other, encountering different perspectives and relating to otherness on a personal level here and now. Using Tornberg's terminology, what I have termed work with intercultural awareness in this study would rather be international awareness. However, my goal is for students to develop respect for difference in general, also concerning social groupings and cultures based on e.g. age and gender, and difference on an individual level both inside and outside the classroom, although most of the content and the tools have been based on what we could call international circumstances. Obviously, the eventual goal of what Tornberg calls international awareness must also be for individuals across national and cultural borders and not present in the classroom context to be able to engage on a personal level. Thus, following most other researchers within the field of FL education, the terms *intercultural* as well as *general cultural* awareness or competence have been used for the educational aim of much of my classroom work, although many of the tools and much of the contents used were within the framework of developing awareness concerning different national contexts.

As for the use of 'relation' instead of 'competence' to describe encounters between individuals, I still consider it a competence to be able to establish and maintain relations in situations where meaning is created, although I can see the encounter itself as a relation.

Possibly I could also be accused of using the cultural perspectives of *a fact fulfilled* and *a future competence* (to use Tornberg's terminology, see Section 3.2), meaning nationally defined, homogeneous cultures as objects of study and skills to be developed for future use in the target-language country according to mainstream practices. In this, my use of tendencies as tools might be seen by some as a further example of what Kramsch has criticized as the construction within language education of mainstream cultures, where differences are leveled

---

[89] The term *insight* is used here to refer to the development of a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects beyond the learning of factual information, in particular related to awareness of difference and diversity within and between groups, as well as respect for such difference through the ability to decenter from the taken-for-granted and what we regard as "normal".

out and similarities stressed (cf. Kubota, 2004), although my intention is rather the opposite. Kramsch (1993: 223-257) suggests that structuralist notions of finding universal bridges in the form of similarities between mainstream national cultures and efficient ways of teaching values and behavior patterns were more or less abandoned in the post-structuralist era of the 1980s and 1990s. Instead, more differentiated notions of national culture, as well as advances in pragmatics and sociolinguistics that have shown how culture can be realized differently in different contexts, e.g. to inform, persuade, imply and even misinform, suggests that 'a dialogic approach can better link language and culture in an exploration of the boundaries created by language itself in the cultural construction of reality.'[90] According to Kramsch, it is possible to teach the boundary, but not the bridge. She wants incompatible differences to remain incompatible but still maybe available through dialogue.

However, I would like to argue that one of the most important aims of my work is to problematize monolithic views of culture, pointing to diversity whenever and wherever possible within the borders of whatever cultural groupings I use as examples. I have made use of tendencies as tools to have something to start from when students learn about circumstances in different countries[91] and hopefully learn to respect possible differences with the ability to decenter from their taken-for-granted perspectives as their basis. Sometimes the starting point is a more general tendency that I choose to focus on, and consequently alternative perspectives have to be presented to diversify the image, also those that would be leveled out in a truly mainstream account of circumstances. Other times the starting point can e.g. be stereotypical or other unrealistic comments expressed by students. In each case it can draw back on what Kohonen (2001b: 31) states concerning experiential learning: 'Learning needs to be related to the learner's prior experiences which are activated for conscious access'. It always has to be stressed that no specific issue applies to all individuals within a certain group, that different issues can have different distributions, depending on social, ethnic, age-related or regional perspectives, and often cut across such boundaries. But we have to be able to say that some differences exist between groups at different levels of complexity and make use of them as examples, e.g. everyday practices, traditions and values. Otherwise we are left with presenting aspects such as Culture with a big C, which means that representatives of different cultural groups on an international level will seem abstract and distant to our students. Another alternative is to be left with a veritable mosaic of allegiances and self-ascriptions that for many individuals are closer to the truth but less likely to provide the intended insights. And here we might find that such a difference is,

---

[90] In cases where a tendency can also be equated with the use of the term 'mainstream' in the (political) negative sense of a socially dominant middle-class culture imposing itself on the diversity of cultural phenomena within a society (Byram, 1997; see also Kubota, 2004), critical considerations and discussions are often both necessary and beneficial for raising students' awareness of power relations within societies, and at the same time serves as yet another reminder of the existing diversity.

[91] Cf. Tornberg (2000: 292) on the importance of background knowledge of a country for one's own orientation, e.g. before visiting the country, provided this knowledge is not presented as objective facts but as multi-dimensional and constantly changing manifestations.

in fact, represented by a majority or great part of a specific group (although by no means the only defining characteristic for each group or individual). It is a fact that cultural aspects such as everyday practices are prone to change rather quickly and also require that students understand the dangers of generalizing such aspects to whole groups or populations. Consequently there is need for continuous reflection and discussion concerning what constitutes a culture in all its complexity, a questioning of homogenizing principles on all levels.

Concerning future competences, I still see a need for such aims on an international level since students can only interact in the present with people they encounter in the present, and this might not be on an international level on a day-to-day basis in all contexts. Hopefully, we can create an educational environment that supports students in their use and development of cultural and linguistic competences both within their language education and outside it.

As can be seen, a veritable jungle of terminology has already developed around the concept of 'culture' and connected terms.[92] Despite a relevant and interesting discussion lead by Tornberg and others, one of the remaining problems is that none of these terms is self-evident and thus still have to be defined clearly by all users because of the different meanings that already have emerged. More importantly, when dealing with such issues within an educational context one also has to take into consideration the reality of different people's conceptions of the world around them: As long as many people see multiculturalism mainly in ethnical or national terms, this can be used as the starting point of the educational process, although the aim would be to develop a less categorical view of culture more focused on change and individual affiliations. Thus, this does not entail teaching "The French are X"!

We should also not take it more or less for granted that teachers who use more 'traditional' concepts such as 'national cultures' always adhere to a homogeneous and static product view: As cultures change and become more complex, so does our view of the concept of culture. It is the teacher's job to problematize any simplified and static product view of culture. And whatever our view of (a) culture, people need the readiness to engage with each other, whether between individuals or groups of individuals with different cultural belongings in today's complex societies. The question is how we can include issues such as awareness of diversity and difference within and between cultural groups on different levels, plus respect for such difference, without falling back on the mediation of images of foreign cultures as homogenous on the grounds of nationality, ethnicity or religion, present such differences as the most important between people and see them as fixed cultural positions.

Should, then, teachers of English exclusively focus their teaching of the cultural dimension on target societies where English is the first language of a majority of the population? Not necessarily, since the aim is that students develop awareness of the existence and respect for difference *in general* and not only concerning representatives of certain English-speaking communities (see also e.g. Sections

---

[92] Cf. Lahdenperä (2004: 12-13), which also includes examples of general differences in terminological use between different countries and agencies; see also the discussion in relation to Jæger (2001) in Section 3.3.

3.2 and 3.3). Still, despite recent discussions of the dominant role of British English and UK society in many other contexts on a global level, the decision was made to focus a large amount of the teaching and surrounding discussion within this project on certain aspects of the UK, on the grounds of the previously mentioned results in Forsman (2004a) that showed stereotypical views partly based on a lack of knowledge of British society. The insights reached through such work were then used to further enhance students' intercultural competence. This can be compared to the suggestions in Byram (1997: 18-22) that the need for using methods that prepare learners for encounters with cultural practices, which have not been presented to them or cannot even be anticipated, can still be achieved by combining contents such as a national culture (in preparation for inter*national* interactions) with focus on critical and comparative methods. The (dominant) national culture will be presented as only one of the sets of possible cultural practices and beliefs (and one that is not static) to which an interlocutor subscribes or at least is aware of, thus providing a basis for interaction, and also a means for transfer to other situations (cf. Section 3.3). According to Byram (1997: 114),

> the crucial element of the knowledge/*savoirs* dimension is that it should include a comparative method and be related to the development of critical cultural awareness/ *savoir s'engager*. Thereafter the decision about what should be the focus, whether an English-speaking country or not, is less significant.

Thus, although general awareness and respect is the aim, we do not want to leave out the specific: After all, students need as much knowledge as possible about the cultural groups of those whose language they are learning to be able to interact as successfully as possible. The problem is our limited amount of time, combined with an ever-expanding cultural content to choose from. Thus, wise choices have to be made, and culture-specific content used to develop general cultural awareness, e.g. by showing how to apply the insights and awareness gained on how stereotypes do not work when you get to know a specific group also in other, unknown, contexts. Here I would also like to point to a concept by Wolfgang Klafki (in Doyé, 1999: 59-60) called *das Prinzip des Exemplarischen*, meaning that 'concrete subject matter is taught in such a way as to convey insights into the structure, dimension, context of a whole discipline.' In Doyé, this is applied to primary level FL education so that 'whenever a suitable opportunity presents itself the teacher includes cultural items from other societies and languages.' As concrete examples several ways of comparing and contrasting cultural elements are presented, e.g. a project about Christmas time around the world and a semantic comparison of how the day is divided differently into periods for the purpose of greeting in ten different languages.

It is important to keep up an ongoing discussion in the classroom about the application of specific knowledge to more general awareness, about what conclusions can be drawn from examples or facts used, e.g. that cultures associate different notions with the same concept or that there are actually differences in the way we organize our day in the first place.[93] Such practice is

---

[93] This is something I find not being stressed or problematized in this specific chapter in Doyé (1999). Instead, the aim presents itself as being more knowledge based, adding to

part of the theory-building following and complementing elements of experience and reflection according to Kolb's Model of Experiential Learning (see Section 4.1).

As professional teachers we are used to analyzing and adapting existing materials, and applying them to our own context by adding elements we find missing during the development of intercultural competence. I will exemplify this with a discussion of Heusinkveld's (1997) article on understanding cultural stereotypes, which provides some theoretical discussion as well as useful practical ideas for teaching. The activities described encourage students to look at both their own and the target culture in question, showing them how different phenomena and perceptions can actually be valued differently from what they take for granted, e.g. that there can be both positive and negative sides to eating at home and at fast-food restaurants respectively. When students realize that we tend to attach only positive values to our own ways and negative ones to those of others, they can better understand how prejudiced views are very easily formed.

However, as I see it, there can be some problematic issues attached to such activities. For example, to be able to consider different sides to specific cultural phenomena, and how different values can be attached to them, students would probably benefit from being able to distance themselves from their own taken-for-granted perceptions in order to realize the randomness of their own ways and values. More importantly, we have an example of the previously discussed dilemma of needing tools, e.g. in the form of tendencies to describe ways and values when dealing with cultural issues: tools that, if we are not careful, might contradict some of the message of a more nuanced and complex view of cultural groups that we also want to emphasize. Heusinkveld's (1997) activities contain many important steps and skills, and yet her activities could, in my opinion, even be said to strengthen or encourage acceptance of certain stereotyped views. This is because they are primarily aimed at teaching students to accept different sides to the specific phenomena that are taken up for discussion, whereas the fact that not all people within these cultural groups would have the same values and attitudes towards these phenomena is not emphasized enough. The message that 'we do this and they do that, both ways have benefits and drawbacks and are of equal worth', is an excellent message of respect on the whole, but one that does not put enough emphasis on diversity.[94] To modify stereotypes other steps probably also need to be included.

I choose to end this section with Byram's (1997) point that an intercultural speaker needs to understand that we are all products of our own socialization, which creates a multiplicity of different perceptions and different modes of interaction. Because of this multiplicity, the provision of knowledge can only be introductory and focused on certain major aspects: It is more important and necessary because of time-limits and other practical reasons that learners acquire

---

students' knowledge more examples of how people around the world celebrate Christmas.

[94] According to the definitions in Section 3.2 of the study, Heusinkveld's activities are rather aimed at understanding prejudices and at changing negative prejudices into more positive ones than at understanding stereotypes.

skills which allow them to independently notice new information, observe practices, and relate these to their own. Also, following Kramsch (1993: 26), in cultural situations where there is conflict between the behavior in the student's own culture and that of the target culture, 'rather than tell their students how they should behave in such paradoxical situations, a teacher's responsibility is to give learners a "space" to make their own meanings and help them interpret those meanings.' While stressing the importance of context in language education, Kramsch (p. 85) points out that learning to use a foreign language does not necessitate conforming to the cultural norms of its native speakers, 'but teaching context does mean making the students aware of cultural differences in discourse styles', e.g. with the use of explicit metatalk. Thus, she stresses that pragmatic knowledge is not an 'if>then' affair, but action 'as food for reflection'. These important issues are all related to learner autonomy, which will be the focus of the next section.

4.4 On learner autonomy

Among the important aspects often stated in educational goal discussions is the development of an ability to learn independently, to actively seek new knowledge and skills in a time when school is not enough to prepare students for the challenges of a complex, changing society. This idea is not new: As was discussed in Section 4.1, John Dewey was a predecessor also in this sense in that as early as in the 1930s he recognized the challenges involved in coping with change and lifelong learning, and developed new approaches through experiential learning to meet these challenges (see e.g. Kolb, 1984). Among the more prominent later contributors to the field are Henri Holec, Leni Dam and David Little. Little (1991: 4) describes autonomy as:

> a *capacity* - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts.

Obviously, learner autonomy within FL education concerns both the linguistic and the cultural dimension. Regarding both these dimensions, learners would benefit from critical media awareness and from knowing how to benefit most from media input (see Forsman, 2004a, on the Finland-Swedish context). This includes e.g. trying to ensure that the learning of English is not only equated with English lessons in the classroom, but is regarded as a process that goes on simultaneously and permanently in several contexts.

Learner autonomy can develop through awareness raising and skills practice, both concerning different aspects of language and culture.[95] To begin the

---

[95] See Kohonen (2001b: 36ff) for a useful discussion of the essential role of different aspects of personal awareness, process awareness, as well as task awareness for the promotion of greater learner autonomy based on an experiential learning approach.

development of learner autonomy we can provide students with scaffolding[96], i.e., help in their *zone of proximal development* (Vygotsky, 1978), or level of potential development, e.g. in the form of systematic guidance concerning reflection on what they learn and on their own learning processes (cf. discussion of the CEF and the ELP in Section 3.4). To give just a short practical example from the cultural field, instead of providing statements and information to be checked up on afterwards, teachers can transform their teaching into activities, including guided observations and reflections e.g. on what people say and do in different situations. Then, to further support and, following Dysthe (2000: 64-65), consolidate the learning, what has been learnt, as well as the usefulness of such learning, could be explored through a dialogic approach in written or spoken form.[97]

The ability to tolerate ambiguity and encounter difference and diversity are often listed among the useful, even necessary skills for today's and tomorrow's citizens of the world. Real life does not always consist of aspects that are simple and clear-cut in terms of right and wrong, one-sided black or white, and this is even more so today with the increasing complexity in relations and contacts on a global basis. We need to be able to observe and interpret cultural behavior, and relate to increasing amounts of information from the internet and other media sources, all with conflicting and even contradictory messages. This often needs to include elements of critical awareness, e.g. critical cultural awareness, or *savoir s'engager,* from Byram's model of IC. Thus, learner autonomy requires students to find information and learn from these sources, where both language and content can be very complex. Naturally, this can be experienced as frustrating by students who are used to doing exercises and solving problems in textbooks adapted to their linguistic and cognitive level and with keys (and the teacher as an expert) available to provide the correct answers.[98]

Here students can benefit from systematic guidance concerning reflective thinking, including work on self-assessment and how to set personal goals. Byram (1997) provides a thorough discussion of the cultural dimension within FL education in relation to different locations of learning, independent learning being one of them (see Byram's comprehensive model of ICC in Section 3.2,

---

[96] The notion of *scaffolding* was used by Bruner, see e.g. Dysthe (1996). See Dysthe and also van Lier (2004) on how scaffolding entails more than general support of the kind usually provided by teachers.

[97] See also Kohonen (2001b: 44) on the need to consider different task properties to be able to promote FL education, including intercultural and independent learning. This includes, for example, to what extent the contents manage to engage the emotions and imagination of learners, and whether learners have opportunities to reflect on and evaluate their progress and processes.

[98] Here an interesting parenthesis (and possibly an overgeneralization) is the experience of many colleagues, as well as myself, that when routines and assignments are changed in FL classes to practice such learner autonomy skills, so-called "good girls" are often among the students who seem to suffer the most frustration, whereas many boys with lower grades in language subjects seem to be more apt at handling the ambiguity entailed in such complex assignments, including possible failures (cf. Kohonen, 2001b: 38-39, on the importance of learners' self-esteem and tolerance of ambiguity for successful language learning).

including three locations of learning: the classroom, fieldwork, and independent learning). Byram (1997: 69) states the following, which connects back to the discussions of experiential learning:

> For experience to become learning, learners must become autonomous in their capacity for refining and increasing their knowledge, skills and attitudes. This in turn suggests a classroom methodology which allows learners to acquire explicitly the underlying principles of the skills and knowledge they are taught, and the means of generalising them to new experience.

This is also what I have set out to accomplish concerning the development of a general cultural awareness, including awareness of difference and diversity on many different levels of society and a respect for such difference through the specific examples used and reflected on in the classroom. Within the framework of the study I explored the possibilities of focused and systematic work inspired by portfolio methods to bring enhanced cultural and linguistic awareness into language education (see below). Taube (1997: 10) has suggested the following definition of portfolio (see also Kohonen, 2001b: 51), with Paulson, Paulson and Meyer's (1991) definition as her basis (partly my translation from Swedish):

> A portfolio consists of purposeful collections of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit in relation to certain common goals, and evidence of the student's self-reflections and attitudes towards the subject.

Thus, it is important to note that the portfolio method is not correctly used if it consists of collecting students' work in a portfolio without changing working methods towards more student participation and involvement in their own learning process. Taube (1997) points out that one of the big problems of today's educational systems is to make students see the connection between what they learn at school and knowledge that they will need outside school. School often fails to make use of students' everyday experiences. Without an appreciation of the value of the knowledge that is mediated through school and a personal interest in what is studied, the efficiency of students' learning can never reach its maximum. By giving room for students' out-of-school experiences when they plan their work, we offer them the opportunity to discover that school knowledge can be used in connection with purposes and interests that relate to their lives outside school: This can help students work towards goals that they find meaningful.

Within portfolio work, issues such as reflection, the development of learning styles and strategies, the setting of individual goals and self-assessment are practiced from the beginning.[99] By using such tools, language teachers can help students become more aware of learning goals, processes and outcomes. This means that learning becomes more visible and thus can be more accessible for negotiation, guidance and feedback. The learners become more skilled at

---

[99] As was previously discussed, Byram (2000) discusses the possibility of letting aspects related to cultural attitudes be part of the issues that students include in their self-assessment.

monitoring and assessing their language skills and learning processes, i.e., they learn how to learn, as well as to establish and maintain mutually beneficial social relationships both in the learning groups and in the community. This also entails that the teacher is able to provide individual guidance to different students. (See also Kohonen, 2001b; Lammi, 2004, for useful discussions.)

It should be noted that for the purpose of this study the underlying principles of the portfolio method within a framework of experiential learning were adapted for use in the language classroom without actually implementing the portfolio method in its entirety. Whereas Kohonen (2001b: 53) discusses the new possibilities provided by authentic assessment for language evaluation, he also notes that portfolio work is labor-intensive for teachers (and students, my addition). Thus, I wanted to explore whether activities inspired by portfolio thinking without all its implementations would still be beneficial. This would be helpful for teachers interested in including a more holistic view of language education, but who are put off by the expected work-load. All portfolio-related activities used during the three project years will not be accounted for since the purpose of the study is to discuss only specific aspects of the cultural dimension within EFL education. However, as I see the principles underlying portfolio work as important, if not indispensable, for a successful implementation of activities and contents aimed at developing intercultural competence, the above discussion deserves its place.

5 Methodological considerations

5.1 Initial reflections on educational research methodology

Kohonen (2001b: 11-15) outlines three major educational paradigms: the positivistic, constructivistic-interpretive and critical-emancipatory paradigms (see Table 3). He suggests that in classroom-based research there has been a shift of emphasis away from positivistically orientated quantitative research towards the two latter paradigms, involving qualitative research strategies, data collection and interpretation. The paradigms also need to relate to the role of the teacher as an educator and be linked to classroom practices.

Table 3. A comparison of three educational paradigms (Kohonen, 2001b: 15)

Paradigm	Ontology	Epistemology	Methodology
(1) Positivistic paradigm	Realism; reality summarised as time- and context-free generalisations	Dualist and objectivist; the investigator and the 'object' as independent entities	Experimental, verification of hypotheses; mainly quantitative methods
(2) Constructivist-interpretive paradigm	Relativism; local and specific constructed realities	Transactional and subjectivist; created findings	Hermeneutical and dialectical interaction
(3) Critical-emancipatory paradigm	Historical realism; individual structures historically situated	Transactional, subjectivist; value-mediated findings	Dialogic and dialectical interaction

This study has its bearings both in the constructivistic-interpretive tradition and the critical-emancipatory paradigm, the latter particularly concerning the researcher's commitment to particular values. However, ontologically my

position is closer to the constructivistic-interpretive tradition in that reality constructions are seen as not true in any absolute sense, only more or less informed and thus alterable (cf. Section 1.2). The basic role of the teacher is considered to be that of the reflective practitioner (see below), but I also adhere to the notion within the critical-emancipatory paradigm that classroom-oriented research helps teachers to interpret, understand and eventually transform the social life in schools (see Section 5.2, on emancipatory, or critical, action research aimed at changing education and schooling in a broader sense). To Byram (2004: 26-33), the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is a second-order distinction: Instead he makes a distinction between *research* and *scholarship*, 'the former seeking for explanation or understanding of what is, the latter attempting to establish what ought to be, and sometimes attempting to implement and evaluate what ought to be' (p. 27). He states that since this distinction may be blurred in practice, scholars and researchers are sometimes not clear about their role and their work. I see the importance for the researcher of clearly and openly stating the purpose of the work in the communication of findings, particularly when the work is normative in nature. Using Byram's descriptors my work will be classified as scholarship.

Concerning educational research, McDonough and McDonough (1997: 22) state that 'an obvious starting point for exploring the interface between action and reflection is teachers' professional knowledge about the central aspects of their jobs'. They point out (pp. 23ff) that the much-cited polarizations of 'teaching' and 'researching', of 'theory' and 'practice', do have their proponents as well as real-life examples, although a more fruitful approach is to look at teachers as being in an expert position when it comes to educational research, a combination of roles where the whole can be seen as 'more than the sum of its two constituent parts'. They point out that it is in teachers' knowledge base of everyday action that Schön in the 1980s developed his seminal theory of the *reflective practitioner* (Schön, 1983), in which he shows that reflection can be conceptualized to provide firm and appropriate research principles in tune with teachers' reality.[100] As arguments for teacher-initiated research they list eight advantages (p. 25, from Beasley & Riordan in Nunan, 1989: 17-18) that will also be cited here in their entirety because of my own support of this viewpoint:

- [Teacher-initiated research] begins with and builds on the knowledge that

   teachers have already accumulated.

- It focuses on the immediate concerns of classroom teachers.

- It matches the subtle organic process of classroom life.

- It builds on the 'natural' processes of evaluation and research which

   teachers carry out daily.

- It bridges the gap between understanding and action by merging the role of researcher and practitioner.

---

[100] However, McDonough & McDonough (1997) also point to the emergence of a not so fruitful new dichotomy in the form of teacher and action research opposed to researcher research and technical rationality.

- It sharpens teachers' critical awareness through observation, recording and analysis of classroom events.
- It helps teachers better articulate teaching and learning processes to their colleagues and interested community members.
- It bridges the gap between theory and practice.

This is not to say that I agree on all of these arguments having the same importance, or that I do not consider that new and unexpected perspectives and insights provided through input from researchers not involved in immediate classroom work also can be very fruitful (cf. Kyburz-Graber & al., 2006). Furthermore, there are also inherent methodological risks with conducting research in such closeness with one's own field of interest and within one's own working context. Such issues will be further addressed particularly in Section 5.4.

5.2 Action research

Within educational research today, action research seems to have started to emerge as one of the preferred research methods, or rather strategies,[101] although van Lier, as late as (1988/1994), stated that action research had not so far received much serious attention as a distinct style of research in language teaching despite its prominence in the social sciences. The term itself is usually attributed to the German social psychologist Kurt Lewin through his work in the US in the 1940s, using a form of experiential learning that stressed the integration of theory and practice in training and organization development (Kolb, 1984). Kolb, in his discussion of this and other models of the experiential learning process, notes its emphasis on *here-and-now* concrete experience to validate and test abstract concepts (pp. 21-22):

> Immediate personal experience is the focal point for learning, giving life, texture, and subjective personal meaning to abstract concepts and at the same time providing a concrete, publicly shared reference point for testing the implications and validity of ideas created during the learning process.

Rönnerman (2004: 27) notes that in the UK the action research tradition has primarily been connected to curriculum reform and the professional development of teachers. It can be traced back to the 1970s and was coined *Teachers as Researchers* by Lawrence Stenhouse and John Elliott (see also e.g. Elliott, 1991: 3ff, 51ff). In the US the tradition has its roots more in progressive movements and the thoughts of John Dewey on the connection between schools and society. It is called *practitioner research* and has been aimed at school development to a greater extent than in the UK.

---

[101] See e.g. Kemmis (1994) for an overview of international perspectives; see also McDonough & McDonough (1997); Kyburz-Graber & al. (2006).

Among the most quoted definitions of action research, even over-quoted according to McDonough and McDonough (1997), is the following in Kemmis (1988: 42; see also e.g. Kemmis, 1994):

> . . . a form of self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social (including educational) situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, their understanding of these practices, and the situations in which the practices are carried out.

According to Kemmis (1988: 46), action research is 'not distinguished by the use of a particular set of research techniques'. Examples of often used techniques are focused diaries about specific aspects of one's practice, the making of audio records of verbal interactions in classrooms, and group interviews after particular lessons. Similarly, techniques used for analyzing these data such as e.g. content analysis are not unique for action research but commonly used by e.g. ethnographers, case study researchers, historians and other interpretive researchers. Kemmis further states that 'what distinguishes action research is its method'. In terms of method, a self-reflective spiral of cycles of (reconnaissance), planning, acting, observing, and reflecting is central to this approach (Kemmis, 1988; see also 1994). The observation or fact-finding phase of the cycle is carried out to evaluate the action taken and to have a basis for further planning and action. These cycles of events are repeated until no new progress can be noted or useful changes have been effected. In McDonough and McDonough (1997), these events are presented as follows:

Initial idea > fact-finding > action plan > implementation

> monitoring > revision > amended plan > . . .

However, Kemmis (1994) points out that these steps are too mechanical and procedural to be more than a starting point and thus are best regarded as tips for beginners. Similarly, although presenting 'pure' action research as participant-driven and reflective, collaborative, leading to change and the improvement of practice, not just knowledge in itself, as well as context-specific, McDonough and McDonough (1997: 27) also state that these characteristics do not always obtain so strictly, leading to the many convergent characteristics of action research and teacher research (cf. Kyburz-Graber & al., 2006: 229). According to van Lier (1988/1994: 67) many classroom experiments[102], including many program evaluation studies, might actually more adequately be called action research, or at least they contain elements thereof.

Kemmis (1994) addresses a contestation over the idea of action research and how its aspirations are to be interpreted between two main schools: One view is a more technical and practical (as well as individualistic) one, based on ideas about 'the reflective practitioner' as a means of improving professional practice at the local, classroom, level; the other (more collaborative) based on the idea of

---

[102] Here, van Lier (1988/1994) points out that such experiments in classroom settings are not "true" experiments in the scientific sense of the word, since they do not include random samples of learners divided into control and experimental groups or complete control over extraneous variables.

emancipatory, or critical, action research aimed at changing education and schooling in a broader sense. He also states, however, that the meaning and significance cannot be fixed by any person or group, especially considering the wide diversity of motivations, forms and contents of action research existing around the world (cf. Kyburz-Graber & al., 2006). For example, considering collaborative or individual undertakings, Kemmis (1988) maintains that action research is most rationally empowering when undertaken by participants collaboratively[103], but that it is also often conducted by individuals.

Kemmis (1994) describes action research as involving people in making critical analyses aimed at recovering how situations have been socially and historically constructed, using this as a source of insight into ways in which we might be able to construct them. Similarly, Posch (1996) correlates action research to changes in the culture of teaching and learning, which he sees as necessary answers to such global changes in industrialized societies as divergent demands and complex practical situations. As a practicing teacher and researcher interested in developing empirically-based pedagogical practices to meet the demands of a changing society, I see it as only natural that my work has been largely inspired and informed by action research.[104]

This project was not a collaborative one: The project came about as a result of my own experience and research, not as a joint project aimed at change and improvement among e.g. colleagues within a common context. Furthermore, the students were not involved in the discussion of the relative merits of different educational measures and possible alternatives to reach the intended insights until towards the end of the project. This was because of my purpose to explore a natural teaching situation with the aim of promoting knowledge and insights that most of the students probably did not have and some might not even see the need of to begin with. When it comes to the recurring cycles of events of an action research project, what is under development often consists of issues that can be in focus and observed and then tried out again after evaluation even in the course of the same set of lessons. Here, the issue concerned more long-term development of both knowledge and attitudes during the final phase of the students' comprehensive education, a phase which constitutes a comprehensive whole with its own aims in the curriculum that are reached by putting together many different pieces without necessarily knowing which separate parts are crucial and which are indispensable. From this it also follows that the next cycle to be explored with the help of the experience and knowledge gained from this project will have to be implemented in other groups.

Regarding the aim of action research, Elliott (1991: 49) states that it is 'to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge. The production and utilization of knowledge is subordinate to, and conditioned by, this fundamental aim'. This is a logical consequence of what he describes as a characteristic feature of this type of curriculum-reform process: 'It is a process which is initiated by practising teachers in response to a particular practical situation they

---

[103] Unless the process is truly collaborative, the emergence of unequal power relations between insiders and outsiders may jeopardize the process (cf. Elliott, 1991:19ff).
[104] Cf. Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi (2006) on the challenges for developing further research-based teacher education in Finland.

confront' (p. 9). Elliott is critical of the way academic culture has tended to appropriate the ideas originating from practice and distort the process. He also suggests that action research is often used in the service of technical rationality, the very paradigm that action research was originally developed to counteract (p. 52). As a consequence, he maintains, educational research is all too often viewed as something teachers do *on* their practice, i.e. by stepping out of their pedagogical role, instead of regarding reflection and action as two aspects of the same process. To Elliott, such 'separation of "research" from "teaching" implies a separation between teaching and curriculum development. The idea of developing the curriculum through teaching presupposes a unified concept of teaching as a reflective practice' (p. 14).

My own interest to improve practice stems from my own struggles in the classroom, particularly when faced with the task of providing students with a more qualitative and systematic intercultural education. However, I also see it as important to contribute with knowledge that can be used by others,[105] particularly as one ethical issue to seriously consider is that it is not simply my own purposes being served in an undertaking with so many others directly and indirectly affected, be it collaborative or not (see Watt, 1995; also Kvale, 1997). Ultimately, my work is also a contribution to the discussion of the aims and contents of FL education through the creation of new knowledge in the field. Thus, there is also an opening for the possibility of letting my work contribute to the change of education in a broader sense, on the grounds of my view of modernistic traditions within FL education being inadequate to deal with all the needs and challenges of today and tomorrow (see discussions in Chapter 2).

5.2.1 Further reflections on educational action research

Educational action research is thus concerned with change and improvement through reflection and action in specific contexts, with empirical data as its basis. Elliott (1991: 50) concludes that 'both product and process need to be jointly considered when attempting to improve practice' and that 'this kind of joint reflection about the relationship in particular circumstances between processes and products is a central characteristic of what Schon [*sic*] has called *reflective practice* and others, including myself, have termed *action research*.' Traditional positivistic research has also been concerned with improving practice, but it has often been suggested that this tends to be through a work process of detachment, independent of practice so as not to risk contamination of data. Brown (1990) points out that in real educational contexts this is hardly ever possible, e.g. to set up a comparison between experimental and control groups, on account of the large number of uncontrollable variables which could influence the outcome.[106] Another difference lies in the claims to generalization:

---

[105] Cf. Brown (1990) on small-scale research in educational contexts with the purpose of extending knowledge; see also Kyburz-Graber & al. (2006: 230) on the opportunity of gaining what they call 'added value'.

[106] In my project such a procedure would also have included an ethical complication: How could I deliberately set out to include more systematic and extended focus on what I consider to be necessary competences for the future to some of my EFL students, but not to others?

The dialogue generated through action research makes no such claims because of its concern with change and improvement in a specific setting, not with generating universally applicable theories.[107] This also means that theory is not favored over practice, nor are generalizations taken for granted without critical reflection. Parker (1997: 40) summarizes this as an 'epistemological and methodological shift from universalization towards particularization', as it does not discard findings that do not fit into previously defined categories but rather gives such findings prominence.

However, the increasing interest in multidisciplinary studies attested to by e.g. van Lier (1988/1994) opens up possibilities for future work where complementary findings are produced. van Lier suggests combinations of action research and classroom ethnography either as successive stages or, more interestingly, as parallel or integrated research activities. This could be taken further towards a reconciliation of different research traditions through more explorations into the possibility of integrating at least some types of experimental work into ethnographic work, although these, as van Lier (p. 67) states, seldom constitute "true" experiments. van Lier further points to the interesting theory-building potential of educational ethnography, noting that it cannot merely be assumed to have the role of exploratory, ground-clearing research (p. 69). Behind these suggestions lies the important notion that researchers cannot unquestioningly assume that positivistic science is necessarily a theoretically more powerful way of doing research in the context of classroom research (cf. Guba & Lincoln, 1988). However, and this is another of my main points, where different approaches can complement and inspire each other towards interesting new research, we must not refrain from crossing disciplinary boundaries (cf. Byram, 2004, on the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research as a second-order distinction, discussed in Section 5.1).

In his book subtitled "a manifesto for education in postmodernity", Parker's (1997) focus is on reflective teaching, entailing autonomy, democracy, emancipation and action research, as the antithesis to positivist approaches to education. Placing them against a positivistic background[108], Parker first explores what he calls 'the stories of reflective teaching, action-research, critical theory and liberal philosophies of education' (1997: 5), before eventually also exploring and questioning the form of reflective education in postmodernity by applying the techniques of deconstruction. Of interest in relation to the above discussion is Parker's argument that both the positivist and the reflective understanding of education are based upon the same realistic foundation, meaning that if realism fails, so will both these positions.[109]

However, to sum up the previous sections of this chapter, I will refer to the discussion in the beginning of Parker's book, where he explores how reflective teachers place reflectiveness at the center of what it means to be a professional educator, with reflection entailing more than thinking about one's practice in

---

[107] However, see also Sections 5.3 and 5.4 on the difficulties of applying universal theories in the complex and specific setting that each classroom constitutes.

[108] See also Schön (1983: 30-49) on positivism as the origin of technical rationality.

[109] Parker still proposes that we should not give up reflective teaching altogether but that it needs another 'story'. This, however, will not be further elaborated on here.

terms of how to most efficiently realize prespecified goals. Here, the moral authority or pedagogical legitimacy of the goals, i.e. the value-aspect of means and ends, become an issue of professional concern, not only pedagogic effectiveness. To me these concerns will still be of the uttermost importance in my work also in a more postmodern context, and thus I will give examples from these discussions.

Parker (1997: 30) points out that reflective practice entails something more than 'any kind of *thinking about one's practice*', which, according to Parker, also has been described as reflective within the predominant position of technical-rationalism (cf. Elliott, 1991: 52). He suggests that technical-rationalism has claimed the term for itself, thus devaluing it from its transformative power and instead making it possible for uncritically assumed and unquestioned positivistic practices to be preserved. To be able to have a more distinct meaning and function other than *thinking about practice*, thus being able to cause innovations in education through analysis and critique, the theoretical foundations of reflective practice 'need to be exhibited and its central principles and their consequences made visible' (p. 30). According to Parker, a rich and diverse literature has developed to provide this necessary distinctive vision, where reflective practice is described as emancipatory, 'concerned to *improve* practice rather than *collect* knowledge and to foster the rationality and autonomy of the teachers and the taught within a setting of democratic and liberal values' (p. 31). Through action research in their own actual context, informed by theories of education, although retaining a critical perspective on these theories, reflective teachers are engaged in improving practice. This practice, and here Parker refers back to John Dewey, is 'subject to a spiralling process of hypothesizing, investigation, reasoning, testing and evaluation, leading to modification and on, in turn, to further investigation.'

Parker (p. 31) points out that this is not a solitary enterprise, although individuals are encouraged to work reflectively to improve their own practice. Rather, these individuals are encouraged to publicly discuss their work in order to achieve the critical perspective that is needed: 'The public setting of such interrogations and the dialogue which surrounds them is essential to the notion of rationality upon which the distinctive character of reflective teaching depends.' In order to understand reflective teaching, Parker (p. 32ff) points out the necessity to know its parent traditions in philosophy, theory, education and politics. Among these traditions he lists the following:

►the reflective practice movement itself with its roots in Dewey and Schön;

►the falsificationism of Popper with its concern for increasing verisimilitude and subjecting truth claims to testing and interrogation, which is a practice central to the reflective practice movement (Dewey and Schön);

►the enlightenment project running through Kantian and Hegelian philosophy to the critical theory of Habermas and the Frankfurt school, also applied in the work of Carr and Kemmis among others, the central concern being emancipation through the development of rational, autonomous persons in a democratic, dialogical society protecting the individual from oppression of technical, bureaucratic means-ends conceptions of social organization;

►the action research movement contributing a sensitivity to the richness and uniqueness of the particular practice-contexts of the classroom as well as an awareness of the inadequacies of positivist generalizing theories for providing guidance in educational planning; action research as the systematization of reflection in teaching.

According to Parker (1997: 32), the parent traditions share at least the following features:

> commitment to the authority of reason; rejection of a means-end conception of rationality and of a technical-rationalist view of human worth; a commitment to personal autonomy and its rational components of honesty and sincerity; emancipatory concerns, liberal and democratic politics, an idea of genuine knowledge as essentially purposeful rather than inert; a transcendental justification.

Parker (1997: e.g. pp. 33-49) discusses concerns with means, ends, and values, differentiating positivistic concerns with efficient curriculum-delivery techniques from the practice to critically examine ends and values for differing contexts within reflective teaching. It is stated that means and ends cannot be separated so that we are only concerned with how to best reach certain previously described ends. However, this does not mean that reflective teachers are not concerned with developing methods that are more (technically) efficient, only criteria governing judgements of efficiency will vary between contexts. Thus, school effectiveness cannot be uncritically measured according to criteria used for measuring other types of effectiveness. This connects to my work also in the sense that successful education of cultural competence, affective aspects in particular, cannot be assessed in the same way as e.g. grammatical skills (see discussion in Sections 3.4 and 3.5.2). Furthermore, from this discussion it becomes clear that reflective teaching is neither value neutral nor independent of context. However, Parker emphasizes that reflective teaching does not entail relativism. This dependency on context points to the difficulty of applying the same ready-made criteria to situations affected by material circumstances such as e.g. the personal and economic resources, socio-cultural setting and job prospects of students, but the authority of *rationality* remains, what is rational to achieve in each context. Here, rationality is not seen simply as a psychological state attained through mental processes in private, but rather as a practice 'which, like the exercise of good manners, is embodied in and developed and refined through interaction with fellow members of a community' (p. 47). This, following Popper, includes the open-mindedness to subject one's own views and position to rigorous public interrogation to increase their validity. Thus, rationality also entails genuine communication, deliberative democracy following e.g. Dewey and Habermas.

5.2.2 The hermeneutical influence

Ödman (1988: 63) defines hermeneutics as 'the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding (*Verstehen*) in different kinds of human contexts (religious as well as secular, scientific as well as those of everyday life).' It is more oriented towards qualitative analysis and more language oriented than positivism. Hermeneutics is often closely linked with other

approaches, and critical theory in particular, although hermeneutics primarily is directed towards understanding. The hermeneutical approach lends itself both to practical educational work as well as to educational research. Ödman stresses the importance of the concept of *pre-understanding* within hermeneutical thinking, i.e. the necessity to have a pre-understanding to be able to understand. The hermeneutical circle is at work when this pre-understanding can be revitalized and changed through a dialectical relationship with new understanding, an interaction between the parts and the whole making possible a continuous deepening of understanding of a particular phenomenon.

This work is largely grounded in the hermeneutic tradition (as opposed to positivistic) of interpreting and aiming at increased understanding of the object of exploration[110] from many different angles, including attempts at beginning to question and discern the taken-for-granted in a new light, in order to infuse new insights both into theory and practice. However, this not only concerns the research approach, which is that of an action researcher critically intervening in practice, with everything a classroom context entails in terms of acceptance of preconceptions and the lack of objectivity endeavored within positivistic traditions (cf. Kemmis, 1988). The methodological approach of the educational project itself also entails such questioning in the sense that students are led to reflect on their own taken-for-granted ways and values as a link in the development of respect for difference, an ability that I will argue is also indispensable for the development of democracy both in the classroom and beyond: People who are not able to relativize their own perspective or see the necessity of not taking prevailing societal conditions for granted will be less competent carriers of a democratic tradition.

5.2.3 The phenomenographic interview

At the end of this research project, the final/evaluative interviews were carried out in the form of semi-structured focused interviews. They are thus part of an explorative study. Here the research approach is to a large extent phenomenographically inspired. The reason for this choice is the phenomenographical interest in variations and possible changes in ways of experiencing the world by pointing to certain critical features in the form of variations in experience that learners need to simultaneously perceive or become aware of in order to learn and understand new aspects of a phenomenon, i.e., an educational point of view (Marton & Booth, 2000). According to Marton (1986: 31), 'phenomenography is a research method for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various aspects of, and phenomena in, the world around them.' The

---

[110] Here: understanding a process of developing intercultural education in the EFL classroom through an interpretive process, where my pre-understanding and assumptions of the situation as a teacher-researcher and actions taken as a result of this understanding continuously interacts with the separate parts, such as my own deepening theoretical understanding and familiarity with the specific context, analysis of different documentations such as a written action log, questionnaires and interviews, resulting in possible restatement of the research problem and/or an amended plan of action rather than confirmation or rejection of any hypothesis.

choice of approach is essentially based on the following (after Marton, 1986; Marton & Booth, 2000): 1.The object of research is a second order perspective, i.e., students' experiences and understanding regarding different educational aspects; 2. There is an empirical foundation in the form of interviews with students; 3. The aim is to describe the existing variation in ways of experiencing a phenomenon: the dimensions of variation; 4. There is also an aim to present this variation through the creation of categories of description in close connection to the unique contents described. Thus, these categories should represent fundamentally different conceptions. It should be noted that the variation in views and experience are emphasized more in my study than the individual variation.

Unlike traditional phenomenography from the 1970s and 1980s, which describe conceptions of different phenomena out of context, I want to argue that it is impossible to discuss learning and learning processes without relating them to the context where the learning takes place. Säljö (2000: 68-69) strongly underlines that human learning and development need to be seen from a socio-cultural perspective. This means that people are not only biological beings but also socio-cultural beings who acquire knowledge, skills, and experiences through interplay and interaction with other people in their environment. Through this interplay and by using the aids, both intellectual and physical, which culture provides, people can reach beyond the borders that their own physiological and mental capacities allow. Consequently, we can never disregard the context of learning, just as we cannot disregard the context where people say, write or do something (cf. Säljö in Section 5.3). In more recent work, e.g. Marton (1992), it is pointed out that within phenomenographical studies it has, in fact, been possible to find out what differing conceptions people have of e.g. learning in certain contexts. Marton and Booth (2000) state that it is not possible to separate people from the world that they are living in, even though people also can be said to live in the kind of world that they experience.

The context of this study is constituted by a Swedish-medium school in a relatively homogeneous rural area of Finland. Here the homogeneity particularly concerns the ethnic, linguistic, religious and socioeconomic situation of the students. Furthermore, students learn English within two different contexts: on the one hand, within the institutionalized context of the school; on the other hand, we have the context of extracurricular activities including different mass media that the students are influenced by. The situation in today's language classrooms cannot be fully understood unless we take into consideration how both these contexts can influence the students' learning, both in the form of knowledge and attitudes, as well as how the teaching in the classrooms is planned and realized. Both these contexts are influenced by each other and their impact on learners can sometimes be in conflict. (See Forsman, 2004a.) These contextual aspects together with my growing familiarity with the students, as well as more individually related aspects such as the insights of students as shown in the initial surveys, have formed the background against which the different stages of the interpretive process and its results had to be reflected.

The interviews were comparable, since they were designed in the form of semi-structured theme interviews. This means that I used an interview protocol with certain focus areas that I wanted to cover in order to evaluate the project in

accordance with my research aims and the theoretical discussion (see the Interview Protocol in Appendix V, and the three Focus areas in Section 6.2). Focus area I could be said to contribute to the evaluation of the project and the understanding of the educational process mainly through my interpretation of students' developing insights in relation to the theoretical discussion. I have also analyzed some of the interview contents thematically for aspects that I discuss without putting them in direct relation to the theoretical considerations or the specific whole constituted by the development of certain individuals or groups of individuals (cf. Larzén, 2005), particularly issues within Focus areas II and III. Thus, the discussion of findings within Focus areas II and III primarily presents the students' own perceptions as they were expressed on a more explicit level (see Section 6.2).

In qualitative studies, the selection of informants is based on different criteria than in quantitative studies. In quantitative studies, a random or representative selection of informants is important, since the results, e.g. the distribution of a certain quality, should be generalizable to a whole population. In qualitative studies, the aim is to contribute with as many different opinions and experiences as possible. Consequently, a sample only representing a so-called normal view is not desirable (see Holter & Kalleberg, 1996: 203-204, on sampling based on criteria like multiplicity and typicality; Kvale, 1997: 210). However, Holter and Kalleberg point out that the selection of informants in qualitative studies cannot be left to pure chance. Instead, the selection must be based on qualitative criteria that imply both theoretical and empirical knowledge and that naturally depend on the aims of the study. According to Holter and Kalleberg this can be called a qualitative non-statistical representativity. This is a form of nonprobability sample (Kerlinger, 1964/1973: 129) that is also used within quantitative research, which means that instead of random sampling one uses the knowledge one has about a certain population to make the selection of informants serve the purpose of the study as well as possible. For example, the purpose might be to investigate how a certain factor affects specific groups of the population. According to Kerlinger this method has its weaknesses, but these are partly compensated for by its purposefulness. However, because of the nature of this study as an action research project and the relatively small number of informants, I decided to interview all the students participating in the project. This was done in order to include as many different opinions and experiences as possible.

5.2.4 Journals or diaries as an element of action research

As was previously stated, Kemmis (1988: 46) suggests that action research is not distinguished by the use of a particular set of research techniques. It still always involves keeping different types of records as well as collecting and analyzing this evidence, although it keeps an open mind about what counts as data or evidence (Kemmis, 1994). However, Kemmis also states that action research involves keeping a personal journal where records of progress in and reflections about two sets of learning are entered: learning about the practices being the focus of the study, as well as learning about the action research process itself. For the current study my own diary writing in what I have chosen to call an *Action Log* has primarily served as a tool for providing a deeper understanding

of both my own and students' learning processes, both during, but particularly after, the classroom teaching period.

According to McDonough and McDonough (1997) the diary has become increasingly significant both as a reflective genre in itself and as one of the many techniques used within what they call micro-ethnographic research, with a number of different formats and varying degrees of advance specification of what to include and how often entries should be made, depending on their purpose and as long as the quality of the data is protected. Bailey (1990: 215) defines a diary *study* as 'a first-person account of a language learning or teaching experience, documented through regular, candid entries in a personal journal and then analysed for recurring patterns or salient events'. A diary study thus entails an analytical process including interpretation and discussion as well as going public and contributing to the growing body of knowledge in a particular field.

The inclusion of the element of diary study can also be a means of providing external validity to the research process through a kind of triangulation (Bailey, 1991; see Section 5.3 for a discussion of different validity aspects). Guba and Lincoln (1988: 85) suggest that a reflexive journal 'can be used to expose epistemological assumptions and to show why the study was defined and carried out in particular ways', although one has to be aware of the ethical issues raised by the possibility of including observations that support the researcher's own claims, either consciously or subconsciously, through not being open to suggestions that counter such claims. According to Guba and Lincoln the trustworthiness of a qualitative study cannot so far be guaranteed, but the practice of adhering to standards opting for e.g. confirmability (see further discussion in Section 5.3) can contribute to persuading the receiver of its meaningfulness. Furthermore, the use of a diary can help provide the kind of rich, 'thick' descriptions of qualitative studies that allow readers to determine whether findings can be transferred to other contexts and situations (Merriam, 1998; see also discussion in Section 5.4), thus also refuting some of the common criticism against case studies or small non-random samples regarding the (im)possibility to generalize research findings.

When analyzing diary-generated text, particularly of the more open-ended narrative type, there are certain features or characteristics of the raw data that have to be considered: the material is rich in quantity and also in quality, since many different themes are addressed; the perspective is evidently subjective; diaries are written in retrospect, meaning that there is likely to be some decay in accuracy (McDonough & McDonough, 1997). Despite these characteristics that some researchers may regard as flaws, diaries also give us the possibility to record what happened, what could change, opinions, anticipation, reactions, and reflections, thus necessitating being able to gain access to individuals' thoughts and reactions that are difficult to capture through traditional positivistic research methods. According to McDonough and McDonough, 'diary-keeping is arguably one of the ways in which teachers can get closest to their own work and hence, via critical reflection, to researching it' (p. 131). van Lier (1988/1994) states that diary studies are of particular value concerning insights into affective and personal factors influencing interaction and learning.

McDonough and McDonough (1997: 125-126) conclude that most commonly in diary studies raw data are analyzed through reading and re-reading the text until significant themes emerge. This procedure often includes quantitative analysis of frequency. Thus, the approach is essentially heuristic and one of discovery, not deductive and hypothesis-driven. This also means that the whole context such as setting and intentions needs to be taken into account in the interpretative process, and that the analysis is not started too soon since this might lead to involuntary pre-coding affecting and restricting subsequent writings. However, McDonough and McDonough also note that with some degree of specification beforehand, a diary can become 'at least an interim research outcome as much as a trigger, a kind of "soft" version of an inductive approach where analytic categories precede data' (pp. 125-126). This comes closer to what Kemmis (1988) states about using focused diaries about specific aspects of one's practice within action research (see also Bailey, 1990: 220). My diary writing was mainly focused on deepening my understanding of issues related to the purpose of this project, i.e. the development of the intercultural dimension within EFL education, both during the project work and the analysis stages, thus determining to a quite large extent the themes emerging from my data. However, through these entries it is also possible to discern many of the other aims and contents that I focused in the classroom within the framework of the curriculum. I have mainly written about my own teaching, often both more factual renderings as well as reflections on the planning, implementation, and perceived outcomes. Often unexpected happenings, problematic situations or otherwise interesting issues, e.g. different student reactions, have been in focus, leaving less time and effort for describing what I, possibly erroneously, have seen as more routine events. Thus, my entries were more regular during the first year, as everything was new and demanded more careful consideration while the foundations for a good cooperative classroom atmosphere and the rest of the educational process were laid, with entries eventually becoming more concentrated only on what I perceived as specific key situations or incidents (cf. Elliott, 1991: 77). All in all, this material covers 53 pages of PC entries written in font size 12 (the *Action Log*) as well as hand-written lesson plans with comments for each lesson during this three-year period. Excerpts from the Action Log have been included in Appendix I to provide the reader with a more complete picture of the classroom work itself. Most of these excerpts are referred to in Chapter 6 with the purpose of illustrating specific aspects in connection to the presentation and discussion of the implementation of the classroom work or the final interviews.

Bailey (1990: 225) notes that a diary study process 'can be as rewarding as it is humbling. One discovers strengths and previously unnoticed talents in the cumulative entries.' Since this was not a diary study *per se*, my Action Log did not undergo thorough analysis. Still, I find that I have learnt both from mistakes and successful undertakings through reflections in connection to writing and reading my entries. I truly see the possibilities for diary writing becoming a usable tool for ongoing educational development.

5.3 Reliability and validity in qualitative research

Different reliability and validity issues within research, particularly within educational research, have already been briefly addressed in the previous sections on methodological considerations of relevance for the current study. This section provides a more focused treatment of reliability and validity issues in qualitative research in general.

Although reliability and validity issues concern both quantitative and qualitative research, all criteria are not directly applicable to all types of research and might need to be redefined. Regarding ethnographic research, including different types of qualitative research, e.g. the phenomenological tradition, it can contribute to science exactly through its differences from positivistic research: For example, since data are collected before the researcher formulates a hypothesis and subjective experiences are taken into account, ethnographic work can deepen the understanding of the phenomena under investigation in a different way than positivistic research can. And for these reasons, reliability and validity criteria are also partly different. (LeCompte & Goetz: 1982; see also Guba & Lincoln, 1988.)

Kvale (1997: 208ff) discusses positivistic criticism against qualitative research methods concerning their *reliability*, *validity*, as well as *generalizability* of findings to other situations (see also LeCompte & Goetz, 1982). He states that as a result of this criticism, some qualitative researchers choose to ignore reliability and validity issues, considering them oppressive positivistic conceptions. Other qualitative researchers in turn have chosen to re-use these conceptions in forms more relevant for interview methods and discuss conceptions like *authenticity, credibility*, *trustworthiness* and *confirmability* (my translation from Swedish; see also Guba & Lincoln, 1988).

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982), <u>reliability</u> within qualitative research is a question of the *replicability* of the results. They differentiate between external and internal criteria, and both types will be discussed in this section. *External reliability* concerns the question of whether other researchers would be able to discover the same phenomena or create the same category system in the same or a similar setting. Qualitative research has often been criticized for not being replicable. LeCompte and Goetz state that because of the uniqueness or complexity, or both, of the phenomena under investigation, e.g. ethnographic research may approach rather than actually attain external reliability. To enhance the external reliability, ethnographic researchers can nevertheless consider questions like researcher status, informant selection, and social situations and conditions. For example, the researcher's status position within a group of informants decides what kind of information the researcher will have access to. Consequently, studies can only be replicated by researchers who assume comparable roles. Other studies can only be regarded as supplemental, not replicative studies. Similarly, different informants represent different groups and exclude all others. This can be handled by carefully describing the informants providing the data as well as the decisions behind the selection of these informants. Also, the social context in which the data are gathered influences what informants are willing to reveal. Thus, physical, social, and interpersonal contexts should be described, e.g. social setting, whether informants were

interviewed alone with the researcher or in a group, and other specific features. However, Marton (1986: 34-35) suggests that discoveries should not need to be replicable, and, consequently, neither should the discovery of categories within qualitative research.

External reliability criteria are not used very often. Instead, great importance is attached to the necessity for the researcher to motivate his/her interpretation and to communicate the whole research process to the readers.

Nevertheless, once a category system has been created, it is desirable that different researchers will be able to use these same categories with a high degree of intersubjective agreement concerning how to match them with the data (Marton, 1986). This can be tested through the use of peer-examination and is a criterion for *internal reliability*. Objectivity in the form of the possibility for the reader to decide whether one perceives the answers from the informants differently or in the same way as the researcher is a reliability component of importance in qualitative research (Trost, 1997: 99-121). This manner of presenting the work should be followed during the whole of its presentation, not only in connection with the presentation of the data analysis. This makes it easier to understand the work: The reader does not have to guess what lies behind different procedures or results (Kvale, 1997: 231). The use of direct quotations is meant to help the reader to understand the categorization or description of experiences that is presented (Larsson, 1986: 39).

According to LeCompte and Goetz (1982: 32), _validity_ concerns the *accuracy* of the research results in relation to the empirical reality. Validity within qualitative research, in particular concerning interviews, very much becomes a question of the craftsmanship and credibility of the researcher (Kvale, 1997: 216ff). This is in accordance with a constructivist and postmodern view of knowledge as a social construction of reality: The researcher needs to be able to argue for and defend different findings in the choice between competing and falsifiable interpretations. Here, too, qualitative researchers distinguish between external and internal criteria.

During the analysis of the data, the researcher should be careful to establish that the observations and measurements are authentic representations of some reality, e.g. that the categories formed are consistent with what the informants have expressed. This will strengthen the *internal validity*. Observer effects during interviews are also a threat to validity: Informants may lie, omit data, or answer the way they expect the interviewer wants them to. Therefore, according to e.g. Kvale (1997: 125, 139, 213), the researcher should try to verify statements, in particular those that are of importance for the study, throughout the whole process to get a more reliable and valid point of departure for the analysis. This can be done through the posing of critical questions and check-ups to avoid misunderstandings.

However, all of the researcher's questions are also a threat to the validity, since they might be leading questions. According to Kvale (1997: 146), the conscious use of leading questions is an effective means of verifying interview statements. However, Trost (1997: 83) points out that to verify in the form of statements is also leading. Thus, instead of saying 'So you mean that . . . ', it is better to use formulations like 'What do you mean by that?'. Larsson (1986: 28-29) states that

in a radical sense it is impossible to avoid leading questions, but this should nevertheless be opted for. Some informants are more easy to influence than others, depending e.g. on their status and experience of the topic. Consequently, it is important that the researcher pays attention to whether questions are leading, if not before, then at least when analyzing the data.

Säljö (2000: 115-119) gives an interesting research methodological comment concerning research approaches based on interviews, which underline the importance of context even further. He states that what we as researchers would like to say something about is people's *thinking* about different phenomena, but the fact is that we only have access to what people say, write or do, i.e. communicative or physical practices, or both. Additionally, in a socio-cultural perspective these practices are decided by context, which means that they are dynamic and partly unpredictable, and not only expressions of the informants' inner world of thoughts or conceptual understanding. According to Säljö, this problem can be solved if we analyze the interviews as situated communicative practices, without assuming that they reveal more than they actually do.

External validity could, in a somewhat simplified manner, be expressed as addressing the degree to which these representations are applicable also in other circumstances, e.g. for comparison across groups (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; see also e.g. Bailey, 1991: 78ff). This is the problem that is most often ignored by ethnographers mainly due to the characteristics of the research process, e.g. contextual research and description of detail, often within small groups, with different selection criteria that make statistical generalization difficult, impossible or even irrelevant to apply. But within ethnography the aim is the comparability and translatability of findings rather than transference of results to groups that have not been investigated.[111] The researcher tries to identify and describe those characteristics of phenomena important for comparison. Some constructs cannot be compared across groups simply because they are specific to a single group. Also concerning cross-group comparisons, observer effects are a threat to validity, since constructs generated in one context always are a function of context-under-investigation rather than of context only, something the researcher must be aware of.

Finally, LeCompte and Goetz (1982) conclude that dichotomous choices between quantitative and qualitative research methods are unnecessary and counterproductive (cf. Byram, 2004, on the distinction between quantitative and qualitative research as a second-order distinction, discussed in Section 5.1). It would be more fruitful both for research activities and the application of results if researchers were to include both objective and subjective data, not having to decide e.g. between representativeness of samples or purposive sampling, and generalizability or uniqueness of results, since each contribute to research in different ways. They state that absolute validity and reliability are impossible to attain in any research model, but researchers can approach the goal by

---

[111] Cf. *transferability* in Guba & Lincoln (1988), e.g. results grounded in thick descriptions providing enough information to provide a vicarious experience of a context, facilitating judgments about the extent of transferability to other, similar contexts; see also Section 5.4.

conscientiously balancing various factors that enhance credibility considering their specific research problems. (See also Guba & Lincoln, 1988.)

5.4 Further methodological considerations of the current study

Different types of classroom studies can generally be defined as case studies. Brown (1990), on the difference between surveys and case studies, states that unlike the survey where one has to ask whether the survey sample is a representative one, the question in e.g. ethnographic classroom work is 'What is this case representative of?'. The class of 17 students assigned to me was not specifically selected, but was a normal class of mixed ability that would otherwise have been taught by one of the regular teachers of the school. This is of importance, since although my findings are not generalizable, I wanted them to be *potentially generalizable*.[112] To quote Brown (1990):

> If, at one extreme, the findings are unique to a specific set of circumstances, then there is nothing to be learned that will be useful in any other context in which the researchers (or anyone else) might find themselves. To be 'potentially generalisable', however, does not imply that one has to operate at the other extreme of large-scale studies with statistical estimates of how generalisable the findings are to the population at large. But it does mean that reports of research have to provide enough information about the circumstances in which it was carried out so that others can judge whether it is reasonable to hypothesise that the findings might be applicable (or not) to their own contexts which will be, in at least some respects, different.

Brown notes that a common approach to classroom studies is to borrow techniques from ethnography, and in a manner similar to anthropologists going into the classroom without preconceived ideas of what the results may be although naturally within the boundaries of what is of interest. For the current study an approach inspired by action research was deemed the most appropriate as it was designed to systematically explore the development of the cultural dimension within EFL education, meaning that it was not characterized by the kind of open-ended, inductive approach as ethnographic studies; rather, with my background as a practicing teacher, through my previous study and by reading other research, I was equipped with a certain background knowledge and understanding of the problem at hand that I consider critical for succeeding with such a project. Thus, I set out with certain explicit assumptions of the situation and specific issues to explore, although I have tried to make these underlying assumptions as open as possible by discussing them throughout the study, as well as being open to new perspectives and possible directions to follow in the actual classroom work, as well as during the different stages of analysis. A possible problem with being personally close to the field of research and research context lies namely in the specific risk of assuming an understanding, thus not being open to or actively searching for other possibilities of interpretation during the research process. Therefore, my role and position has

---

[112] See also Section 5.3; cf. Elliott (1991: 16, 65) and the idea behind the presentation of case studies in Kyburz-Graber & al. (2006).

continuously shifted between that of the more personal involvement of the teacher and the more distanced role of the researcher during the process of the study. Still, for a teacher-researcher the two roles cannot be clearly separated (cf. Elliott, 1991). The issue is connected to the positivistic ideal of objectivity or neutrality within research; however, according to e.g. Kemmis (1988: 45) this ideal is an illusion created by the image of a value-free, supposedly objective social science that 'cannot by definition be a science of human praxis which must always embody values and interests'. And according to Kemmis, only the practitioner can have access to the perspectives and commitments informing a particular action as praxis, with praxis meaning informed, committed action, and the improvement of praxis is already an embodiment of values and interests (see also Elliott, 1991).

During these three school years I chose to spend as much time as possible at the school also outside my own teaching hours, e.g. choosing to work with other research related material at the school instead of leaving to sit in an office elsewhere, in order to keep up a more normal contact with students and what was going on at the school. In line with this, I also took part in different projects, field trips, sports days, traditional celebrations and festivities involving both the whole school and the project group in particular, as well as a five-day skiing trip (class trip) with the project group in the spring of grade 9. Combined with the more formal teaching situations, participation also in such less formal contexts gave the process more of an ethnographic element of continuous observation (see e.g. van Lier, 1988/1994; Kullberg, 1996/2004), which, in addition to being both enjoyable and interesting, increased my chances of getting to know the students better and include as many relevant aspects into the study as possible (cf. Taft, 1988). By getting to know the students I also had a better chance to reflect on the validity of different answers and utterances in a way that is impossible when analyzing questionnaires and interviews conducted with unknown informants. I consider this possibility of becoming an insider to differing degrees to be one of the greatest advantages of being a teacher-researcher in the classroom.[113]

One objection against my involvement in the school could be that at the same time I let the students become more aware of my own values and intentions, meaning that at the same time the risk that they would behave and answer questions in the way they expected me to appreciate, or not appreciate, also increased. However, since the context is one of action research where the teacher is already personally involved, a more objective, detached behavior on my part would only serve to make the teaching situation more unnatural. After all, the most important decision was to let the education become more experiential (see discussion in Section 4.1), since I would like to suggest that this approach enables a relationship between teacher and students that is more personally engaged as well as more open and democratic: According to Kohonen (2005),

---

[113] However, see also Elliott (1991: 57-67) on some dilemmas of the reflective practitioner, e.g. how to handle data accessed in one's role as the teacher. Also Paige-Smith (1996) describes dilemmas of conducting action research in a case where she had a triple role as a researcher, a parent and an advocate, roles that she often found merged in the research setting.

experiential learning means learning from immediate experience by engaging learners intellectually as well as emotionally in the process through active participation. In traditional teacher-directed approaches learning takes place mainly at an intellectual level, with students in the role of more or less passive recipients of information. I wish to argue that the experiential approach is of particular importance to consider when we want to build an atmosphere of trust and promote education that involves students as whole human beings. Still, I would like to suggest that I was able to make use of a researcher's perspective whenever necessary, e.g. when planning or analyzing parts of the ongoing process, but also in much reflection during practice. Furthermore, directly after the classroom project was ended, I had a 10-month period when I was not directly involved in the study. This provided me with the possibility to step back from the whole process and later return to the study and its final analysis stage primarily in the role of the researcher, although the two roles were never conceived of as completely separate. More important was that this period enabled me to distance myself from the large empirical material. This distance seemed to cause many issues to fall into perspective and make me discern patterns both in the process and in the concrete material that made the analysis more lucid and manageable.

One problematic issue in research of this kind is the obvious difficulties connected to capturing and analyzing undergoing learning processes, whether it be attitudes or knowledge. Questions concerning validity and reliability in relation to interview answers also abound. How do we, for example, know whether what informants state really reflects their actual thinking or attitudes? Thus, it would not be possible to state with any certainty that the educational efforts that were part of this project caused actual insights and changes in attitudes, or changes that would not otherwise have come about. Eventually, there is a lot that simply has to be taken at face value, and we have to be aware of the fact that we cannot state more with any certainty than this is what the informants actually expressed and how it was interpreted in this particular context (cf. Säljö, 2000, in Section 5.3). In this study I do not attempt to measure the efficiency of the educational approach and activities used in any absolute sense, at least not in terms of actual changes in attitudes; rather, the study constitutes a description and an explorative analysis of the educational process, including students' ability to argue for insights and understanding as well as their conceptions regarding educational approaches/activities and key contents. To enhance the reliability of the study, I have tried to outline and describe the steps of it as clearly as possible.

Initial permission for me to come into the school for this project was granted by the school board, with the principal and the other English subject teachers as my key persons to enter the operational activities. I tried to increase the validity of the study from the beginning by not stating to students and parents that I was conducting research, since revealing this and the purpose of the research would have jeopardized its outcome. In relation to ethical issues, Watt (1995) suggests the possibility of providing informants with necessary information at a later stage (see also Kvale, 1997: 107). Consequently, I did not ask parents/legal guardians for permission to use this material until May 2005, when the project was over and final grades in English already given (see letter of consent in

Appendix VII). Instead, I explained to the students in the beginning in more general terms that my intentions were to develop my own teaching and also find methods that other FL teachers could learn from, and therefore it was important to regularly evaluate their development and ask them about how they learn best. To avoid leading information I did not specify concerning what aspects, and in fact I worked with several other aspects alongside the focus of this study (see below). However, this line of procedure was an ethical decision that was not easy to make, since students and parents were not initially given the opportunity to give informed consent: Those who might have wished for more traditional language education were not given the possibility to choose. On the other hand, students are very seldom given the possibility to choose their teachers within the comprehensive school system, we only have to trust that all teachers are doing a professional job, making sure students receive the best possible education according to their abilities. What I could do, besides honoring my responsibilities to those accountable within the system and people personally involved, was to work towards making participation as easy and pleasant as possible and ensure that the research would cause the least possible disruption to all the people at the school (see Watt, 1995; cf. Kvale, 1997).

Thus, since I had the privilege of implementing the syllabus for three whole years in this class, I had abundant opportunities to include many different aspects to reflect on related to both language and culture, as well as learning and education in general, which contributed towards making it less obvious for students what the focus of this study would be. Naturally, I was interested in investigating and emphasizing many different aspects which could help me plan for the work in the classroom, and the knowledge gained from these efforts helped me to develop as a teacher on many levels. In Forsman (2004a) I outline several areas such as increased awareness of using different forms of media to learn English both in and outside the classroom. Since I wanted to develop my own teaching concerning all these aspects, these were also included in my classroom work. In this study, however, the focus will only be on some aspects dealt with during these three years. Because of the large amount of empirical data that could be collected during this project, the material collected and chosen for analysis had to be balanced between a display of material that could have easily become overwhelming and an oversimplification that would not tell readers enough about the process in order to achieve an effective analysis and presentation of the research (cf. Brown, 1990).

Different evaluations of the students' educational process towards the specific area of intercultural competence as well as of approaches and activities used were conducted in the form of questionnaires at different stages and finally also through individual theme interviews in grade 9. Besides being important for project evaluation purposes, these aimed at giving the students the opportunity to reflect on their own learning process and progress in a very concrete manner, e.g. through the use of questions intended to stimulate reflection both before and after certain sequences, as well as to consolidate what had been learnt on several levels through this further processing (cf. Dysthe, 1996: 236-237, 2000: 64-65; Kohonen, 2001b: 44-45). The different questionnaires also enabled me to plan the educational process as more in tune with students' actual needs. Dysthe (1996: 232-233), on the benefits of a more dialogical approach in the classroom,

describes the technique of using follow-ups in the form of student responses in the following teacher questions to trigger further reflections among students. What I have used here can be said to be a type that she describes as 'planned follow-up', i.e. relevant student contributions are followed up through different approaches in other lessons to contribute to further processing and progress.

Traditionally, action research has often been carried out with many stakeholders on different levels of authority, all of whom have been in agreement with the need for action and collaborating towards the same goals, which often has consisted of trying to improve social conditions within a community (e.g. Kemmis, 1994). Currently, more work involving the teacher as a researcher in the classroom, or action research which does not include as many stakeholders, seems to be emerging, e.g. some of the research described in O'Hanlon (1996). The role of the students in such classroom research may be to take part as learners in the process, with one of their main tasks being to help evaluate the success of the project. As previously stated, when I launched the project I did not explicitly discuss the concept of research or the possible use of collected material for a dissertation with the students. Instead I explained, much along the same lines as Richards (1996: 105) did when initiating her project, that in order to find out more about what to teach and how to teach different aspects of English as successfully as possible, I was going to ask a lot of questions during our three years together, and that hopefully not only me but also the students, as well as other teachers, would be able to benefit from this experience. In traditional action research, students would have been in the know concerning exactly *what* and *why*, or at least able to see the need for improvement after being informed about the current situation and benefits of working towards an improvement. This is also the way I would prefer to set up a possible follow-up project to gain experiences of another kind. However, in this case one could say that the students were not taking part in explicit planning of the process until at the very end, through the evaluative interviews, when they e.g. were encouraged to give advice on what approaches and activities had been useful, how these activities and others could be improved, and their views on other ways of treating cultural aspects successfully in schools. This means that at that point students did take part in improving practice by being able to influence how activities would be evaluated and treated by me and other teachers/researchers as well as actually taking part in the planning stages of the following cycle of the process, e.g. how possible follow-up projects could be carried out. An important reason for such a set-up was my wish to evaluate the educational process without the possible influences that such background knowledge might have provided. I would like to suggest that this attempt was successful, since in the final interviews, when asked what message or aspect of teaching they deemed had been most important for me in my teaching, none of the students suggested cultural aspects of any kind; instead, much to my surprise, the most common suggestions were irregular verbs and some aspect of grammar or grammar in general!

Thus, the students' knowledge and opinions concerning many areas within EFL education were explored both initially and during the learning process itself, mainly through written questionnaires, with the manifold purpose of finding starting points for the work in the classroom, activating students' prior

knowledge and experiences for better learning (cf. Kohonen, 2001b: 31; Dysthe, 1996) as well as monitoring and reflecting on the educational process. Important evaluation, and consolidation of learning also on a metacognitive level, took place in the end of the spring semester of grade 8, when students were asked in a set of questionnaires to compare their initial knowledge and views of the UK with their more recent ones. Their reactions to different activities used to enhance intercultural understanding were also explored, e.g. whether they had become frustrated in some way by certain realizations, whether they had changed their attitudes to people in the UK or difference in general by certain activities, and, if so, to argue for their new understanding. These questionnaires were also used during the final interviews to point to and clarify certain issues in students' development, and sometimes to raise issues for the students to expand on (cf. Elliott, 1991: 80). As a consequence of mainly being intended as tools in the educational action research process itself, the results of the analysis of the different questionnaires have not been exhaustively presented. Instead, only certain interesting and relevant issues have been pointed to in the discussions in Chapter 6.

I decided on the use of focused questionnaires with authentic and open-ended questions at specific points during the semesters rather than asking students to write reflections in journals on a more regular basis. This was mainly because I was reluctant to put too much stress and time pressure on the students, since there would still be many specific issues that I wanted their reactions to. Now that I believe certain approaches and activities to be of use, I would like to develop these further by including more dialogic writing about these specific issues on a regular basis. This could contribute to better learning by triggering the thought processes of individual students even further than what was possible through the whole-class discussions or individual writing used after a more extended length of time (cf. Dysthe, 1996: e.g. 232, 240). From a research point of view such writing would also provide an excellent basis for individual follow-up discussions, besides being good when trying to track both students' development as well as finding out about their immediate reactions to specific approaches.

I was always careful to emphasize that students' answers in these explorations would not affect their grades. Since they repeatedly answered an array of different questions during the three years of the project, those who initially might have been worried about their grading could recognize that their grades were affected by other circumstances. My intention was also to create an atmosphere of openness that would allow for all kinds of opinions to be discussed, e.g. by using cooperative learning techniques to promote the building of a community of learners (see Kohonen, 2001b: 33-35). My conclusion is that this did not completely succeed: A couple of students would not trust the others enough to fully take part or voice their own opinions in whole class discussions, but could do so in small groups or together with me.

Furthermore, my teaching did not seem to meet the expectations of how English should be taught in at least one case. The reasons for this are important to consider, but impossible to state with certainty here because of the reluctance of the student to discuss the matter. Kohonen (2001b: 38-40, also pp. 32-33 on motivation in experiential learning) discusses the role of the learner's self-

esteem in the ability to tolerate ambiguity without feeling threatened in language learning situations that of necessity involve unpredictability and novelty because of the encounter with a new linguistic and cultural system (cf. Pelkonen, 2005a, on the challenges concerning individual levels or stages of intercultural development). In addition, the learners might have certain assumptions of their role as learners, and one might conclude that at least in the case of low self-esteem these assumptions are possibly more prone to include a more dependent learner role than the promotion of learner autonomy allows. Unfulfilled expectations regarding the teacher and the educational process led by the teacher must be considered as an important factor for the success of the learning process. The above is also connected with what Kohonen describes as the quality of the learning task (from Rogers, 1975), i.e. whether learning has personal meaning and involves the feelings of the learner (cf. Dysthe, 1996). Possibly much of the contents concerning the cultural dimension, particularly the inclusion of affective elements in the educative process, were not experienced as meaningful to this learner; they might rather have been perceived as threatening. In addition, the use of texts such as magazines and song lyrics to replace the majority of textbook work, combined with increased emphasis on reflective processes and development of independent learning might have departed too much from traditional transmission models or frontal teaching focused on more narrow, specific objectives and tasks to meet the expectations of the learner towards less ambiguity and unpredictability.[114] These experiences all suggest the challenges but also the importance of finding ways of successfully addressing individual student needs for the process of developing intercultural competence, as deep-rooted assumptions, attitudes and habits are persistent.[115] However, despite these difficulties and the complexity involved, particularly in terms of showing respect for others, the capacity for empathy and tolerance of ambiguity, due to the links of these elements to learner personality, these are still no arguments against making intercultural competence an aim of FL education (Kaikkonen, 2001: 68).

I was careful not to let the interviews turn into interrogations or tests of knowledge, but let them be closer to conversations or dialogues about these different aspects to avoid as much as possible students saying what they thought the teacher wanted to hear, instead of openly speaking up about the different issues and expressing their attitudes. With some exceptions, most students seemed relaxed during the interviews, expressing both attitudes and opinions. The use of questionnaires during interviews was useful in several respects: Not only was it possible to use issues from the questionnaires as triggers for a certain amount of stimulated recall during interviews, but it was also possible to validate answers by comparing what students said during interviews to what they had previously stated in writing and check up on unclear or contradictory issues that students had written in the questionnaires. As it turned out, several issues that otherwise would have remained misunderstood without my knowing were straightened out during the interviews. One example concerned a boy who had

---

[114] Cf. Dysthe, 1996. See also Kohonen (2001b: 21) on language teaching as learner *training* versus learner *education*.

[115] Cf. experiences, although mainly positive, related in Kohonen (2001b: 41, 52-53); see also Kaikkonen (2001: 68) on different starting points for different learners with reference to growing as intercultural actors.

stated in a questionnaire that he disliked black people. When probed on the reasons for this during the interview, he explained that he knew about a black boy in the community who had been criminally involved, and criminality meant that the police would frequent the community more often, which in turn was bad news also for teenagers like him with tuned up mopeds! Similarly, when another boy had explained that he was not specifically interested in contents dealing with the UK, this simply meant that in his view also other communities and people would be entitled to the same treatment. These examples show some of the difficulties regarding how to know when to take seemingly straightforward statements at face value. In addition, students obviously experienced difficulties concerning being able to remember their own prior thoughts and knowledge; sometimes it is even easy to believe that we have always known what we know now.

Particularly in monological classrooms some students manage to sail along without reflecting or processing thoughts deeply enough simply because the classroom approaches employed and a bigger group, unlike the one-on-one situation of an interview, allows them to stay in the background if they wish to (cf. Dysthe, 1996: e.g. 225, 232). However, it was noticeable during some of the interviews that the discussions had managed to trigger students' thought processes, since they suddenly could show additional ways of reasoning and insights that they had not done earlier, e.g. in the questionnaires or even at the beginning of the interviews. This suggests that the learning potential of interviews should not be underestimated. Larzén (2005: 77) refers to Ashworth and Lucas' (2000: 302) definition of the phenomenographic interview as 'a conversational partnership in which the interviewer assists a process of reflection'. Thus, interviews can also be seen as learning opportunities, particularly if they can be conducted along the same lines as the interactive learning processes described in Dysthe (1996), where the stress is on creating a dialogue between the student and other individuals as well as between the student and the focus of learning. Consequently, some sort of authentic learning dialogues could be employed also in regular EFL education.[116]

The interviews were conducted over a period of about two months. Naturally, some students might have discussed the contents of the interviews between themselves to find out what I was asking about, but I would like to suggest that the interviews generally included such a wide variety of topics that their discussions did not affect the results in any significant matters. The general information they had received concerning my purpose of exploring their views in order to be able to develop educational approaches for EFL probably was enough, since this procedure was nothing they would be graded for.

In the interviews I looked for information on several levels: first of all, whether the students had reached some of the insights and gained some of the awareness intended, and if so, I tried to conclude from what experiences such insights and awareness originated. If the previous did not give concrete results, I provided specific triggers regarding activities or approaches for the students to reflect on and discuss (cf. Elliott, 1991: 80), and finally I also asked them for other

---

[116] Cf. the portfolio method for more student-centered education practices, focusing also on the process of learning and not only on the product (see e.g. Section 4.4).

opinions and ideas related to EFL education (see presentation of Focus areas for the interviews in Section 6.2). Thus, the interview process went from the initial evaluation of educational progress to reflections on concrete approaches and students' suggestions of how they had, or would have, learnt best. During the interviews particular focus was demanded to keep track of all the different issues that I wanted to evaluate, as these issues were approached from so many different angles depending on the students' responses and where the discussions went, so as not to unintentionally prompt answers when I instead would have the possibility to probe interesting issues (cf. Brown, 1990).

The complete interview recordings consist of over eight hours of material. I started the analyses by repeatedly listening through the recordings to bring each specific situation back to mind, receive an overall picture of each interview as well as all the interviews, and locate specific parts of possible interest in each of them for further categorization, particularly in connection to the Focus areas (see Section 6.2; see also considerations in Section 5.2.3). When analyzing the interviews, I regarded my own familiarity with the overall context, the students and the interview situations as the most important factors for being able to understand and interpret the utterances of the students. To avoid superfluous work with detailed transcriptions of parts that were not of immediate relevance for the purpose of the study, I considered this familiarity enough for being able to decide what specific sections of the interviews were to be transcribed. The interviews were mainly transcribed by two assistants, some by me. Also in the following steps of analyzing the interviews on a deeper level, the recordings were regularly consulted alongside the written transcripts to be able to take into account e.g. the tone of voice and degree of hesitation in the answers, issues that I considered myself in a better position to interpret than outsiders to the process. Thus, the assistants made what could be called raw transcripts to be used in the last stages of the analyses.

Throughout the analysis of the answers I have tried to check that my questions have not been leading. If so, I have simply disregarded the sequence in question. Sometimes, though, leading questions have worked as a way of confirming the answers or establishing what the informant really meant (cf. Section 5.3). Naturally, during the analysis of the material I have also found examples of instances where critical questions or some other sort of clarification could have contributed towards more informed findings.

With such a small and concentrated group of informants, their right to privacy becomes harder than usual to protect. In the presentation of the results the confidentiality[117] of the informants has been protected by withdrawing information such as names, both personal and geographical, and gender that could help identify individuals. The fact that the excerpts have been translated into English works as further protection of their identities, since possible regional dialect features and most other individual characteristics of speech are

---

[117] See e.g. Kvale (1996, 1997) on ethical guidelines for qualitative research involving interviews.

no longer visible.[118] In case certain excerpts could still give away individual identities for people familiar with the informants, no coded markings have been used to specify individuals in the presentations of different excerpts, since this would give the possibility to look for further information about identified informants.

Throughout the work process I have tried to look for results in the form of reasoning and arguments that would indicate deeper insights or understanding of underlying mechanisms with respect to the formation of stereotypes and prejudiced views, while being critical of situations where it would be easy for students to give what they might perceive as the 'correct answer'. These have then also been considered in relation to students' answers in the initial questionnaires (see Sections 6.1.1 and 6.3). Although we can never be sure that informants mean what they say when they, e.g., state that they find respect for difference important, nevertheless being able to reflect on experiences and viewpoints, as well as giving arguments concerning *why* this is important, can still be regarded as progress in itself that might have effects on future experiences. Again, there is the dilemma of not being able to assess educational processes that are open-ended.

Although the main focus will be on the variations in views and development of this particular group of students as suggested by the analysis, comparison with relevant material such as the findings in Forsman (2004a) and the study presented in Smeds (2004; see Section 6.3) will be brought into the discussion to point to interesting considerations. Furthermore, a brief comparison with three other ninth-grade groups from the same school will be made regarding some specific issues, although on a very cautious note: Towards the end of the project I decided to include material from students of the other English teachers in the school in the form of questionnaires covering a specific set of questions (see Appendix VI) in order to compare these answers to the project students' reactions to the same questions. Such a practice is not in accordance with qualitative research methodology, and findings cannot be generalized or used to conclusively support results.[119] In this case I found that this procedure could still add to my understanding of the situation, particularly concerning whether insights reached by the project students could be the result of educational projects or information that the whole school had been taking part in rather than educational efforts during the project itself (see further discussion in Section 6.3).

---

[118] On the other hand, the drawback of such a procedure is that features such as the use of pragmatic speech markers that can contribute to the interpretation during the analysis of the interviews are no longer obvious to the readers.

[119] However, e.g. Elliott & Adelman (1996) mention results of a measurement program used to evaluate the teaching strategies of a project after an experimental period, involving what they call '"untrained" teachers' "samples"'.

6 Culture in practice:
Implementations and results

6.1 Implementation of the classroom work [120]

My purpose for the three years of classroom work within the project was to develop my teaching concerning several specific dimensions within the framework of the regular curriculum. More generally these dimensions can be described as being directed towards the aims included in Byram's comprehensive model of ICC (see Section 3.2). This included emphasis on aspects found in Forsman (2004a; see discussion in Section 1.3) such as students' relative lack of awareness of different registers, particularly in British English, as well as the need for autonomous learning skills concerning both language and culture, in particular in relation to the use of different media. Much of the methodology used in the classroom was inspired by experiential learning and portfolio work (see also Sections 4.1 and 4.4), e.g. regarding increased emphasis on the students' reflections around and evaluation of their own learning. Some concrete approaches, such as how to include a more diverse and realistic concept of British teenagers, were also inspired by the findings in Forsman (2004a: see particularly pp. 154-156). However, the focus of the discussion in this study will be on the development of the intercultural dimension within language education, particularly on the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity and respect for such difference, since I see these two elements as fundamental for other cultural work in the classroom and for the realization of important aspects of the underlying values of basic education.

It could be argued that many of the intended insights would not be difficult to reach during an extended period of regular teaching. However, my intention was to explore what realistically could be accomplished considering the available time and resources and the differing curricular aims that needed to be balanced during such a time span. Thus, cultural aims and contents were rather integrated into the syllabus in a systematic manner than given priority over other aims and contents, in the same way as e.g. more systematic focus was also put on the development of independent learning skills concerning the linguistic dimension, although this aspect will not be the focus of this study.

All lessons have been documented in the form of a handwritten lesson plan, including comments added on after the lesson on what was actually done, as well as reflective notes on particularly interesting issues that came up during each lesson. Additionally, to be able to analyze, understand, and remember the process better, I documented the first year of teaching in the form of more extended diary notes on both planning and realization, and the two following school years concerning issues and events that I considered to be of importance

---

[120] See also Forsman (2004b).

for the project. These were mainly in the form of reflective entries and practical annotations, e.g. on the practical outcome of certain lesson plans.

Students' insights were explored both initially and after certain teaching sequences with the use of different questionnaires, regular discussions and finally evaluated through interviews (see below).

Before moving on to the interview results in Section 6.2, a selection of the key stages or events in the educational experiences during the project will be briefly presented and discussed. They can all be found in the chronological outline in Table 4, included to give an overview of the contents and their relative order. The issues listed in the outline are all addressed in the study, although some with more prominence than others. The points in time refer to when the activities or events in question took place during the project years. The capital letters within brackets refer to excerpts from my Action Log[121] (see Appendix I), where the activities in question have been reflected or commented on. Also from the point of view of receiving a more concrete understanding of the actual classroom work, particularly from the beginning of the process, the reader is referred to the chronological selection of excerpts in the Action Log.

Table 4. An outline of key stages and events during the three project years in chronological order

Grade 7 (course 1-3 ≈ 35 hours/course)		
Decentering using the alien perspective	December 2002	(G, M)
Topic: *Different conventions in different*		
school systems (Finland-the US)	January 2003	(H)
Questionnaire I *Exploring the UK*	March 2003	
Topic: *Sports*	April 2003	(J, K)
Järtelius' story of the African in Sweden	April 2003	(K)
Movie: *Bend It Like Beckham*[122]	April 2003	(L)

---

[121] These excerpts have been included in unedited form except for names and other specific information that have been left out or changed to protect the anonymity of students. In addition, the language has been tidied up in some instances and some information has been included in the form of footnotes to make the text more understandable.

[122] Directed by Gurinder Chadha in 2002, see below and References.

Grade 8 (course 4-5)

Exploring UK society through magazine texts	regularly	
Exploring language in the UK through video clips	regularly	
Topic: *Fashion*	September 2003	
'Fieldwork'- *Asking teenagers in Wales* (see footnote 123)	October 2003	
Visit by young students from Wales[123]	April 2004	
Spontaneous discussion of Roma	April 2004	(M)
Follow-up on Roma	May 2004	(M)
Questionnaire II *Exploring the UK (2)*	May 2004	
Questionnaire III *Reflections on change (UK)*	May 2004	
Questionnaire IV *Final grade 8, Part I*	May 2004	
Questionnaire V *Final grade 8, Part II*	May 2004	

Grade 9 (course 6-8)

Consolidating work/reflections	regularly
Interview	October-November 2004

Table 4 shows that the important foundations for the ability to decenter were laid during the second half of grade 7, whereas most work on exploring the UK to show difference and diversity was concentrated in grade 8. Much of the work in grade 7 concerned the development of awareness of different aspects related to linguistic features such as more independent learning both inside and outside the classroom and the ability to reflect on one's own learning process.[124] Finally, in grade 9, work on the cultural dimension was mainly carried out to consolidate and possibly also deepen previous insights, mainly by referring back to previous discussions and insights in connection to suitable topics and activities brought in during EFL lessons. In addition, a lot of small but important revision and reflective work that has not been included as separate events in Table 4 was

---

[123] It should be pointed out that I was not involved in organizing the visits to and from Wales, which is the reason for these events not being more thoroughly described and discussed in the study. However, since the visits were useful for involving students in different activities as well as spontaneous reflections connected to their experiences and reactions, this visit has also been included in the table.

[124] See particularly Excerpts A-F in the Action Log in Appendix I.

integrated into the EFL education throughout the years, also by making use of spontaneous situations whenever these arouse and/or utilizing these in later follow-ups, thus enabling a more dialogical approach. A lot of opportunities for reflective work were created in connection to the magazine texts that were used to replace most of the textbook material. Here I want to refer to Dysthe (1996: 232-233), who stresses the benefits within a dialogical approach of good planning that still allows enough flexibility in the form of immediate or planned follow-ups on relevant student comments and reactions (see also Section 5.4).

Table 4 also shows the points in time of the different questionnaires used within the scope of this study, as well as the final interview conducted when approximately half of the EFL courses of grade 9 remained (see Section 7.2 on reasons for conducting the interviews at that point).

6.1.1 Monitoring questionnaires: Explorations of students' insights regarding the cultural dimension

The first questionnaire in this set[125] was answered in March 2003, and explored different aspects of the UK (see Questionnaire I, Appendix II). The student answers were analyzed and used as the basis for what was to be included concerning the cultural dimension within their EFL education during the project. One year later, in May 2004, after having looked deeper into most of the issues asked for in the questionnaire, students were asked to answer basically the same questionnaire on different aspects of the UK (referred to as Questionnaire II, see Appendix II). In the period between the two UK questionnaires, we had also made use of relevant approaches to develop the ability to decenter.[126] A few days after the second UK questionnaire they were given both these questionnaires back, together with a third one, where they were asked to reflect on the two previous ones concerning possible changes concerning both cognitive and affective aspects (see Questionnaire III, Appendix III). The final link in this set was used at the end of May, when the affective dimension was explored more thoroughly together with a few issues on certain activities that I saw the need to explore after having seen the students' thoughts in the previous questionnaire (see Questionnaire IV-V[127]; see discussion below).[128]

In the initial surveys of students' background knowledge conducted in grade 7, it could be seen that many of them showed different stereotypic views of the UK and its representatives. This included significant lack of awareness of multicultural Britain and the existence of slang in British English (cf. Forsman,

---

[125] The reason why the first exploration into cultural matters was put off towards the end of grade 7 is that this was actually the sixth questionnaire used during the school year: The previous ones were explorations into other aspects that could contribute to a more purposeful EFL education, e.g. issues related to students' language awareness, use of affordances in their spare time and attitudes related to language learning at school.

[126] See particularly Excerpts G, I, K and M in the Action Log in Appendix I.

[127] This set was originally written as one longer questionnaire, but was changed to constitute two separate ones; therefore the numbers of the questions run from 1 to 9 between the two parts.

[128] Cf. Dysthe (1996) on the importance of coming into dialogue with the contents of learning.

2004a). However, compared to my previous study, the most marked difference was that fewer suggestions in general were given as answers to the different questions: Many students simply did not know or had no opinions. Considering the fact that these surveys were conducted when the students were one or two years younger than the informants in Forsman (2004a), I would like to suggest that this difference could only be expected due to the fact that many students simply had not yet had the time to form specific opinions or conceptions of many of these issues regarding the UK.[129] Thus, I would hesitate to contribute this difference to this specific group being less inclined to stereotypical or prejudiced views than students in general.

Thus, the questionnaires were mainly intended to be part of the dialogical process between the students and myself as the teacher. The purpose of the initial questionnaires was to explore students' insights so that more opportunities could be provided for them to develop their knowledge from a suitable level. By monitoring the educational process I was able to plan the following stages of the process, i.e. a form of planned follow-up (cf. Dysthe, 1996; see Section 5.4 for a description) that enabled me to further extend or address specific issues. The students, on their part, were able to reflect on their learning process and consolidate their individual learning (cf. Dysthe, p. 236). As a consequence, for the purpose of evaluating the project, the final interviews have been given more interest than the previously mentioned questionnaires, which consequently have not been the focus of a thorough presentation in this study.

However, as a brief example of what I have looked for during the process, I will use the questionnaires below to show some student answers. First I will trace the development of one of the students concerning one specific aspect: the student's knowledge and awareness of British vs. American English, particularly the existence of different registers:

Questionnaire I *Exploring the UK* (March 2003):

A: *American teenagers speak more slang* [than British teenagers]*.*

Questionnaire II *Exploring the UK (2)* (May 2004):

A: *British teenagers speak more strangely* [than American teenagers]*.*

Questionnaire III *Reflections on change (UK)* (i.e. student's own reflections on how her/his knowledge has changed, May 2004):

A: *That British people have strange words.*

---

[129] Cf. Björklund (2004) on differences regarding knowledge and formation of specific conceptions of different varieties of English as well as of people and conditions in the UK and the US among children in Finland-Swedish schools already by the age of 10-11.

Questionnaire IV *Final grade 8 (I)* (May 2004):

Q: Describe how your image of the UK (people, language, ...) changed by watching *Bend It Like Beckham* and clips from *Ali G*[130]?

A: *I started to think that not everyone in the UK speaks in the same way. For example, Ali G doesn't only speak like the original language in the UK.*

Analysis (using my knowledge of the context):

The student has gained an awareness of the existence of slang also in British English since the answer given in March 2003, i.e. a greater awareness of diversity concerning this specific aspect. Movies like *Bend It Like Beckham*[131] and clips from different TV-shows have given alternative impressions and managed to show some of the variety in British society, both culturally, linguistically and socially. However, the student still seems to be reacting to differences between American and British English, using the word 'strange' to describe the latter. Given my experience with this student and the issues we have been discussing in class, my suggestion is that this is mainly because the student has learnt a lot of American English from such sources as the media and reacts to the still somewhat unfamiliar vocabulary in British English that we have treated (such as *faucet-tap* and other word pairs), thus the use of the description 'strange *words*' (emphasis added).

In addition, the student's views of people in the UK also changed somewhat between March 2003 and May 2004 towards becoming more diverse:

Questionnaire III *Reflections on change (UK)*:

A: *I used to think that people in London were peaceful and quiet, but apparently they can be pretty wild as well.*

Analysis (using my knowledge of the context):

The student had been under the impression that a British teenager is a quiet, well-behaving person dressed in a school uniform, but now this image has changed somewhat. The project school had taken part in a several-year long exchange program that among other happenings included a visit from Wales (see Table 4). This visit, however, probably confirmed the old stereotypical image to some extent since the young Welsh students were rather shy and very polite, in addition to telling about the strict rules in their own school. What is referred to above, however, are the experiences of a class of older students from the project

---

[130] Sacha Baron Cohen (born in 1971 in Staines, London) is an English comedian notable for his highly successful comedy characters, one of which is Ali G, a rapper and gangster wannabe from Staines. (Information retrieved from *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia.)
[131] See Excerpt L in the Action Log in Appendix I.

school who managed to get into a fight with a group of British teenagers during a class trip to London, an event that obviously had made an impression.

It should be noted that the development traced above has not been included among what I have referred to as development of the intended insights concerning the cultural dimension assigned to group (2) in Section 6.3 below. The reason for this is that during the final interview the student did not show that these beginning insights had been either consolidated or deepened. Thus, the development of this student has been interpreted to mainly concern the level of specific factual information.

Then we move on to briefly address the possible development concerning respect for otherness through the ability to decenter with the use of some further examples from the final set of questionnaires employed in grade 8. Here the examples concern three different students:

Questionnaire V *Final grade 8 (II)* (May 2004):

Q: How could you think in order to respect others better?

A1: *We tend to think that we are normal and others not.* (boy)

A2: *(...) everyone behaves the way they've been taught from childhood. And when you get to know them, they might not be that strange.* (boy)

A3: *It helps to think that I'm different in someone else's eyes, for example where everyone is Roma, they may consider me strange.* (girl)

The analysis showed that, all in all, students' answers at this point exemplified at least some ability to decenter from their own cultural viewpoint in the majority of cases with the exception of two students discussing these issues only on a very superficial and unreflective level, one choosing not to give any answers, and two interesting cases showing ability to change perspective on a theoretical level, but at the same time stating the impossibility for them to do so. Since these questionnaires were used at the end of a teaching period where different reflective activities had been used somewhat more than usual, I was aware of the fact that the answers could be reflecting the most recent activities and not any long-term effects. In fact, several students with interesting insights and reflections in these questionnaires did not show the same degree of awareness in the interviews, and also in those cases the students have not been categorized as showing noticeable development (see Section 6.3 below). For example, the student represented by the second questionnaire extract above (A2) is one such example. Thus, my intention has been to keep the criteria for what to consider as development of the intended insights in this study rather strict.

As was previously pointed out, these questionnaires have not been fully presented in the study as they mainly constituted tools for the educational process itself, not evaluative instruments for the whole process like the final interviews. However, before moving on to the presentation of the analysis of the

evaluative interviews in Section 6.2, I will outline the work in the classroom with promoting awareness of difference and diversity as well as respect for such difference through the ability to decenter in somewhat more detail in the two following sections below.

6.1.2 The basis for IC: The alien perspective in practice

The first steps in the direction of developing the ability to decenter in the EFL classroom were taken during our first semester together in grade 7 in the form of 'the alien perspective'.[132] Concretely, this was done with the help of an insightful cartoon drawing attention in a humoristic way to the haphazard nature of the social convention of greeting someone by shaking hands and how we take it for granted.[133] In the ensuing discussion, which included e.g. brainstorming about other more or less imaginative ways of greeting people, I pointed out that we are simply so used to our own ways that we seldom question them, but we tend to question other people's conventions. Why, if social conventions mainly and merely are conventions? This was followed by other brainstorming activities on 'rules' that might have been construed or agreed upon differently in our society, to further emphasize the arbitrariness of our own ways. One of these concerned how we could show our appreciation at a play instead of clapping our hands, the other what kind of tools we could have developed for eating as an alternative to spoons, knives, and forks,[134] i.e., we looked at conventions shared by everybody in the class and also acknowledged by many other cultural groups. Consequently, these activities were not experienced as threatening (cf. Section 4.2).

In connection to these activities I also read a story[135], originally in Swedish by Arne Järtelius (e.g. in Herlitz, 1999: 41-42), about a young man from an African country who went to study in Sweden for a year and made interesting observations about this 'strange and exotic people' (my translation). Here the author shows what a description of something familiar might look like when done in the same way as we have tended to describe other societies, cultures and traditions. Thus, the experience of de-familiarization is what is important, not the specific perspective, which is also shown from the fact that it is not specified from what African country the young man came.[136] Although all of the traditions discussed are not shared by the students in the group, most of them are, and they are certainly very well recognized by everyone. In this way, the focus of

---

[132] See Excerpt G in the Action Log in Appendix I.

[133] *The Far Side* is a popular one-panel comic created by Gary Larson. Its surrealistic humor is often based on uncomfortable social situations, improbable events, an anthropomorphic view of the world, logical fallacies, impending bizarre disasters, or the search for meaning in life. (From *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia)

[134] See Excerpt I in the Action Log in Appendix I.

[135] See Excerpt K in the Action Log in Appendix I.

[136] As a concrete example for those familiar with certain traditional songs and celebrations in Swedish society, e.g. at Easter, Midsummer, and Christmas, the story includes a de-familiarizing perspective on how Swedes must be great animal lovers, as they worship chicken in the spring, frogs in summer, crayfish in the fall, and cats, horses, and pigs during the darkest period of the year!

observation narrowed down more closely on the specific cultural group of these students during the different decentering activities, until we could take a more distanced and possibly more objective look at what we do on a more personal level.

Much lesson time in grade 7 was devoted to systematic as well as spontaneous work on addressing these decentering activities again in other discussions (cf. Kohonen, 2001b: 31, on activating learners' prior experiences for conscious access; and Kaikkonen, 2001: 89, on the usefulness of including sensitizing activities in every lesson). Other ways to consolidate and further strengthen the decentering experience were to take a critical look at sports[137] and fashion[138], both phenomena that are easy to de-familiarize by pointing out the way we so easily start taking things for granted. We discussed, for example, how people in different parts of the world have invented lots of sports with all kinds of complicated rules, sports that originally were meant to be games that we play for fun, but suddenly these games can become more important than life itself, people investing and earning large sums of money, cheating, hooliganism, and so on. From this, certain parallels were drawn: Just as we create rules for our games, we create rules that our societies work by, and, like all rules, these can actually be changed if we decide to agree on something completely different. Concerning fashion, most teenagers in Western societies are familiar with the phenomenon that clothes which one day seem ugly and strange will be on everybody's shopping lists the next day, and finally even look good, right before you are supposed to start disliking them again.

6.1.3 Exploring difference and diversity: The UK as a tool for general awareness

In grade 8, the focus moved on to activities aimed at helping students increase their awareness and modify possible stereotyped views of the UK. Based on the results in Forsman (2004a), as well as students' answers in the initial exploratory questionnaire (see above), which both showed examples of stereotypic views and lack of knowledge of multicultural Britain, I chose to focus a large amount of time on certain aspects of the UK. However, the ultimate goal, as previously stated, was to use possible insights gained concerning the UK as tools in the process of promoting awareness and respect for difference and diversity in general, also concerning difference that one does not have much actual knowledge about.

Besides reflective and other work around e.g. video chunks, magazine texts, and pictures, we watched Gurinder Chadha's movie from 2002 called *Bend It Like Beckham*,[139] with the main purpose of diversifying the students' visual image of teenagers in the UK from that of the stereotypical red-haired youth dressed in a school uniform (see Forsman, 2004a; Section 6.2.1 below). In this sometimes very humoristic movie the main character, a British-born girl of Sikh parents, is struggling to find her place torn between contemporary UK society that promises

---

[137] See Excerpts J and K in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[138] Beginning of grade 8; see also Section 6.3.1.
[139] See Excerpt L in the Action Log in Appendix I.

to fulfill her dreams of becoming a professional soccer player and her parents' more traditional wishes for what they see as a proper education and family life.

Furthermore, an element of fieldwork was included in the form of a number of short surveys on topics students wanted to know more about.[140] Examples of these topics were what teenagers in the UK associate with the concept of 'school lunch', whether they really like baked beans and how they eat them, and what image they have of Finland. One of these activities is depicted in Figure 8. The surveys were conducted by a group of students of the same age from our school who had the opportunity to visit the UK on a short school trip, but naturally such surveys are also easily done through e-mail or other contacts with school classes in different countries. In this context 'teenagers in the UK' simply constituted the specific students in a Welsh community that our students happened to meet with and ask.

Survey question (the students in Finland wrote their associations on small pieces of paper; the students going to Wales asked 15 Welsh students the same question and kept a record of the answers):

> **What three things do you first come to think of when you hear the word 'school lunch'?**

The results were presented in the form of mind maps that accounted for both similarities and differences, for example as follows:

Figure 8. Exploration of the concept of 'school lunch' in two contexts

---

[140] Cf. Dysthe (1996) on creating interest and opening up for learning also in a cognitive sense through different preparational activities in order to enable students coming into dialogue with the contents of learning.

As Tornberg (2001) points out (see also discussion in Section 3.1), although words and concepts do not always carry the same meaning in different languages more than on a superficial level (e.g. differing meanings associated to the concept of 'family'), there are hardly any conceptual meanings that are culture specific in the sense that they would be common to all group members. She underlines the individual variation caused by influence of personal experiences in the past as well as change over time as a result of new personal experiences being added. In my teaching during this project I have used some examples of what could be called analysis of semantic fields, e.g. as presented in Figure 8, to exemplify a tendency to difference in the associations to specific concepts between certain groups, an approach that still allows for the important variation within groups to be stressed (see Section 4.3). Obviously, it is impossible to state the distribution of specific connotations, suffice it to say that the tendency should be noticeable enough to be useful and meaningful, and thus the method makes for a tool that shows both difference and diversity at the same time. The purpose is manifold: to become prepared for (conceptual) difference, but at the same time be aware of variation. To this should also be added variations over time, possibly by adding associations of different age-groups to the comparison.

The fieldwork activities served several important purposes: With the ability to decenter as the cornerstone, they encouraged openness and curiosity. Furthermore, they supported the development of learner autonomy, especially the skills of finding, observing and interpreting information, through a teacher-guided reflective work process using authentic material that concretely demonstrated differences and similarities both between and within these target groups. Through reflective activities, including metacognitive discussions, the findings of the fieldwork were used as tools to help students link awareness of diversity and possible modification of stereotypes concerning this *specific* community to awareness of diversity and modifying of stereotypes *in general*.

As we went on, through guided reflections on stereotyped and one-sided concepts of UK society versus the more complex, process view gained during the exploration of British society in their EFL education, the students could gain more awareness of how stereotypes are usually formed when we do not have enough knowledge about other groups, and how negative attitudes can originate from a lack of objectivity concerning our own ways and values. Eventually, the aim is for students to be able to apply the insight that there is diversity within all cultural groups on different levels and that we can respect the differences we meet, even if we do not know very much about them, also in other situations where we would otherwise be quick to pass judgement on people or groups of people.

6.2 Presentation of interviews

Final interviews were conducted with the students in grade 9 (see Table 4 in Section 6.1 for an outline of the different key stages). The purpose of the interviews was to explore and evaluate the project and the educational process concerning the following three Focus areas (see questions in the Interview Protocol in Appendix V):

I. possible development of students' insights[141] concerning different aspects
  of the cultural dimension, particularly regarding
   a) awareness of difference and diversity, including modification of
      stereotypes,
      as well as
   b) the ability to decenter in order to be able to respect such difference.
II. students' awareness and views of activities/approaches and affordances
    both inside and outside the EFL classroom in relation to the intended
    insights.
III. the relevance to students of different aspects of the cultural dimension.

Focus area I could be said to contribute to the evaluation of the project mainly through my interpretation of students' developing insights as they were expressed and argued for in the study. Focus areas II and III primarily contributed to the evaluation through students' own perceptions as they were expressed on a more explicit level.

Naturally, it is difficult for students to know exactly when they develop certain insights, particularly when it comes to insights that might develop gradually and that they most likely learn about from a variety of sources both within and outside school education. To them, the insights are suddenly just there and unless somebody asks for specific issues or work metacognitively and reflectively with them, they do not consciously think about what they know: knowledge and insights become taken-for-granted. As one student put it:

> (...) _now_ I know that that's not the way it is, but it's kind of hard to think back, 'cause it's sort of... well now you know, but not- what did I think back then?

However, with the help of the questionnaires where students have answered questions and reflected on specific issues at different points of the educational process, it has been possible to pin down and reflect on some of their thinking at certain stages in order to trace their developing insights (see further discussion of results in Section 6.3). This approach has probably also helped students to further develop their metacognitive awareness of what we have been treating, through the discussion of specific activities and the learning process.

---

[141] As was previously discussed, in this context the term _insight_ is used to refer to the development of a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects (cf. Larzén, 2005). One dimension of the behavioral aspect explored concerns the ability to apply insights developed through a specific context also in other situations and settings.

In the presentation of the analysis, excerpts from the transcribed interviews will illustrate the variation of different aspects discussed. As was discussed in Section 5.2.3, the variation in views and experience is emphasized more in this study than the individual variation, meaning that the same informant can contribute with several different views. As a consequence, and to protect the anonymity of students (see Section 5.4), the different excerpts are not connected to individual informants in the presentation. In addition, since the views presented constitute the different views of the informants taking part in the interviews and the results cannot be directly generalized to any other population, there have been no attempts at systematically presenting numbers or percentages of different categories of answers. Instead, the presented excerpts have been chosen in an attempt to give such a varied and nuanced description of the results as possible. They have been numbered in the order presented to enable references to and between specific excerpts.

It should be noted that there have been examples of at least one or two students not knowing or having no opinion regarding many of the issues presented in the analysis, although these have not been included as specific excerpts from the interviews. In addition, one of the students wished not to take part in the interview, and I saw no gain in trying to enforce the contribution of this student. However, the reasons for such a reaction would be interesting and important to know more about. I have suggested that in this case it was due to unfulfilled expectations of EFL education.[142] These issues will be further addressed in connection to the presentation of the analysis below.

To better reflect the informal style often used by my informants I have chosen to let the translated language contain typical markers of informal language, e.g. repetitions, hesitations, colloquialisms, and linguistic 'mistakes', whenever used by an informant. Despite the inherent difficulties of defining what constitutes a complete sentence in spoken discourse, I have chosen to use (...) in a quotation to indicate that one or several words from the same sentence are missing, while (---) indicates that one or several sentences are missing from an excerpt. My own questions and comments during the interviews are included within square brackets. Comments added on during the analysis of the interviews to help clarify the informants' statements are added within brackets. The use of a hyphen within an utterance indicates an interruption, often followed by a repetition or rephrasing. Finally, the use of three dots indicates a noticeable pause. However, the length of pauses has not been accounted for. (See also the transcription key in Table 5.)

---

[142] This could include reactions against content that is emotionally too challenging for some students (cf. discussion of *reverse culture shock* e.g. in Section 4.2).

Table 5. Transcription key used in the study

Transcription key:	
- Speakers quoting actual utterances or exemplifying their arguments with imagined ones	" "
- My questions and other utterances within the interview	[]
- Comments and clarifications that have been added on during the analysis	( )
- Word or words missing	(...)
- Complete sentence or sentences missing	(---)
- Noticeable pause	...
- Words expressed with emphasis are underlined.	_____

To give a brief overall summary of how the interviews were conducted[143] with the aim of exploring the three Focus areas stated in the introduction to this section, I first of all looked into what the students had found most useful during EFL lessons and their spontaneous recollections of what we had done. After this, I explored what insights they had gained primarily regarding the cultural dimension, also from specific activities, and eventually students' own reflections on the issues in focus, as well as how they think they would learn these issues best. Naturally, depending on the students' answers and reactions, issues were approached and developed further in somewhat differing directions during individual interview sessions. The recordings and transcripts have been analyzed through repeated listening and focused reading to discern, interpret and categorize answers (see also Section 5.4), and results will be presented below in a manner that reflects the three Focus areas as outlined above. Within each Focus area, different categories of topics will be presented and discussed (see Figure 9 below), each in turn with sub-categories in the form of example excerpts with what I have found to be qualitatively different contents intended to describe the variation in the students' views and insights. These sub-categories are often preceded by a descriptive title or part of the discussion in bold print intended to reflect what I have interpreted these utterances to express or represent, also on a more theoretical level wherever possible in order to connect the analysis with the theoretical considerations of the study (see also Section 5.2.3). The descriptive titles can also aid the reader to discern the suggested nuances of different sub-categories.

---

[143] See also the Interview Protocol in Appendix V.

Focus area I	The ability to decenter
	On stereotypes and their origin
	Awareness of difference
	Awareness of diversity
	Applying awareness and insights to other groups

Focus area II	Awareness of affordances
	On media use at school
	On the contribution of school education

Focus area III	Most important aspects learnt
	Students' views of teacher priorities
	General opinions about contents and methods
	Opinions about cultural contents

Figure 9. Topic categories created from the three Focus areas of the interviews

6.2.1 Focus area I

The ability to decenter

As was previously discussed in Section 6.1.2 in particular, different approaches were used with the aim of developing the ability to decenter and defamiliarize oneself from one's own cultural group in order to reach the distance many people need to be able to see oneself in a new and possibly more objective light.[144] The foundations were laid using a cartoon from a series of comic strip books[145] featuring a group of aliens being greeted by a farmer in a way that is regarded as perfectly normal on earth but that creates a problematic situation when applied to the aliens. This was later followed up by reflections on other behavior we take for granted and the often random nature of this behavior, e.g. applauding in a theatre and our specific use of eating utensils.[146]

Most students could remember the cartoon when I showed it to them, but nobody specifically mentioned it or realizations related to the ability to decenter in their spontaneous recollections before this. Concerning their thoughts on why I had used it during EFL education, there were roughly two different types of answers or combinations of these, besides those who did not venture any suggestions or comments. The most common suggestion was that it was to show that one should not take it for granted that everyone has the same behavior and traditions (cf. topic category *Awareness of difference* below), such as in excerpt 1, and a small number who showed at least some degree of the ability to decenter as exemplified by excerpts 2 and 3, with some even claiming to have considered the issue of whose behavior really is normal a great deal, as in excerpt 3.

(1) **Increased awareness of difference**
[(---) Is it possible to learn something from this... about others-] To not have... preconceived notions and think that everyone does the same things (as we do).

(2) **Ability to decenter: relativizing normality**
But... this is how it works: They think that what they do is normal [But maybe they're wrong, because they're strange. We're the ones who are right] No, not if you think about it! [Why not? How can you think to understand this?] No, 'cause everyone doesn't behave in the same way, I'm sure they think we are completely nuts as well and... sort of...“What the he- what are you doing?”, sort of “What the heck are you up to?” [(---) How can you see this on your own, without some of them coming here telling you this?... What do you have to realize?] Well, that what we do is not normal.

---

[144] See different examples in Excerpts G, I, J, K and M in the Action Log in Appendix I.

[145] *The Far Side* is a popular one-panel comic created by Gary Larson. Its surrealistic humor is often based on uncomfortable social situations, improbable events, an anthropomorphic view of the world, logical fallacies, impending bizarre disasters, or the search for meaning in life. (From *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia)

[146] See Excerpt I in the Action Log in Appendix I.

(3) **Ability to decenter: familiar reflection**
[But don't you think those who behave differently from us can be a bit strange?] No [Why not?] (...) maybe we are the ones behaving... stupidly (short laughter) (---) [What have your thoughts on this been?] I only remember that I've sort of thought of this quite a lot [mm]

Another activity aimed at developing the ability to decenter was attempted through the use of a story[147] about an African student spending a year in Sweden (in Herlitz, 1999; see also Section 6.1.2). This activity gave rise to more reactions than the one previously mentioned, but the students' understanding seemed more unanimous: Either they were still not able to capture the intended message or, more so this time than before, they offered reflections suggesting different degrees of ability to relativize their own way of life through defamiliarization of what they have become used to and take for granted (excerpts 4 and 5):

(4) **Ability to decenter: experience of defamiliarization**
It sounded quite funny, you haven't really thought about what you're doing, 'cause you don't really think about that you're imitating frogs and everything. So it can begin to seem strange to us as well, but we're sort of used to it since this is what we do.

(5) **Ability to decenter: changing between perspectives**
It's everyday behavior to us but it seems really strange to them [(...) what can you think about so you won't think that what they do is strange?] Everything we do is really strange as well.

This insight actually seemed self-evident to a few students:

(6) **Ability to decenter: self-evident insight**
Everyone is strange in one way or another, I suppose [mm, do you think-] in the eyes of someone else. [(---) is this an insight that many people might need, is this something we haven't considered?]... Personally I find it rather obvious [yes] but for some I guess...

Together with those students who failed to remember the story and the intended message, I related the story once more and tried to guide them through a reflective discussion to reach the intended distance from their taken-for-granted behavior. Some agreed such reflections were useful, but few arguments for their views or possible new insights were given. It was obvious that these discussions were on a much more superficial level (see excerpt 7, where the student takes an example from the story in Herlitz, 1999, as the only example without further comment) compared to those students (such as in excerpts 4-6) who I wish to argue had already developed the ability to decenter much further.

---

[147] See Excerpt K in the Action Log in Appendix I.

(7) **Ability to decenter: superficial level**
[Have you ever thought about strange things that we do?] I suppose I have [Can you give any specific... examples, something you've realized that- this is a bit...] Why you should jump around a pole at Midsummer.

Several other interesting reflections could also be pointed to in connection to discussions of these decentering activities. One is the following, on how realizing how strange our traditional behavior can seem makes it easier to accept, and maybe even respect, the foreign behavior of others, although we do not really know the actual background or meaning of their behavior. This comes close to the eventual goal of respect for difference in general:

(8) **Ability to decenter: respect without specific knowledge**
(---) we also think it looks stupid when they stand and scream and jump (short laughter) around some sort of bonfires, but it's the same thing as when this man came to Sweden and we- we have Easter chickens and... (short laughter) and all kinds of May poles and frogs and (...), that's the same thing really (---) [what are your thoughts even if you laugh, what is the insight you get (...)?] Sort of "So that's what they're thinking, OK", that "Well, then maybe (...) it has some specific meaning, they don't just do it because (short laughter) it looks fun but it's sort of their tradition and we have ours and-" [Were you able to sort of see yourself from the outside?] Mm, like I had been this African man, and seen what we're really doing, surely it must have looked really, really stupid.

A few students brought up that one can experience one's own ways and values as strange in relation to others when going abroad (cf. excerpt 74). I find this insight interesting as a variety of what we had been attempting in the classroom, where the focus had been on making strange of the familiar in our own environment; thus, such an experience could be referred to as another type of *reverse culture shock* (see Section 4.2). It should be pointed out, however, that this notion, or the experience of *culture shock* when going abroad, was never discussed as such in the classroom.[148] Whereas the realization brought about by a sense of defamiliarization in one's own environment can be helpful for being able to respect the ways of life of others in general, I would like to suggest that this perspective might include a specific angle of opening up for empathy towards foreigners to our society.[149]

---

[148] See, however, Excerpt G in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[149] I find it interesting to note that both excerpts 9 and 74 are taken from interviews with students that I would describe as having a well-developed ability to put themselves in other people's shoes, an ability that also can be used less constructively through a realization of what can hurt other people's feelings.

(9) **Ability to decenter: making strange of the familiar in a foreign environment**
[(---) How do you see yourself then?] Yes... well what I see myself as is that I see it normal, or like... yes, well, OK, it's not strange here, but maybe when you come to another country (...) then you surely feel a bit strange there when- when everybody else is behaving differently.

One student could connect the reflective work conducted at school with what had been happening in her/his spare time at the time in question:[150]

(10) **Ability to decenter: realization in real life inspired by EFL education**
(---) yes, because on Good Friday night we were sitting by the pavilion, freezing cold with our winter jackets on and- between one and five- no I suppose it was two and six (...) and took turns keeping guard so nobody would light the bonfire the night before- [so you would be able to burn it the following day] yes, sat there freezing, and four o'clock- right in the middle of our morning coffees- we were chasing some people that had tried to burn it down (---) [Were you thinking already then that it was strange, or did it strike you-] No because we were discussing this (in class) at that time, that our own culture could be strange, that's why we reacted, "Actually, we must be pretty crazy to be doing this".

It was previously discussed how the experience of what could be called a reverse culture shock often brought on through decentering activities can be emotionally challenging for some students, since this can be experienced as a threat to one's sense of security or affect one's self-esteem (see Section 4.2). It was suggested that in such cases students can have defense reactions in the form of hostile or angry feelings towards the Others providing this new and threatening perspective, and therefore educational practices could benefit from at least initially employing the more 'neutral' alien perspective. During the interviews none of the students shared any personal experiences of reacting with negative emotions or defensively in connection to feelings evoked by decentering activities, although I had noted some reactions during lessons.[151] However, below are examples of insightful comments on the experience of **challenged self-esteem** at, as I see it, two slightly different levels:

---

[150] See also Excerpt M in the Action Log in Appendix I.

[151] See Excerpts G and L in the Action Log in Appendix I. See also excerpt in Larzén (2005: 124), where a teacher tells about students' negative reactions. It is possible that the example in Larzén is not an example of defense reactions caused by a sense of defamiliarization of what has been taken for granted, but a case of an impopular foreign perspective obstructing the view (see Section 4.2). Still I would like to suggest that this example points to the usefulness of starting to develop the ability to decenter by using the alien perspective. Also, students' reactions in this case would provide a good opportunity for reflections around the fact that prejudiced and racist views do exist in all societies, which still does not warrant their existence (cf. *critical cultural awareness* in Byram, 1997, and the need for awareness of diversity discussed in this study).

(11)

[Can it be terrifying somehow to notice-] I don't know terrifying, but it's sort of... "OK, we're pretty funny as well" [Because sometimes I've noticed that people don't really want to realize-] No you don't really want to be str- see that you will be strange, "Really, I have to understand this, people think we're strange as well".

(12)

It can be because it- it might be that they don't want to know either [No] It- they want- they want for... what we do to be normal and everything else- all other people who do something differently are completely abnormal [Why do you think one might want that?] Because... maybe they realize then that they are not at all normal themselves [yes] and then... [Well how does that feel?] It doesn't feel good for them, I guess [I actually think that many people are afraid of such feelings, because it's like] yes [it sort of-] But it is the same thing with those who hate- or hate these... what should I say colored people [mm] then it's sort of "Us whites are the best, there's nothing better than u- than us whites".

On stereotypes and their origin

In the interviews students generally recognized that certain images of people, including their use of language, are easily created through the media, family and friends as well as school education, particularly textbooks. Other examples than those presented in this topic category can be found throughout the material, in particular excerpts 37, 41 and 45 of the interview material. As was previously mentioned, Forsman (2004a) discussed the relatively more diverse image Finland-Swedish students generally seem to have regarding teenagers in the US compared to the UK: Although their image is not always very realistic, the greater display of e.g. different ethnic, social and religious groups in the US through TV and movies has prevented some possible stereotypes from emerging and also given students at least a sense of actually knowing more about teenagers in the US. The students in this study generally expressed similar views as the ones expressed by the informants in my previous study concerning the **perceived image of people through the influence of different media:**

(13) **The US versus the UK on TV**
Americans, there's such a lot on TV about them, they have so many different shows and all sorts of things (---) there are so few British programs on TV [mm] the ones that are on are just the kind... the kind that doesn't show what they really look like.

 Stereotypes of the UK consolidated through TV

(14)
(---) when you see England they mainly- they look the way you expected them to [mm they're often-] in all TV-series they always have red hair and a well-ironed school uniform.

(15)

[...on TV?] They've been wearing black suits (---) and they've sort of been awfully kind and don't- don't do anything wrong and...

(16) **Stereotypes of the UK through comic books/magazines**

(...) I suppose I really had known that they didn't look like red-haired trolls with short skirts [yes] but it was that image that was always used in comic books [yes] and every darned magazine you always saw even if you sort of knew that they really can't be like that... so-

Some of the informants expressed the view, particularly concerning the US, that perhaps the youth representatives of the English-speaking cultures are not that different from themselves (cf. Forsman, 2004a). For example, teenage fashions spread easily from one culture to another, especially if the socio-economic situations are similar. Although the possibility to find commonalities in this way can be seen as a positive thing, my suggestion is that cultural aspects still need to be addressed, since most similarities might be only on a superficial level and also differ between generations. And, as McGarry (1995) points out, if the target culture is in fact very similar to the students' own culture, students may assume that cultural differences are trivial and superficial matters unless these issues are discussed. McGarry suggests that the students' culture should be seen in the context of a wide range of others, not only *one* target language culture, so that they realize that their own culture is only one of many possible manifestations of human culture. This is also a way of trying to prevent students comparing their own culture to only one other culture that is very foreign to them and concluding that their own is normal and the foreign culture an aberration.

It could be argued that in this group stereotypical images of the US were as common (or as uncommon) as the ones concerning the UK. One possible reason for this could be that relatively more effort had been put on reflecting on the UK context during EFL education,[152] although without students necessarily developing the ability to apply their insights of diversity to other contexts. Often, however, students were able to discuss the image conveyed by the media concerning these countries separately from their own more diversified images, as in the following example:

(17)

[(...) what image from TV?] More than half of (people in the US) are white, pretty fixated on working out and on their own appearance- this doesn't concern everybody but there are lots of stars and stuff- either you're really fit or then you eat at McD's (laughs) (---) In the UK they look more like us in the Nordic countries. (That is, these two clear extremes are not stressed as much through the media neither in the UK nor in the Nordic countries.)

When discussing the image TV and media mediate concerning the UK and the US respectively, the following view constituted a rather interesting

---

[152] See example in Excerpt L in the Action Log in Appendix I.

misunderstanding that I suggest might be corrected by taking it up for reflection among students. This view was not represented in Forsman (2004a):

(18)
You don't consider (...) if they show from a city or something [mm] you see different people, you don't realize that they're all Brits though they look different [mm] 'cause you sort of think- (...) it could be people who're just there in the country for some month working- [OK] and go back [mm] and don't think about that they also might live there.

The British Royal Family that so often is featured in the media all over the world has also influenced the image of British people in general for some of these students:

(19) **Image of people through the Royal Family**
[... not very familiar with the UK...] I think one tends to think about those... royals there sitting and drinking their tea and-

It can also be a question of other chance experiences that remain part of our categorization of the world until something happens that causes changes or further developments:

(20) **Image of people through chance experiences**
[(---) What would you say about Australian teenagers?] I just have this picture of a boy in a pair of worn jeans [Where from-] I met an Australian boy.

In Forsman (2004a) I suggested that the greater familiarity with the language American teenagers use has prevented them from creating stereotypes such as the one about UK teenagers speaking less slang and also made American English more popular in this particular age group. Most students in the current study admitted to connecting the US to slang and the UK to what some described as 'clean language' until sometime in grade 8, when we had started exploring British English more thoroughly. In line with findings in Forsman (2004a), the students suggested that their earlier opinions were a result of them having heard more examples of American English through TV and in movies, whereas the British English they have heard mainly constituted standard school language, thus often regarded as less popular and sometimes referred to as "nice" in the sense of 'posh' and 'lacking slang'. Another reason expressed was the view of British society as generally being more orderly, possibly also mainly due to media influence. The examples below refer to sources such as previous text books or even teacher mediation:

(21) **Linguistic images created through media influence**
I suppose it's because of that poor English book we had in primary school 'cause there it was "yes, please", "no, please" [yes?] and not a single word in... using slang or anything.

(22) **Linguistic images created through school education**
[... but there was no American English slang either?] No, no, but it was still like the teacher told us that in the States they speak more slang than in eeh... England.

Regarding students' concept of the UK as showed in the interviews compared to their previous views, I would like to suggest that their answers generally point to an increased awareness of difference and diversity. However, this awareness can be categorized as concerning qualitatively different aspects of change as well as differing degrees of awareness on an individual level.

Awareness of difference

(23) **Start to question what we take for granted**
[Has your thinking about the UK changed?] Yes... like when we started grade 7,"but they celebrate exactly the same way we do", but they actually have a lot more traditions than we have and we have other traditions than they have.

Without enough awareness of difference on a variety of levels we might take it for granted e.g. that other people have the same holidays and celebrate them in the same way as we do, and thus probably also behave in the same way and have the same values. As was previously discussed (see Chapter 4), insights into difference can be said to constitute one of the first steps towards gaining new perspectives, and they can even start a transformative learning process by challenging ethnocentric worldviews. Other examples of awareness of difference were referred to in relation to the topic category *The ability to decenter*, above.

Awareness of diversity

In Forsman (2004a: 156), along with the display of different stereotypical views, some students complained that EFL education had failed to provide them with the sense of knowing what people in English-speaking countries, particularly British teenagers, really were like (cf. Byram & al., 1991: 118). Such similar views seem to have been at least somewhat modified among these students, as shown by the following:

(24) **People seen as less abstract - more personalized**
[Concerning people in the UK (...) what is your image now, has it changed?] Yes... I suppose they're somewhat more... human. (---) in old English films they're always out partying (...) in nice clothes (---) but they have a lot of other styles, like rap and stuff.

(25) **Multicultural UK**
I hadn't thought of it before that there'd be as many (different nationalities) in England as in (the US).

(26) **Modification of common stereotypic views: drinking tea; weather**
Well, one has had (...) a lot of prejudice and then we've learnt that they don't drink only tea in the morning, sort of, and... it doesn't rain there all the time, you know in that way so that those prejudices, we've learnt that it doesn't always have to be like on TV.

There was also an event close to students' own reality that seemed to have made a considerable contribution towards modifying the image of British people as being very polite in all circumstances (cf. Forsman, 2004a): The story behind this particular change of opinion was the hands-on experience of a boy from the same school who happened to get into a fight during a trip to London (see also Section 6.1.1):

(27) **Modification of common stereotypical views: being polite**
[What changed that image?] (...) gave this guy from- gave him a beating (...)

A stereotypical image that according to my experience has proven particularly persistent is the one mentioned above of a typical British teenager being a well-behaved pupil in a school uniform with a shirt and tie, often including red hair and freckles (see Forsman, 2004a: 120-122 in particular). Also students that otherwise suggested that they did not have stereotypical conceptions of teenagers in the UK recognized this image:

(28) **Modification of common stereotypical views: typical British teenager**
Well... those school uniforms, I used to think everyone was wearing a skirt and stuff at school [yes?] but they actually don't.

Thus, also concerning this stereotypical image many students had modified their views. These more modified views often included the realization that some school uniforms are different from the traditional view of a suit and tie (as in excerpt 29), or the fact that not all students wear a school uniform (as in 30).

(29)
Today I wouldn't say they have red hair and a school uniform (---) they sort of have a uniform but not- not like you'd think.

(30)
[...what did you know about British teenagers before?] Well they had- (girls and boys) went to separate schools and always wore some kind of (...) school costume. [Have this changed then, what do you know now?] Well, I suppose (everyone) doesn't have to wear (the uniform).

Still, when asked to describe British teenagers, the school uniform was the first image that came to some students' minds. This was also the case for the student

in the following excerpt, although s/he otherwise showed development of a certain degree of awareness considering the use of different registers within British English (see further on linguistic awareness below):

(31)
School uniform (short laughter)... and sort of... how can I explain it... like an ordinary person really [mm] only they speak sort of slang... it sounds more like slang although it isn't. (The student refers to British teenagers sounding different on TV and in reality than the language used during English lessons, without speaking American slang.)

Despite the persistent image of the school uniform, to me the above example still seems like a step in the right direction, considering that this student belonged to those who previously insisted that British teenagers do not speak any slang.

However, although the concept of young people in the UK had been somewhat modified, there were also examples of considerations of how this was mainly on a more abstract level of awareness, i.e. students felt that they still did not know actual people behind the modified images:

(32) **More work to be done to really know**
Probably we think we know a little bit, but they are <u>still</u> somewhere [yes] behind a wall somehow.

In connection to this discussion of stereotyped versus modified images of certain groups of people, it should be noted that there were also a few examples of students spontaneously expressing an awareness of a more diverse concept of groups of people in general:

(33) **Always diversity in groups**
[But if you had to say something to describe (British people)?] Well... I don't know, it's difficult to describe how (...) groups of people- I mean (people) all look different.

I would also like to suggest that the following discussion, although reflecting awareness of the multiethnic nature of the US and the UK respectively, suggest that a group of people is hard to describe without reverting to at least some degree of generalization or rather use of tendencies (cf. discussion in Section 4.3):

(34) **Generalization used with awareness**
[... difference between an American and a British teenager?] No idea, they're... they certainly speak differently but- and- I don't know... I suppose they're pretty similar really [mm] even if you think they're very different... [... when you find it difficult to describe them, is it because you don't know at all] no [or is it something el-] no I don't know <u>how</u> to explain them [yes] I know what they're like, but I don't know how to explain them in a specific way... [Is there anything (...) if you compare if you'd look outside into the corridor (...) what could be different (...)?] You know in (an) American

(school) there're more a- a- like blacks and stuff that are- we don't really have that around here [Yes, what about the UK, if you'd look-] I suppose they're not that many that are- there're more from India and stuff there. They're not that many bla- that are completely black [but you still think that there-] There are still foreigners there and... different...

Most students showed development at least concerning the awareness of slang existing also in British English when comparing their answers to the questionnaires in grade 7 and in the final interviews. In connection to this it is interesting to note that in the initial questionnaires the preference for American over British English was obvious (cf. Forsman, 2004a), but in the final discussions this view had been modified for many students, often into no specific preference.

The following spontaneous comment of one student in connection to commenting on what s/he has found to be particularly important or useful to learn shows some of this development:

(35) **Awareness of different registers**
Well, we have this what we could call "school English", but then- then we've been watching these movies, these dialects come in [mm] and so we get to learn some slang words as well [mm] compared to (only) learning the school language- when you come to the country in question they have lots of slang and then you don't understand a thing (...) we've learnt quite a few slang words.

To give a brief account of what had been done on the topic of increased awareness of different registers during EFL lessons, we had watched some video clips with different examples of British slang, and then worked with brief transcriptions where students had "translated" the slang into standard English; reflected on the existence of different registers in all languages, as well as the relative usefulness of slang versus standard language in different situations, e.g. by pointing to examples in movies[153], including comparisons with the use of dialects and standard language in the students' own language; revised previous insights when using song lyrics, which basically always contain some elements of slang, i.e. also explaining and commenting on the particular context where slang is used, without ever putting one variety or register above others. Thus, we did not learn slang in the sense one usually refers to when talking about learning a language; instead, the aim has been to increase students' awareness of its general existence and usefulness in different contexts. This approach of consciously bringing in elements of slang and at the same time avoiding evaluative comments on different registers has possibly contributed to these students experiencing little need for protests against the standard language used at school or connecting school language to British standard language only.[154]

---

[153] See also example in Excerpt L in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[154] This, in comparison to previous experiences, as well as the findings in Forsman (2004a), where a perceived gap between the English language used at school and outside

A few students thought they still would not be able to recognize British English from American confidently, whereas some of them stated that they knew the one from the other but still found the difference hard to pinpoint with certainty. They suggested finding clues concerning variety of English in the use of different word pairs of the type pupil-student, headmaster-principal that had been dealt with in class, and familiar pronunciation distinctions of the type [dɑ:ns]-[dæns] for 'dance'. One student even suggested listening for slang words such as 'dude' and different words for drugs that s/he knew in American English but not in British(!).

The concluding excerpt below might not seem spectacular at first glance. However, I would suggest that it shows significant development, considering the fact that in grade 7 this student, who has also been faced with considerable challenges with respect to language learning during the years, could not confidently differ between British and American standard English. In addition s/he had not been aware of the existence of slang in British English. The excerpt includes the view also found in Forsman (2004a) of British English, particularly of the kind usually not found in textbook materials, as being more difficult to pronounce, most probably because of its relative unfamiliarity. This is connected with the fact that most students found it difficult to give examples of movies or TV-programs where they regularly hear British English. This unfamiliarity is probably also the reason why British English in my experience is often described as 'strange' by teenage students (cf. Forsman, 2004a, and comparison with other ninth-graders discussed in Section 6.3).

> (36)
>
> *[Do you think you can notice the difference if it is British English that maybe educated people speak, without slang, or the kind of slang language that maybe young people use for example (...)?] mm, a little, it depends, sometimes I think I can a little... [mm, have you heard on TV or?] Yes, on TV, and we have sort of- we have some English channels at home, where they usually speak slang, I've heard there [yes?] when they show this Big Brother[155] on the English channel, then I've been sitting and listening to that and then there's been different types of English [mm... and you can hear that it is different English from American English then?] mm [What- can you sort of explain (...) how do you know that it isn't American?] [---] There's more*

it included the view that school language equals written British English (see also Section 1.3 and the case study below).

[155] *Big Brother* is a popular reality television format, where, over 15 weeks or so, a number of contestants (typically 12) try to avoid periodic publicly-voted evictions from a communal house and hence win a cash prize. The show (. . .) has been a prime-time hit in almost 70 different countries (. . . .) The show's name comes from George Orwell's 1949 novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four* in which Big Brother is the all-seeing leader of the dystopian Oceania. (From *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia)

The show was first aired on British Channel 4 in the summer of 2000: A group of strangers were sealed off from the outside world in a house without television, radio or the internet - but with a battery of cameras following their every move. The contestants were usually in their early twenties, and different British accents and registers, including slang, could be heard.

sort of strange (short, insecure laughter) pronunciation in it I think [In which of them?] Eeh, not... American, (but) British [mm, what do you mean by strange so I understand what you mean?] It's sort of- you know- more difficult to pronounce I think.

Applying awareness and insights to other groups

In connection both to the discussions exploring the ability to decenter and the students' awareness of diversity, I tried to explore their ability to apply such insights also to groups outside the specific British context.

One concrete question was whether students had started to think differently about any other people or group of people in connection to what we had done in EFL education. Most students declined, but the few spontaneous answers I did get included Roma, Muslims and Native Americans, all groups that had been the focus of at least some discussions in class:

(37) **Roma**
[Have you started thinking differently about any other group of people (...)?] Any group? [Yes, just what you...] That would be these poor Gypsies we have. (---) I personally have never been afraid of them the same way everybody else seems to be, but the thing is that gran and grandma and mum and dad and everybody else is afraid of them so that's why you're not even allowed to say hi, it's sort of "You shouldn't mix with those people". (---) [But our discussion sort of confirmed what you had been thinking?] Yes, yeah, 'cause I've always sort of "Why are you so afraid of them?", sort of "Not everyone is a thief, there are those who do steal but why do you have to blame everybody because of them?" [mm] But it's always been like "That's the way those people are" [mm] You can't change the way they think anymore...

(38) **Muslims**
Yes, like when we watched a documentary (...) they were Muslims... I guess, these people who have their heads covered, but everybody doesn't have that, although some really "Girls mustn't show their hair" and- what is it, their mouth or whatever, and their body, but [Only their eyes?] yeah, but there are Muslims who still do that, like if you think about Sweden, everybody doesn't walk around wearing those veils and whatever they're wearing.

(39) **Native Americans**
Mm well... those Indians. [You've thought about them?] yeah [What about them?] Like before I thought they were sort of... abducting people and... doing abracadabra and (laughs) they don't really. [But we haven't really done that much around them] No but- [You've still started to think differently about them?] Yes.

The first excerpt could rather be used to illustrate how school education can contribute towards confirming what some students already think, providing them with (new) arguments, or simply putting words on their feelings.

In excerpt 39 it turned out to be a combination of awareness-raising during EFL lessons and media influence that had contributed to further modifying the previously stereotypical picture. Since we dealt so little with the topic during lessons, I would also like to suggest that this is a question of being able to apply specific insights to other situations (see also below).

Otherwise most students admitted to having problems with applying their insights to the Roma. This also concerned students among those whom I would describe as the less prejudiced students, although they themselves recognized the illogicality of this behavior:

(40)
[(...) did you feel that we are a bit strange as well (...)] Surely we are a bit strange but- [yes] isn't everyone? [But do we realize that or do we only think that others are strange?]... Well I don't know about that, at least I haven't seen anybody else as strange [yes] really, everyone has (their) cultures and religions [But did you recognize what we discussed about Roma (...) that it is a group that people often have very negative-] Yes, I did recognize that [yes] (---) I don't know, you sort of... it's hard not to react when someone enters [mm] in a big skirt and stuff... but... if you really think about it they're not dangerous [mm] sure there are [yes] some who go around stealing stuff (---) [What should you think about then?] That everyone isn't the same... even if you look the same [yes, but how do you really get this?] It's just something you have to be able to think inside your head.

(41)
I find that hard [Yes?] because (...) surely they are normal as well [mm, in their own way] Yes, the way they live, but it's like, you've heard so many rumors that they steal, about what they do, but I'm sure there are mean Gypsies and then there are awfully kind ones. (---) But surely when we discussed it some of it stuck in your mind, but still you're left with this feeling... sort of "What is that?"

Concerning whether it would be possible to apply insights gained in specific contexts also to other groups, some students saw the possibilities on a more abstract level:

(42) **Specific awareness generally applied**
[Do you think you can apply this awareness also to other groups?] Yes... that everybody doesn't have to be the same just because they belong to the same family or people or... whatever they belong to [Why is it good to realize this?] (...) so you won't believe that everyone does (...) because it's wrong too, to believe that everybody does the same thing while only a few of them do.

(43) **Applying authentic examples of others' beliefs about us**
I'm sure it's possible [mm] you know at least a little bit about all countries [mm] and have- believe lots of things, but it's like, sort of when I spoke to a friend who has a friend in England and he had said since- since we have saunas he said "Are you rich?" [yes] "No?", it's sort of everyone in Finland has a sauna and... and then he asked "Do you use birch whisks and grill

sausages?", "No". He assumed all sorts of things, and that's not the way it (is).

(44) **Applying the perspective of something familiar**

[How can you remember (applying these insights) concerning other groups even if you know nothing about them?] (...) it's like if someone would say to me all the time that "Oh, you're not in the sauna every night?", "Noo" - but I guess one sort of has to start thinking on one's own then.

(45) **Get the facts straight**

(...) mm, but if you hear about a new group that they say stuff about, like for example that they... always have red curtains in their windows or something [mm] like that, what you can do then is to check... for example on the internet to see... if it really concerns all of them!

Others gave more **concrete and detailed** examples showing the ability to change perspective and realizing that what others do is normal to them:

(46)

(...) we might have normal- or let's say "normal" clothes then [Yes, exactly, mm] But like for example in Africa maybe they have these baggy dresses and other these kinds that- Muslims also have- and then they have those dress- [---] those Indian ones- we had- [a sari] yes, we had one of those that you showed... and then we've watched a movie, then we saw... [Was it Bend it Like Beckham (...)?] mm [Can you use (this insight) in real situations? (---) How do you think then?] Yes, but sort of if someone comes here to this country if there's a war in their country, so then they come here and feel totally like outsiders, but we must have- how can I say, sort of accept that the way they live... so they don't have to live according to what we do, they can have their own way of dressing and eat what they- yes eat their own food and not what we eat [But there are so many people who don't accept that, you know that] mm [(---) why don't people understand that?] They have a certain ha - or they can feel a certain hatred towards them, they don't want... other-other people into the country because they... they sort of... see that... we sort of embarrass Finland, sort of "You're not normal".

(47)

(...) they didn't only speak English(...) they had- what was it- Welsh, we only understood- the longest word they had was only sort of a lot of consonants in our eyes [Yes that's right] a lot of letters they had just thrown together that you couldn't make anything out of... and we sort of... "And they read that!" [yes] so I'm sure there are those who when they start looking at our long words they go "That's only a bunch of letters too that have been thrown together!" sort of, "But that's just totally common!", and they just "But so is ours!"

It should be noted concerning the example with the Welsh language, this specific angle of looking at our language from a different perspective was never discussed during EFL education.

However, several students still thought it would not be possible to apply their insights to other groups in general without learning more about them or having actual experience of the others (cf. *Suggestions for experiential learning* below):

(48) **Experienced need for specific knowledge**
I suppose you have to find out some things first, the first time you see them you get a certain impression, but if you find out more you'll realize "So that's the way it is".

The above might be true for many individuals, those who are cognitively oriented in particular, although it might also be the result of students simply being **more used to modifying their views through expanding their knowledge** than to applying insights gained in specific contexts to other situations:

(49)
(---) I heard someone say that they beat people up [mm] so that's why I thought they were strange, but then I've met lots of them (laughs) [yes] (and) they're actually not (strange).

Other students did not understand my question until I guided them through some examples. This included starting with their modified view of certain aspects of the UK, and then moving on to discussing the possibilities of asking oneself whether other groups also could be somewhat different from one's initial concepts. Here the following reason why such modification had been possible concerning people in the UK, but not with another group of people that the student had expressed negative views about came up:

(50) **Modification through lack of affective involvement**
Yes, but the Brits didn't bother me from the beginning.

I find the previous comment significant in that it points towards the difference between modifying stereotypes and prejudice: Due to the affective involvement concerning prejudice (see Section 3.2), such views are harder to modify than those involving cognitive stereotypes simply based on a lack of knowledge of the people or group in question. Therefore, to apply insights based on the modification of stereotypes or negative opinions on a fairly disengaged and superficial level, e.g. concerning people in the UK in the case of these students, to other groups becomes particularly difficult when there is the addition of deep-rooted negative attitudes, such as in the case of their prejudiced views towards the Roma. My conclusion here is that not only do we need to put more effort into applying insights gained from modified stereotypical views to other contexts, but also into actually succeeding in modifying prejudiced views and thereafter also working towards applying such insights in other contexts.

I further found that a few students seemed to have taken my message to be that we have to like everybody and everything within all other groups. At an early stage I had decided not to put emphasis on the exploration of more in-depth

issues such as underlying values for specific target language groups since I considered there would already be a wide variety of issues to choose from of more immediate interest to this specific age group. Instead we discussed some issues on a more general level, e.g. issues such as differences in terms of how educational opportunities are distributed within a society. Relatively more emphasis was put on what could be called a 'general diversity aspect', e.g. on how people generally can find issues that they regard as positive and negative within all groups and societies, including their own. The basis for this was the development of respect for difference in general[156] through a more objective view of our own ways and values. However, on the basis of some of the answers, my conclusion is that critical cultural awareness[157] in the form of reflections about the existence of both positive issues and problems in all groups could have been further stressed (see also discussions in Sections 3.3, 3.5.2 and 4.2):

(51) **Need for more critical cultural awareness**
No, well, I suppose it's possible (that everyone is not the way I thought), but I will still be of the opinion that some of them are mean.

Another less successful example concerns a student who, evidently much as a result of having watched Michael Moore's movie *Bowling for Columbine*[158], claimed that every single American owns a weapon. The student did not modify these views through my suggestions that s/he should compare this e.g. to the fact that although many people in Finland have a sauna, it is not true to say that everybody does; according to this student we actually do!

The guided reflections were more successful in other cases, such as the following concerning Muslims through analogy with diversity within the student's own group:

(52)
[(...) if we try to reason, that everyone isn't necessarily the way you picture them, what could we say about (Muslims)?] No, everybody doesn't <u>have to</u> be that religious, because we're not either [no] of course there are people who are super religious... and... they believe in and have read the Bible several times sort of, but like... us, us ordinary like <u>me</u> for example [mm] I certainly don't go to church every Sunday.

---

[156] Insights regarding respect for difference in general was not directly explored in Forsman (2004a); however, through the previously mentioned stereotypical and sometimes negative images used concerning British people and British English, it could be implied that there is room for development in this area.

[157] See brief examples of how this aspect was treated in Excerpts G-I in the Action Log in Appendix I.

[158] The title of Moore's movie from 2002 comes from a school shooting at Columbine High School in Littleton, Colorado in 1999, when two teenaged boys both killed others and committed suicide. The boys were supposed to have bowling as the first lesson of the day when the tragic events took place.

My conclusion here is that some students seemed to have modified previous stereotyped images, and the insights gained through this process were possible to use, to differing degrees, for reflecting on how to further apply their new insights in other contexts. However, for other students the educational experiences mainly contributed to their development of knowledge of the UK in the first place, and consequently this process did not include the same degree of realization through modified views. This means that for the latter groups it was even more of a challenge to develop the ability to apply insights to other contexts; they were more dependent on specific knowledge for realizing difference and diversity and respecting such difference for each specific group they would encounter.

6.2.2 Focus area II

Awareness of affordances

As was discussed in Section 4.1, the notion of *affordance* in the context of language learning can be said to be used to replace the older term 'input' and refers to the 'relationship between properties of the environment and the active learner' (van Lier, 2000: 257). van Lier argues that language emerges out of semiotic activity, i.e. the focus is on the opportunities for meaningful action that the situation affords, not on the amount of available or comprehensible input. An active and engaged learner will perceive linguistic affordances and use them for linguistic action (pp. 252-257). In Forsman (2004a) it was suggested that many students would benefit from making more use of affordances such as different media, literature and song lyrics in their spare time. During the interviews many students were able to reflect on their development of both linguistic knowledge and cultural insights and the way these had come about and still continued to develop through making use of affordances. For example, these students had all become aware of the use of song lyrics.[159] Of particular interest to me were examples where students had continued to learn about certain issues and/or make use of affordances after we had first focused on them at school.[160] (See also excerpt 39 for an example concerning *Applying awareness to other groups*.)

Continued use of affordances

(53)
In the summer I wrote down words[161] and looked them up or looked for them on the internet (---) remember them better if I find them on my own.

(54)
Earlier I didn't understand that much English so I watched Swedish television and stuff [yes] but then when I started watching English programs and sort of... well for example "Emmerdale" or whatever it's called [mm] they often said sort of "got". (Pronounced with an attempt at a glottal stop, a

---

[159] See Excerpt C in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[160] See e.g. Excerpts A-C in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[161] Cf. Excerpt A in the Action Log in Appendix I.

linguistic phenomenon that had been dealt with when we explored features that students could try to notice in British English).

(55)
[(...) because of something we've dealt with in class?] You could say it's sort of both [mm] what I've sort of watched at home and what we've done at school (--) And after we saw (Ali G) at school [mm] when it was on TV at home I usually watch it. (This concerns increased awareness of different registers in British English: In the questionnaire in grade 8 this student still suggested that there is less slang in British English, although with somewhat more hesitation than in the explorative questionnaire in grade 7.)

When asked to compare learning at school versus outside it about topics such as what people are like in the target countries and the varieties and registers of language these people use, the importance of the media was stressed:

The media as affordance versus school education

(56)
TV- we're so- so much affected by TV [yes] 'cause that's what you're watching and... and in the (text) books they don't tell you anything specific about what people are like but there it sort of just goes on with what they're dealing with.

(57)
(On the difference between seeing clips of *Ali G* on TV compared to the teacher telling about the existence of slang also in British English:) *When you- I think you don't take it so- sort of seriously then, but (it is different) when you see it on TV with your own eyes.*

However, the above examples also suggest the need for critical media awareness (see e.g. Forsman, 2004a), although the usefulness of different media, TV in particular, as a resource for learning also becomes obvious (cf. the discussion of the use of the movie *Bend It Like Beckham* below).

On media use at school

In the interviews I tried to find out what students could remember having learnt about the UK from specific activities or events. First of all, the following listing of activities and events is a result of the student considering **different approaches we had used** when trying to work on the modification of stereotypical views:

(58)
[But... how do you learn that then, to realize?] But take us for example, when we've watched... what have we done... we've at least seen, we've been reading, and then we've had visitors from Wales, and then we've learnt about their school, and then we've talked about other schools as well and then

we've watched TV, a documentary or whatever it was... like for example... that not everyone in the UK wears those school uniforms.

Of these different activities I was particularly interested in the students' recollections of the movie *Bend It Like Beckham*, since I could see its possible usefulness for providing students with a more diversified and realistic visual image of multicultural Britain and young people close to their own time and age.[162] Many students were not able to say anything substantial about what insights they had gained from watching the movie without my probing. This was to be expected, considering that we watched it as far back as in grade 7. However, the following excerpt is a representative example of how the discussions went, and in my opinion shows the **possibilities of the movie to contribute towards the intended insights**:

(59)
[(...) Bend It Like Beckham] mm [(...) what did they look like, and what were they wearing?] They looked like ordinary people (---) the girl that started to play came from India, didn't she? (with hesitation)... and... at school they... didn't wear uniforms, did they? [no] they wore normal clothes [Did the girl look the way you had thought they would look in England (...)?] It was only the color that changed a little... nothing else, I guess.

Further on, the interviews gave me the insight that many students, as a result of seeing or being shown a more heterogeneous image, do not automatically realize that people with foreign appearance can be part of the society in question (see below and also excerpt 18 for a further example). This is yet another example that shows the **need for reflective discussions** about different experiences.

(60)
[(---) can you remember anything of (the movie), anything that changed your view of how... people looked in England, or how England-] They look like completely ordinary people like we do sort of... I don't think- really... they were like us, they like playing certain things and- and they watch TV (short laughter) [mm] (---) [Mm... did you think about her- the main character there, she didn't really look like- usually look like when you look outside in the corridor here-] No but she was from another country, wasn't she? [Yes, but did you think about that in connection to England that-] No, actually there are foreigners in all- all countries [mm] that have fled from countries that might've been in war or whatever they've been doing [but have you thought about it before when you've been thinking about people in England, that there's a lot of dark-skinned for example (...)] Yes- no I haven't thought about the foreigners, no.

---

[162] See Excerpt L in the Action Log in Appendix I.

On the contribution of school education

We also considered whether school education really can contribute to the development of different aspects of the cultural dimension and more respectful attitudes towards difference in particular. In this part of the analysis in particular I find many similarities with what Dysthe (1996) discusses concerning the multivoiced classroom, where the basis for learning is its dialogic nature, both through an approach where many sources of knowledge are utilized, but also through students being involved in a dialogue both with the teacher, each other, and the contents of what they are to learn, including their own learning process.

Students generally recognized different fears towards the unknown that some have as one factor that can hinder such development (cf. excerpts 11 and 12 in topic category *The ability to decenter*), fears that psychological research suggests are connected to one's self-esteem (see e.g. in Doyé, 1999: 38, 53). A further similar opinion is that a certain degree of openness is a prerequisite:

> (61) **Importance of openness**
> *Mm... at least it doesn't work to sit there not wanting to learn [mm] (...) because then you don't take anything in [mm] instead you need to be sort of... open if one can put it that way [mm] and sort of look around for different things.*

Many of the students considered what we had been doing during EFL education useful when it comes to promoting respect towards difference.[163] The following suggests some of the **dialogic nature of the process**:

> (62)
> *Well, it does help, you bring it up, and other stuff that we've thought about and that we think about.*

The following excerpts suggest that these students at least partly attribute some of the development away from stereotypical and prejudiced views and towards more awareness of difference and diversity, as well as respect towards such difference, to EFL education, although they find it difficult to point to specific activities or events:

> **The usefulness of EFL education**

> (63)
> *(...) I guess it's what I myself have put into my head and then I've believed it as well, that there is no other way (of doing things/organizing life/behaving) sort of [OK but how do you learn that this is not the way it is (...)?]... In primary school we didn't discuss more than (linguistic aspects) sort of, it's not until now, when we started to have you (---) I did think that British people were strange in the beginning, when I sort of- before I learnt that they sort of- they don't all drink tea and they don't all have red hair- [But some of them do, do you think they are strange then?] No [Why not?] Well, anyone*

---

[163] This in addition to the examples of development discussed in Focus area I.

could have red hair (...) it runs in the family [But why did you think it was strange at first... then?]... Well... that's sort of something that's stuck to your brain, something you have as prejudice that... this is the way it is here and that is the way it is there and [mm... Yes, but you still claim that what we've been doing in English has had some effect then?] Yes [Explain to me what's happened in your brain or your feelings or something, what-] We've learnt about lots of different cultures and (...) everybody isn't the same [mm] there <u>are</u> different types- (---) it's fun to learn about- about other people.

(64)
I do think that most of us have started to realize- that we don't see only the read-haired person anymore [mm]... [But you can't really say from what specifically-](---) It's not just one specific thing, like <u>that</u> in particular, but general stuff.

I would also like to suggest that excerpts 63 and 64 show how the **images of others** emerging through socialization, just like those of ourselves, often are taken for granted and **need to be questioned**. The educational process seems to have helped students to start discerning the actual people behind these images (cf. discussion concerning *Suggestions for experiential learning* below).

The following excerpt lists several reasons why repeated efforts are necessary in the classroom:

(65) **Individual needs for revision and repeated efforts**
(...) sometimes there's such a lot that needs to be taken in, and then- then one might not hear everything, and then one might sit and day-dream (---) eventually some get bored: "We've talked about this a million times already!" and others are like "What?" (laughter) yeah, it's like- there are people like that in the group, that's for sure.

However, several students suggested that **school education is not enough**, particularly considering the fact that they meet with so many negative attitudes towards certain groups of people in their daily lives:

(66) **Conflicting messages**
[How do you know what to believe then?] Well, it's... it's just- one has to start thinking then, who should I trust, myself, what I've heard or what- what you (i.e. the teacher) say then [mm] one has to- maybe one starts finding out something on one's own then as well, ask different people as well, so maybe one's opinions change [You might not immediately at least...?] No, I don't think one would change at once, sort of "OK, that was then and now it's like this".

The above excerpt suggests some possibility for the development of an **ability for autonomous learning** (cf. also excerpt 61 above), e.g. by finding out about other cultural groups instead of trusting stereotypical images (cf. Byram's *savoir apprendre/faire*, see e.g. Section 3.2).

Suggestions for experiential learning

Many of the students repeatedly reflected on the distinction between teachers 'teaching about' what people are like and students experiencing this for themselves. These experiences also seem to be considered by the students from different perspectives, placed both in the present and in the future and in different locations of learning (cf. Figure 4 in Section 3.2). Because of their relative importance (see theoretical discussion in Section 4.1), I have included such suggestions here as a separate sub-section within the discussion of the contribution of school education for developing aspects of intercultural competence, under the heading *Suggestions for experiential learning*.

Many students suggested that it would be helpful, even necessary, to get to know people from other cultural groups in order to make people understand that you cannot really say anything about others until you know them better. This could be either in the form of educational experiences at school (excerpt 68) or an out-of-school experience (69). Excerpt 67 does not suggest the location of learning, but it is interesting through its reference to a dialogic and reciprocal approach.

Personalizing through one's own experiences

(67)
It would be much easier if you could meet someone in person and get to ask all sorts of things, and what they think about us and...

(68)
[... Is it possible to work with this somehow (that not everyone in a country is the same)?] I suppose you could. [How could you do this?] You have to meet them first [mm] and see what kind of guys they are.

(69)
... you simply have to go meet the people yourself [yes] go working or something and- whatever.

A concrete example of an experience in the present was the previously mentioned example of the boy from the same school who happened to get into a fight during a trip to London (see also Section 6.1.1), which seemed to lead to the modification of the image of British people as being very polite in all circumstances.

Another example of these students experiencing an authentic part of another culture was through the previously mentioned visit from Wales by a couple of students and a few of their teachers when the students in the study were in grade 8 (see also Section 6.1.1). However, the visiting students were primary school students, meaning that the students were not as interested as they would have been in visitors of their own age group. Thus, they did not feel that they really came much closer to young people from the UK from this experience. Furthermore, it was noticeable that some of the students had turned the few facts they had learnt about the visitors into a stereotyped concept, or were strengthened in their already stereotyped images, e.g. the fact that the visiting students were not allowed by their school rules to come to the school with dyed hair was taken as further evidence of the image of Britain as an exceptionally

orderly society (cf. students' lack of awareness of slang in British English) and the description of British students as well-behaved and polite. Not even the fact that the students from Wales were not wearing school uniforms in the traditional sense, but dark trousers and sweaters in the school colors had modified the stereotyped image of a British student for everybody:

(70)
[If we go back to that school uniform, how would you describe it?] Mm, skirts for girls and a blazer and a white sweater and a tie. [Mm, do you at all consider now that maybe they don't all have] mm [that kind, or do you still picture that kind of uniform?]... Sort of [Do you remember the students from Wales, they didn't have that kind?] mm [But you thought-] Now I only remember they weren't allowed to dye their hair.

However, others were able to reflect on how this experience could turn into stereotyping and suggest how to deal with it:

(71) **Need for reflection**
But it's actually not (the whole picture)! [... that's why I was thinking about (...) even if you see something (...) you should realize that's not everything there is] Yes, so you should both see [what's there- mm] and then you'd have to talk about it [mm and discuss it] yes.

There were also other examples of students who had realized the benefits of **regularly occurring reflective work** in class in order to develop different insights:

(72)
[... how to get everyone to understand this, to see themselves from a distance and- and realize that you might not be the center of the universe?] But these pictures[164] for example, and we always sit and discuss... and we still do. We learn something new every day when we use- have these pictures, and we remember from grade 7 and 8, and we have it again... eventually it will stick in your mind.

Concerning the ability to decenter, there were suggestions of possible other qualities and abilities involved than e.g. mechanical performance or application of rules (cf. Kohonen, 2005; see also Section 4.1):

(73) **Need for emotional engagement**
Is it enough to be able to think these things (...) or do you need a certain feeling (...) is it a question of logical understanding-] No but- you must feel it as well, otherwise... [mm] it would be just like <u>doing</u> (short laughter) something.

---

[164] The student refers to different pictures/cartoons that the teacher has collected to use e.g. to tune in to topics, illustrate arguments, or revise previous topics.

Again, inspired by the decentering activities and surrounding discussions, some students were also able to see themselves in a situation where they would be the outsiders, experiencing the need to accommodate to the behavior of others (cf. *reverse culture shock*, see above and Section 4.2):

(74)
(...) and when I come there I want to greet them, maybe they sort of sit down on the ground and greet me or something, it's like... then you'll notice for sure that what I do is pretty funny compared to what they do [(...) how would you feel then coming - and then you notice...] Well not- you'd want to learn to behave like the others so you won't be so out...

Humor was seen as an important approach by most students, as it works to motivate, engage and open up people's minds:

(75) **Importance of humor**
[Do you find this to be a good way of getting students to understand this, to read this kind of story?] You open up to everything that is funny.

In addition, I looked into whether students had more tips and ideas about what might help improve educational efforts and students' development. Concerning how to learn to respect other ways of life and habits that we find funny or strange, several students suggested that we could try them ourselves, "maybe we'll enjoy it". If people still found these habits strange, several students suggested asking them whether not dancing around a tree inside at Christmas time is strange. This suggestion was clearly inspired by the story about the African in Sweden[165], although no Christmas tree was mentioned in the story. However, one student claimed to have thought about similar things before:

(76)
I guess I've been thinking a little bit myself about stuff like that when I've found someone- something strange and then I guess I've thought about [mm] how we- holidays and stuff [mm] then you sort of realize it's sort of (short laughter)...

A further idea was also inspired by the above-mentioned story:

(77)
Film us when we jump like frogs!

Possibly filming students involved in certain traditional behavior or everyday events would be a useful way of helping more students, including those who find it difficult to reflect on abstract ideas, to distance themselves from their own traditions in a very concrete manner. One student suggested that it would be useful simply to show even more examples of difference in the EFL classroom.

---

[165] See Excerpt K in the Action Log in Appendix I and Section 6.1.2 above.

Another useful student suggestion was to encourage students to find out more on their own about issues that they have stereotyped or clashing opinions about, e.g. by using the internet. I suggest this would enable more students to gain insights that might contribute towards modifying stereotyped views on a more individual level compared to whole-class projects focusing on specific groups, which was the main approach used within the current study (see discussion of students' differing preconceptions and its possible consequences for gaining the intended insights in Section 6.3 below). A similar approach was suggested to involve disinterested or reluctant students in work with cultural content:

> (78) **Importance of personal involvement**
> *They can find-... look for something within that language or culture that they are interested in (and) then they can read about <u>that</u>, then something new might arise from that.*

The following excerpt on how to work with different texts alludes to the **usefulness of both revision and reflection**, through the use of references to previously learnt material in a true constructivist manner(!):

> (79)
> *(...) and then you can sort of ask "Did you notice that this sort of fits in here and that fits there?"... and... sort of "We've talked about that, haven't we?" and... "Yes, we actually have", so- so then maybe it'll eventually stick.*

It also seems probable, as one student related, that s/he has grown to be respectful towards difference due to having been friends with a disabled person all the way from kindergarten. Similar experiences of other students included siblings with different disabilities. According to one of these students, even if one is not disabled, being different and an outsider in other ways can disable a person and that is something people should realize and empathize with. Possibly younger generations growing up in more ethnically and in other ways more heterogeneous settings will develop more respectful and empathic attitudes in a similar way as these students who have become used to difference and diversity almost to the point that they take it for granted. However, in settings where this is not possible, other means of promoting development of e.g. respect and empathy will have to be attempted.

Finally, I was interested in students' thoughts concerning when they actually listen to a teacher with a message such as respect for difference. One important issue was that **the teacher is engaged**[166] **and in-the-know** (cf. Dysthe, 1996: 239):

> (80)
> *The person in question needs to know what he or she is doing and not just stand there reading from a paper, not having a clue about it herself (...) not just taken it from someone who's told him that "Read this to the class, this is*

---

[166] Cf. my experiences of perhaps being too much engaged in Excerpt M in the Action Log in Appendix I.

good" and- [OK, so you have to feel somehow that it is-] this is important, that you don't just... copy something right off- write down a couple of sentences in a notebook and read it and that's it, but... [yes] the teacher cares about it as well.

For some, **engagement** was more important than whether the topics discussed and arguments are based on the teacher's personal experiences:

(81)
I don't know about (personal experience), but you know, the teacher should be interested [mm] and not completely bored by what you're about to discuss.

Other saw the possibilities in the teacher relating her/his **own experiences**, interestingly enough through a suggested dialogue with students and not only through transmission:

(82)
I think that since you've been to England and seen certain things, then I think it's good that you actually tell about that... and that you- you sort of ask "What do you think about this?" and then we say something..."Yes, that might be, but actually it isn't", sort of "I've actually <u>seen</u> it".

Finally, some students realized that dealing with issues related to affective development might be problematic for those who do not trust or like the teacher in question. Therefore, it would be useful if as many teachers as possible were involved. Consequently, there were also suggestions concerning **other school subjects** that students found suitable for such education:

(83)
(...) in mother tongue education (Swedish) you can bring it in- Finnish! (with exclamation)... [mm] if you have elective languages, so you get to know more about e.g. Germans [mm] and then maybe you can find a text on the internet in German that you- [yes?] what they sort of think about people in Finland.[167]

6.2.3 Focus area III

In this last part focus will be on the perceived relevance of the cultural dimension within EFL education. I was interested in learning about what

---

[167] This type of activity that involves comparing our own views of ourselves to other people's views of us, so-called *autostereotypes* compared to *heterostereotypes*, seems to fascinate many students, particularly when the views do not coincide (cf. excerpt 67). They may be helpful when drawing students' attention to the fact that our views of others can be erroneous as well.

students considered the most important aspects that they had learnt in their EFL education during the three years of the project. In addition, I wanted to find out what they thought I considered the most important aspects for them to learn. These two issues were of interest since they would give increased insight into whether students had geared their answers in the interviews towards opinions that they considered to be the "right answer" according to the teacher. It would also help me to find out whether I had put too much or too little focus on some specific issues according to the students, e.g. too much time spent on cultural contents at the cost of linguistic aspects or other curricular aims.

Most important aspects learnt

The following were the **most important aspects** according to the students. Some of these issues were on a more general level than others, whereas some concerned very specific issues that individual students had found problematic. It was obvious that the development of better speaking skills was seen as important by the vast majority of students (see Forsman, 2004a, for similar results).

(84)
Everything, really.

(85)
To learn vocabulary to be able to speak better.

(86)
To speak... rather than to write. Inflections.

(87)
That they use different words for the same things (---) I did know that there were several words for the same thing [Yes, like synonyms] but not that they were sort of used in different countries.

(88)
I think the ing-form is pretty important.

(89)
I've finally managed to sort out the difference between "a" and "an" (laughs)!

None of the students spontaneously considered some aspect of the cultural dimension to be the most important, although some of these aspects, e.g. speaking, could be said to include cultural dimensions as well, and excerpt 87 certainly does at least on an implicit level. In addition several students seemed to find the totality of what had been treated to be of importance as in excerpt 84. Towards the end of the interview, however, one student expressed the following on a direct question concerning the most important insight reached when disregarding purely linguistic aspects:

(90)
Probably that we ourselves also can be quite- [mm] I started thinking about it that... people probably think we are strange if they come from somewhere else.

Obviously, issues connected with the ability to decenter had already been addressed during the specific interview by the time this view was expressed, but through my knowledge of the students I would suggest that the above accurately reflected the views of this particular individual.

Students' views of teacher priorities

On the issue what students thought I had found particularly important during the educational process, the result was somewhat more evenly divided between linguistic and cultural aspects. However, no affective aspects of the cultural dimension were mentioned.

(91)
Haven't noticed anything specific.

(92)
Grammar.

(93)
Irregular verbs!

(94)
These different languages, they're some sort of English but they sound differently. (Here the student refers to different varieties and registers of English.)

(95)
Well but... you think it's important that we know... lots of things about... this... sort of like England, we work with England almost all the time, don't we, or about in... [coun-] yes [the country- about the countries] Sort of.

Here, grammar and irregular verbs were the most common suggestions. On the direct question whether it has been obvious that one of my main focus areas has been awareness of difference and diversity as well as respect for such difference, one student stated:

(96)
Well I don't know if... I believe that if other classes would come in and sit with us, then they would surely notice that we're different [yes] that we're doing something different [yes] I think we don't notice because we're so used to it by now (laughter) we just string along now...

These findings suggest that it had been **possible to integrate** the purpose of the project, i.e. more systematic focus on specific aspects of the cultural dimension,

with the overreaching curricular goals. I also find this enlightening in the way it describes how most students in the group were able to **adapt to and even embrace** new educational approaches and contents, either consciously or not. This shows that even if students, as well as parents and teachers, have preconceptions of how English should be taught and learnt (cf. Kaikkonen, 2004b; see also excerpt 99), these are possible to change[168] for most students if we can meet more of their needs as well as motivate them and guide them to see the need and usefulness of issues that they might not realize on their own (cf. Dysthe, 1996: 242).

General opinions about contents and methods

During the interviews no student was of the opinion that we should have spent more time on what we could call more traditional linguistic aspects as opposed to cultural contents, although there were a few **objections against the specific topics** that we had been studying, such as in the following example:

> (97)
> *I suppose that I will mainly use English in connection to computer related work [mm] and not much else.*

Instead, the majority of students were pleased with the **variation**[169] in ways of working with e.g. magazine texts, song lyrics, stories, discussions of different topics, more audiovisual material, as well as what they described as **more motivating contents** compared to previous experiences or other language subjects they were studying. They described more "traditional" approaches as a repeated routine with the translation of (what they described as often less motivating) textbook texts followed by the specific grammar points to be practiced in connection to each text. Some expressed that it was good to alternate between the textbook and other, often **more authentic text sources**. A few students would as well have used, or even preferred, using only the textbook, but mainly on the grounds that it is easier to have all material, including vocabulary lists, within the same covers than to keep track of magazine issues and photocopies. Some excerpts to illustrate opinions from different angles follow below:

> (98)
> <u>I</u> *don't think that we've had too little of the language (...) it's not less demanding (compared to what others do) (---) At least I've learnt loads that I didn't know before.*

> (99)
> *I think it's good that we for example don't read from a boring textbook all the time, we learn much more spoken language and... and... well, we can fit in the grammar anyway (---) [Is it possible that people think this doesn't work, that you <u>have to</u> read from a... book?] But you can use the textbook*

---

[168] Cf. reflections in Excerpts E and F in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[169] See examples of approaches in Excerpts A-D in the Action Log in Appendix I.

sometimes, only not all the time [mm]... 'cause- when I for example tell people in (other ninth-grade group) they think it sounds <u>much</u> better and more fun (...) [But do they think that we just play around all the time?] (...) no, that's not what they say (short laugher) [yes] They notice that we deal with sort of the same issues but we do it in different ways [yes]... so it <u>does</u> work to learn this way [yes] we've seen it, haven't we? (laughter)

(100)
One might learn the language at the same time as we read about different people in English, then one learns the language at the same time. At least <u>I</u> think it becomes much more interesting compared to writing down grammar in a notebook all the time.

(101)
[(...) what should the texts be about?]... Things that we're interested in (laughs) I guess, sort of... for example this bootcamp and all that we've read about and- terrorism too- stuff that is- that happens for real [mm] and not any old stories that they've sort of made up in the old textbook (laughs).

In addition to these views, it could be added that the use of several different text sources can contribute to a richer learning environment through the creation of one type of **multivoicedness**, as a contrast to only using the textbook and the teacher as sources (cf. Dysthe, 1996: 231).

Opinions about cultural contents

Most students agreed that peace education and similar contents aimed at developing respect towards difference are important and should be included in school education. On the topic of how to deal with the fact that not everyone agrees with this view and where such contents in that case could be included, one student expressed as follows:

(102) **Importance of affective development**
I suppose they'd have to accept, really, that those things must be included as well (...) and since we have no specific subject called that well then it'll have to be fitted into other places.

As was previously pointed out, the focus within EFL education had been on a few specific groups and UK society in particular, with the more far-reaching aim of helping students develop the ability to apply insights on difference and diversity also in other contexts. The majority of students expressed no objections towards the rather specific contents used. They suggested the following benefits with respect to learning about specific cultures, first presented through a multi-facetted answer (excerpt 103) that could be said to express appreciation of general knowledge, with particular focus on the possibility of modifying possible erroneous preconceptions, before being faced with them first hand with possibly more unpleasant consequences. The excerpt also points out the

convenient and motivating nature of such work, considering that they, after all, are studying the language spoken in the country in question:

> (103)   **Appreciation of general knowledge: to be prepared + convenient and motivating approach for language learning**
> *Well, in a way I suppose it's good to learn something about the country as well... since you're dealing with the language anyway, so it's... it becomes more interesting that way, that you know what the people who speak that language are like [mm] how they- what it looks like in that country and... [Is it useful in any way you can think of...?] I don't know, I suppose the thing is that you won't get a shock the first time you go there expecting certain things and then it's completely different, you know a little bit more.*

> (104)   **Appreciation of general knowledge: awareness of difference**
> *[... don't you think you would get by without knowing?] Well... what about if... you go there or meet someone... someone from the UK here and then... we sort of think that they have exactly the same (way of life).*

> (105)   **Appreciation of general knowledge: awareness of behavior**
> *General knowledge (laughs) [yes] no but if you go there, you'd sort of "Isn't this what you do then?", and they'd "No?", sort of "Where did you get that?"*

> (106)   **Appreciation of general knowledge: awareness of historical facts**
> *[...is there a difference what the contents are, for example if you learn facts about the country (...), about teenagers and their interests (...), or how people speak (...)? (If you learn) facts or about people?] No [Anything that is more necessary...?] Something about... what has happened in history, about the country maybe. [Do you think that is interesting?] Mm, you have to know something as well, not just speak bullshit.*

Although the previously mentioned ability to apply insights also in other contexts was practiced through different approaches, this specific aim was not discussed during lessons. A more open discussion of these aims, including more focus on the benefits of being able to encounter and respect difference in general, could have helped the previously-cited students realize the fact that specific factual knowledge, however useful in its specific context, has its limits, and the student in excerpt 107 to accept the specific contents that had been chosen. The last-mentioned student was the only one to point out spontaneously that the relative focus on British contents could be criticized on the grounds that it was too specific.

> (107)   **Contents too specific**
> *[... explain why!] (sighs) we could in principle learn about how they live in (short laughter) Africa.*

Below, these findings will be summarized and discussed, with the addition of the presentation of a case study to further illustrate the process and its findings.

6.3 Summary and further analysis of findings

Focus area I dealt with possible development of students' insights[170] concerning different aspects of the cultural dimension, with focus on awareness of difference and diversity with the further aim of modifying stereotypes, as well as the ability to decenter in order to be better able to respect such difference. In the work aimed at awareness of diversity, a variety of approaches for explorations of different aspects of UK society were used as the main tools. The students' answers suggested that all of them had developed an (increased) awareness of the existence of difference and diversity, particularly in the context of awareness of the UK as a multicultural society. For the most part this included a (more) varied and realistic image of teenagers in the UK and of different registers of British English. However, for all of the students this development was not connected with a modification of stereotypical views. Concerning the ability to decenter, it was suggested that many students were able to argue for the intended insights. This included examples of the ability to relativize aspects of their own way of life that previously had been regarded as normal, as well as experiences of defamiliarization of behavior that previously had been taken for granted. Others would have benefited from more guidance on their individual level of development. Similarly, it was concluded that many students would have benefited from more opportunities for and guidance in terms of applying their new insights to more unfamiliar contexts, although there were also some suggestions of development in this direction.

It needs to be pointed out that the development suggested above is an interpretation by me as a teacher-researcher on the basis of students' reflections and argumentation in questionnaires and interviews together with my familiarity with the context and these students. However, the ability to e.g. show awareness of how stereotypes can be modified or claiming changed attitudes towards certain groups does not necessarily equal positive attitudes or respect towards difference in general, nor readiness for action in situations demanding an open mind. Bearing these limitations in mind, and although, as was previously stated, the variation in views and experience are emphasized more in this study than individual variation, I have tried to look for at least some general patterns within the group through students' individual development. The reason for this is that such patterns can contribute to more understanding. For example, whereas the presentation of a variation of student suggestions for the teaching of cultural aspects can be relevant as such also in other contexts, since a variation of student types are likely to be represented, suggestions of specific developmental patterns can contribute towards finding better educational approaches for different individual needs.

The analysis seems to suggest that these students could be placed primarily in one out of four categories by the time of the interviews, although with

---

[170] The term *insight* is used here to refer to the development of a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral aspects (cf. Larzén, 2005) beyond the learning of factual information. One dimension of the behavioral aspect explored concerns the ability to apply insights developed through a specific context also in other situations and settings.

sometimes noticeable variation also within groups due to individual developmental histories, and, interestingly enough, at least partly unaffected by academic results[171]:

(1) those who from the very beginning could be said to have shown many of the intended insights such as awareness of diversity within groups in general and respect for such difference;

(2) those who through their reflections showed significant development of the intended insights, particularly modification of stereotyped views through increased awareness of difference and diversity, as well as the ability to decenter at least to some degree;

(3) those who mainly had increased their initially weak knowledge and awareness particularly concerning different aspects of the UK, but seemed to lack modification of stereotyped views and the ability to decenter, presumably more because of vague preconceptions and disinterest in the subject than because of particularly stereotyped or prejudiced initial views; and

(4) those who mainly had increased their knowledge and awareness particularly concerning different aspects of the UK but still showed stereotyped views and seemed to lack the ability to decenter. This group, on the other hand, seemed to consciously resist different attempts at modifying initial stereotypical and/or prejudiced views and showed reluctance to reflect on such issues.

On a methodological note that concerns the validity of the study, I would like to suggest that the presented reflections generally point towards the credence of these students, since many of them did not hesitate to give examples of stereotyped and even prejudiced views, despite obviously knowing what the politically correct answers would be.

An overview of how the students could be positioned within these groups, including information on gender and average grades in English[172], can be found in Table 6.

---

[171] For their course grades, students were only graded "positively" for their interest concerning cultural aspects, i.e. no student received a lower grade because of low motivation or lack of insights concerning the specific issues in focus of this study. The main reasons for not putting too much emphasis on this dimension was the fact that something corresponding was not demanded by any other groups in the school, and that the issue of assessment considering cultural aspects needs to be further developed.
[172] The grade scale has been divided into three intervals to better protect the anonymity of the students.

Table 6. The positioning of the students in four groups according to gender and grades in English

Grades	Group 1 girls	Group 1 boys	Group 2 girls	Group 2 boys	Group 3 girls	Group 3 boys	Group 4 girls	Group 4 boys
9-10	1		1	1		1		1
7-8		1	2	2	2	1		
5-6			1	1	1			1
Total	1	1	4	4	3	2	0	2

To give an overall descriptive view, the analysis suggests that the great majority of students could be found in groups (2) and (3). Through the approaches used in the classroom, the level of potential development could be utilized for basically all students concerning increased awareness of multicultural Britain, to promote a more realistic image of British teenagers, and to promote awareness of the existence of different linguistic registers also in British English. However, considering the modification of outright stereotypical views particularly concerning the UK, students in group (2) seemed to have been on the most suitable level, and these, together with group (1), were the ones that also seemed to find the contents treated most meaningful and interesting (cf. Dysthe, 1996: 57). In the light of the previously mentioned study presented in Smeds (2004; see Section 1.1) according to which ninth-grade students in Finland not intending to continue their education at upper secondary school showed higher values for xenophobia than those intending to do so, it is interesting to note the recognizable development at least concerning modification of stereotypes[173] of many of the students among this category in my study: In group (2), which showed most of this development, five out of eight students did not continue to upper secondary school. Concerning gender, more girls belonged to the group of students that showed the most interest and the clearest development of insights, particularly concerning the ability to decenter and to apply insights also to other contexts, as well as an ability to argue for and reflect on their insights. However, it should be noted that this is considered a qualitative but not a numeric difference in this material. Together with the suggestion that no girls could be found in group (4), this aspect can be said to be in line with the findings presented in Smeds (2004), i.e. that boys generally show higher values for xenophobia than girls (cf. discussion of tentative results in Byram & al., 1991: 117-118).

However, when looking only at the development of the aspect of awareness of diversity within the UK in the form of the existence of ethnic and linguistic variation (i.e. awareness of slang), the results of the boys seemed impressive,

---

[173] However, as was discussed in Section 6.2.1, the modification of prejudiced or xenophobic views can be an entirely different matter, depending on the level of negative attitudes involved.

particularly compared to the answers given by three other groups of ninth-graders that I decided to compare my material to (n = 41; with three different teachers of English). Although it is difficult to draw any far-reaching conclusions based on the brief questionnaire material collected from the other three groups, it is still possible to discern a clear tendency: On average, 80% of the boys in the reference groups showed stereotypical views considering these aspects of the UK,[174] very similar to those presented e.g. in Forsman (2004a), as compared to 22% in the project group. The corresponding numbers for the girls are suggested to be roughly 50% versus 38% in the project group. Although it is not possible to explore the depth of their arguments and ability to reflect on these issues, it should also be noted that significantly more girls compared to boys in the reference groups not only showed awareness of difference and diversity but also expressed respect for such difference, thus further supporting the findings concerning gender differences presented in Smeds (2004) and the suggestions in Byram et al. (1991). It is interesting to note that of the students in the reference group only one (girl) suggested school education to be the source of this ability to respect others; other more common sources were the home and the parents, particularly the mothers concerning the girls, and the students' own thoughts.

My suggestion is that intercultural education can have different purposes and entail different possibilities regarding the categories of students as described above: It can confirm and consolidate what students in the first group already feel or know, and possibly even provide other and sometimes better arguments (cf. excerpt 37 in Section 6.2.1). For the middle-groups, intercultural education can open up the possibility for the development of alternative perspectives that the students might not otherwise have gained, maybe even making some of them more open-minded instead of the opposite. For example, Kohonen (2005) describes the process as *transformative* when students revise their beliefs, assumptions or expectations into qualitatively new ways of seeing the world (cf. Marton & Booth, 2000), and as *emancipatory* when students experience freedom from forces that previously have constrained their options or been taken for granted (see Section 4.1). The analysis suggests that the process was not transformative or emancipatory enough for some students. For example, due to their initial knowledge and preconceptions, some students were not able to modify any stereotyped or prejudiced views, and thus gained no such insights to apply to other contexts.

Finally, it can challenge the taken-for-granted views of the last group and show that their views are not necessarily all there is to it (cf. Allport in Doyé, 1999: 47; see also Dysthe, 1996, on learning through the dialogical approach of contrasting different perspectives, and thus creating tension and sometimes conflict between them). I found it interesting to note that my engagement with the topics discussed, which sometimes had caused me to react with more fervor

---

[174] For example, British English: *silly*, *strange*, speak *like snobs*, *sounds worse*, *more difficult*;
people in the UK: dress *in a boring way*, *in an old-fashioned way*, *woolen* sweaters, *school uniform I think*, look *like snobs*, *orange hair and freckles*, are *polite*, *pedantic*, *"nicer"*.

than I had wished or planned for[175], was seen as a beneficial factor by many students. Still, it is a question of the degree of engagement as well as how one chooses to display this engagement to ensure that no students are offended or feel that the teacher's opinions are forced upon them (cf. Dysthe, p. 247). To what extent education can contribute to a more positive development regarding group (4) remains to be further explored.

Focus area II concerned awareness and views of approaches used in the classroom, as well as affordances outside the classroom in connection to different aspects of the cultural dimension stressed within EFL education. Most students were well aware of the influence of different media, particularly concerning the image conveyed of representatives of different English-speaking societies and the language they speak. Because of the strong influence exerted by various media, the need for enhanced media awareness was suggested (see also Forsman, 2004a). Concerning approaches used in the classroom, benefits from the use of specific movies and video clips, magazine texts and song lyrics for modifying stereotyped views both concerning linguistic and cultural aspects were pointed out. However, only in a few cases could single activities be picked out as more memorable or crucial than others. Still, although many students could not recall specific discussions and their thoughts and reactions to several of the activities discussed, they generally claimed that the cultural insights reached at least partly was a result of the total sum of what had been attempted during the EFL education. The results seem to suggest that the approaches used, including reflective work, also concerning students' individual learning processes, had opened up for deeper awareness of and more views on intercultural education than what was suggested in Forsman (2004a). This not only concerned their suggestions of possible activities and approaches, but also insightful reflections on *why* certain approaches would be useful, i.e. suggestions of more abstract conceptualizations on a metacognitive level. In particular, it was interesting to note the many instances referring to different dimensions of experiential learning (see discussion in Section 4.1), not only in the form of suggestions for more learning through concrete experiences but also for the need for reflecting on such experiences and the benefits of emotional engagement. Also, the benefits of a systematic approach where issues are addressed repeatedly during the educational process were stressed.

Although none of the students spontaneously brought forward aspects of the cultural dimension among what they considered to be the most important issues that they had learnt within EFL education, they generally saw them as a relevant, interesting and important part when the issue was discussed further (Focus area III). My conclusion from their answers and reactions, together with my insights into their linguistic development is that for the great majority the approaches used had been suitable for bringing about more awareness and helping students develop insights concerning the issues in focus for this study without noticeably interfering with their linguistic development or views of what constitutes EFL education. Only a few students had reacted against the unfamiliar approaches, and for most of these only so far that the specific cultural content was regarded as rather limited or with practical considerations such as the greater amount of

---

[175] See Excerpt M in the Action Log in Appendix I.

photocopies and magazine issues to keep track of. Most students in the group seemed able to adapt to and even embrace these new and different educational approaches, despite possible preconceptions of how English should be taught and learnt. Thus, I would like to suggest that for most students it is possible to overcome such preconceptions if we can meet more of their needs as well as motivate them and guide them to see the need and usefulness of issues that they might not realize on their own.

However, there is a need to further develop these approaches for use in the classroom from different points of view. One issue concerns the findings that most students seemed locked into the view that they need more factual information about every different cultural group to modify possible stereotypes concerning each of them. Thus, my conclusion is that special effort and even more systematic work need to be put into both abstract conceptualization and active experimentation regarding how to apply certain insights gained through specific contexts also in other situations. Another issue concerns whether to replace the final interviews with some similar type of reflective activities with the aim of focusing even more on the students' individual learning processes: Now the interviews were mainly used as an evaluation instrument for the study, but as was previously mentioned, the conversations during the interviews also seemed to contribute to the process of reflection and assist in the educational process. Also, I see a need to address the issue of how to show enough sensitivity to how the teacher's reactions and arguments are put forward as well as how students' thoughts and arguments are reacted to without the risk of views being enforced on them or that they become reluctant to express their true selves.

It is necessary to explore the challenges connected with students in groups (3) and (4) in greater depth (cf. Pelkonen, 2005a: 85, on challenges connected with learners at different stages such as those not yet willing to develop intercultural competence), but it is not within the scope of this study to offer more particular insights into this matter. This material does not provide enough insights into the thinking of these students. It should also be taken into consideration that some students need more time and practice to develop their reflective abilities and the ability to verbally express their thoughts. Instead, one case from group (2) will be presented below through answers and reflections given in the main questionnaires and the interview in order to provide the reader with a more concrete picture of the developing insights of one single student, particularly concerning the cultural dimension. The case concerns a student with mainly low and average grades in theoretical subjects, and grade 7 in English on her/his school leaving certificate. It should be noted that this student did not continue her/his education at upper secondary school (cf. Smeds above). However, the choice to present this specific student is also based on the fact that many issues of how the EFL education during the three years of the project was conducted are brought forward within this same material and can be presented to the readers and commented on. Thus, to conclude, different findings and other relevant issues discussed throughout the study can be further reflected on through the case presented in Section 6.3.1.

6.3.1 Presentation of case study

The student's answers and reflections in Questionnaires III-V will be presented below in their entirety, and the interview answers mainly to the extent that they illustrate issues of consequence for the understanding of the project work and the study.

Questionnaire III *Reflections on change*, May 2004 (see Appendix III):

Look at your answers about the UK.[176]

1. Has your **knowledge** (of the UK, teenagers, the language,...) changed? If not, why?

If your knowledge has changed, what are the most significant changes? concerning

the language: *That there are different dialects such as upper secondary school > junior hig (sic) school*

teenagers: *That they are pretty similar (to us)*

habits: *It differs what school they go to and how their families celebrate a holiday.*[177]

What specific activities/discussions/happenings/etc. have caused these changes? concerning

the language: *When we have texts at school. And we have got papers on the differences[178] at school.*

teenagers: *We have had texts at school about young people. You learn quite a lot from the texts. And when I have watched TV.*

habits: *I've learnt that at school as well and when I've been watching TV and reading magazines.*

---

[176] This refers to a) one of the initial explorative questionnaires used in grade 7, in March 2003, and b) the same one used in May 2004 to explore students' learning process and progress (see also Section 6.1.1 and Appendix II).

[177] An example of expanded knowledge between March 2003 and May 2004 when students filled in the same questionnaire (see Appendix II) is that in 2003 the student brought up Thanksgiving and Halloween, in 2004 these traditions were replaced by a rendering of the Guy Fawkes' Night celebrations.

[178] This probably refers to texts and information dealing with the differing school systems in the US (see Excerpt H in the Action Log) and the UK, as well as explorations into American vs. British distinctions concerning vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation. The exploration into the school systems was tied to a discussion of how different countries can have different grading systems and ways of organizing e.g. school subjects and school days, with drawbacks and benefits to most systems, including the fact that we all become used to our own ways.

2. Have your **opinions/attitudes** towards **people** in the UK changed? If not, why? If so, describe your thoughts **before** and your thoughts **now**!

But one has had all sorts of thoughts[179] *really but now I know that they are pretty much like us. sort of.*

What has caused these changes?

We've learnt a lot at school and when watching TV. etc, etc.

3. Have your **opinions/attitudes** towards the **language** in the UK changed? If not, why? If so, describe your thoughts **before** and your thoughts **now**!

I used to think that America speak more slang. But now I know that is only different dialects and everything doesn't differ.

What has caused these changes? *School and TV.*

Questionnaire IV *Final grade 8 (I)*, May 2004 (see Appendix IV):

1. Describe how your image of the UK (people, language,...) changed by watching *Bend It Like Beckham* and clips from *Ali G*?

They did change... That there are different things and dialects in the country.

2. We have discussed how we can use a change of perspective to see ourselves in a new light (e.g. using an 'alien' perspective; the African student watching Swedes worshipping poultry, horses and cats; discussions of how fashion works).

Have these discussions affected your thoughts in any way? If not, why? If so, describe in what way!

I guess they have had some effect. That everybody isn't the same. Because everybody doesn't have the same religion. One doesn't know what they do in their country or religion.

3. Did you become frustrated/irritated/sad by discussing the fact that what we do might be seen as strange by others? Describe your thoughts!

But we are strange according to others and we think that others are strange.

4. An exercise: Think of a group of people that you have negative opinions about/consider strange. Then try to think of something **you/we** do that might seem strange when taking another perspective, but something you are used to and might even like.

Also consider that in no group everybody is the same.

That there are good and bad things everywhere, also within our group.

Does this way of thinking help you to respect the group you were thinking about?

---

[179] See examples in the students' reflections during the interview below.

Yes, because...

I'm as strange as the other group.

No, because...

-

Questionnaire V *Final grade 8 (II)*, **May 2004 (see Appendix IV):**

5. Complete the sentence: "When we were talking about Roma/Gypsies, I was thinking..."

There are nice and mean gypsies... I don't think there's anything wrong with them. But there are those I don't like as well 'cause they steal.

6. What is your reaction when teachers talk about respecting other cultural groups? When do you listen, when don't you? What do you want to know?

I think it is good. Because you start thinking in a different way when you learn more and don't hear ugly rumors about people.

7. Why don't we automatically respect all others? What/how do we think?

Because you hear a lot of strange and mean things about people. And that's when you start believing those things about them.

8. a) How could you think in order to respect others better?

You think about yourself and what strange things you do that he/she thinks. And you can't point to a person and that she is mean before you get to know that person.

b) Could it for example be helpful to think "all Germans/Finns/Roma/etc. might not be the way I thought since neither were people in the UK"?

Why is it possible to think this way?

Because you actually don't know what all Germans look like or what they eat, or how she/he dresses

Why is it not possible to think this way?

-

9. Do you think it is important to talk about respecting others? Why/why not?

Yes I do, so that everyone will have the knowledge to respect others. And that everybody gets to know that you can't say for example that everybody in that country has red hair.

Interview conducted in October-November, 2004:

Unlike some of the examples discussed in Section 6.1.1 above, this student could be said to still show the same and even further insights in the interview as in the presented questionnaires. Below excerpts from the interview will be presented and commented on, in chronological order. Note that excerpts that are also included, or have parts of them included, within the previous presentation and discussion of results from the interview analysis in Section 6.2, have been marked with the same excerpt number within brackets below.

When asked what have been the most important issues to learn during EFL education since grade 7, this student focuses on linguistic aspects only:

To speak... rather than to write. Inflections. (86)

However, when asked what s/he thinks I have considered particularly important, this student is one of the few who spontaneously picks out the cultural dimension. Still, it should be noted that s/he focuses only on the cognitive dimension of culture. S/he seems to be enjoying learning about such contents, although the answer partly reflects a preference for magazine texts over the regular use of a textbook.[180] S/he points out how specific cultural contents can be integrated with language learning in this way, whereas the use of textbook material means that the contents will be restricted to whatever texts are in the book.

Well but... you think it's important that we know... lots of things about... this... sort of like England, we work with England almost all the time, don't we, or about in... [coun-] yes [the country- about the countries] Sort of. Like. So we sort of know... since we do. (---) [What's your opinion about that then, that specific content, that I've chosen to bring in... quite a lot like that?] I like it, (rather) than sit with that textbook and... sit and read those texts - it's sort of much more fun to read in the magazines we have, where we get -it's for example about terrorism at the moment and then we get to know about that and then we learn about that at the same time as we learn English. (95)

At this point of the interview I suggest some possible drawbacks with the magazine texts. I particularly point out the fact that there are no ready-made word lists[181], but the student does not agree since s/he has realized the benefits of having to work with the texts in order to find the English equivalents to Swedish words and expressions that I usually picked out for them to work with. We also varied between reading specific texts together as a class and having students choose which ones they wanted to study on their own. This enabled more in-depth work on contents I found particularly useful to explore with different curricular aims in focus, and at the same time included more elements of student autonomy and increased motivation.[182] The student also spontaneously comments on this approach to text work, as well as the benefit of working with song lyrics which we also did regularly.[183]

---

[180] See Excerpt A in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[181] See Excerpt A in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[182] See Excerpt E in the Action Log in Appendix I.
[183] See Excerpt C in the Action Log in Appendix I.

Yes and we work (individually) we get to choose a text... but when we work all together we have one text. (---) it's easier to remember the language when one sings along with the music.

The student goes on to spontaneously comment on what s/he specifically recalls from the EFL lessons. This connects to issues regarding a perceived dichotomy between the English language used at school and outside it, including what has been referred to as the BICS/CALP distinction (Cummins, e.g. 2000, in Forsman, 2004a; see also Sections 1.1 and 1.3 above). In the Finland-Swedish context this perceived gap includes a tendency to connect the language used at school to British standard, written language (see also discussion in Section 6.2.1).

Well, we have this what we could call "school English", but then- then we've been watching these movies, these dialects come in [mm] and so we get to learn some slang words as well [mm] compared to (only) learning the school language- when you come to the country in question they have lots of slang and then you don't understand a thing (...) we've learnt quite a few slang words. (35)

Compared to previous teaching experiences and the findings in Forsman (2004a),[184] I interpret the above comment, together with the general lack of complaints within this group, as evidence of how relatively limited efforts aimed at increasing students' awareness of the diversity of English varieties and registers also have contributed towards diminishing the gap between the language used in and outside the classroom.

Further spontaneous comments regarding EFL lessons are the following, on cultural content. The first one entails the insight of existing differences instead of presumed similarities that previously have been taken for granted:

And then we learn- we have learnt about how they... when we were in- we have (seen) sort of how they celebrate Christmas or Thanksgiving... or... all these different what traditions they have and... [Has your thinking about the UK changed?] Yes ... like when we started grade 7,"but they celebrate exactly the same way we do", but they actually have a lot more traditions than we have and we have other traditions than they have (---) [Don't you think you would get by without knowing?] Well... what about if... you go there or meet someone... someone from the UK here and then... we sort of think that they have exactly the same. (23)

The following concerns the possible modification of stereotyped views of British teenagers from the activities mentioned above:

[Did this change the way they look to you?] Yes, because first we thought that, OK, everyone sort of has red hair and freckles [Is this really what you thought (...) or is it just that you hadn't really thought about it?] I'm not really sure [There are those who look that way] Yees... but that's sort of- well, I don't know... it's not- not- now I know that that's not the way it is, but it's kind of hard to think back, 'cause it's sort of... well now you know, but not- what did I think back then?

---

[184] For example, "complaints" by students on how 'nobody uses this kind of language for real'.

The above also shows the difficulties with respect to evaluating one's own progress or development, unless it is regularly reported and reflected on (cf. introduction to Section 6.2 above). My reason for asking whether this actually was the student's opinion is that these specific stereotypical views were not mentioned in the student's answers in the explorative questionnaires.[185] My reflection here is that this group has not had as much "opportunity" as students from the three ninth-grade groups briefly used as comparison (see Section 6.3 above) or the students taking part in Forsman (2004a) to form the typical stereotypical views of teenagers in the UK, since we started exploring these issues at a time when stereotypical and even prejudiced views typically seem to be forming or becoming stronger (cf. Baker, 1992). This formation of stereotypes is possibly a 'coping mechanism' or 'strategy' that helps students categorize new experiences such as those connected to representatives of the languages they are studying into their own view of the world (cf. Section 3.2 on stereotypes) in the absence of other strategies. It is probable that many of the students in the study simply became aware of some of these stereotyped views in connection to our explorations during EFL classes. Thus, it has not so much been a question of modifying stereotypes as preventing them from forming for some of the students.

In the following section I try to explore whether the student shows conscious awareness of the fact that the above insights about British teenagers also could be applied in other situations, i.e. the realization that since British teenagers did not all fit into the stereotypical image, maybe others will not either:

It can, 'cause if you think about it, not everyone behaves the same way as we do here in Finland, or here, here in (name of local community). Not all schools are like ours. There are schools with much stricter rules than we have. [But is this something one doesn't realize unless one learns about others (...)?] Well, I guess not 'cause if you think -talk about us- "Well everybody in Finland is this way"... 'cause you wouldn't- why would you think differently unless you learn something about others.

Since I am not sure at this point whether the student still focuses on the previously mentioned insight of difference between groups, i.e. with the focus on not taking for granted that everybody behaves like us, I go on to explore the issue through asking for possible changed views of or insights regarding some other specific groups:

Yes, like when we watched a documentary[186] (...) they were Muslims... I guess, these people who have their heads covered, but everybody doesn't have that, although some really "Girls mustn't show their hair" and- what is it, their mouth or whatever, and their body, but [Only their eyes?] yeah, but there are Muslims who still do that, like if you think about Sweden, everybody doesn't walk around wearing those veils and whatever they're wearing. (38)

Thus, these changes have come about in connection to attempts at developing more awareness concerning a specific group. Consequently, one could argue that

---

[185] However, see question 9 in Questionnaire V presented above.

[186] This activity had taken place outside school and not in connection to EFL education.

it is still not a question of applying insights also in new contexts where one lacks specific knowledge, e.g. simply by starting to question a certain concept on the grounds that it does not entail diversity. Like most of the students, this student regularly points to the importance of learning more about different groups, e.g. in the ways s/he mentions below, in order to realize that these groups of people might not be or behave according to our preconceptions. Again, I notice the need for more systematic reflective work related to how we regularly should distrust stereotypical preconceptions on the grounds that previous insights have proven them wrong, i.e. without necessarily knowing a lot about the new groups.

[But... how do you learn that then, to realize?] But take us for example, when we've watched... what have we done... we've at least seen, we've been reading, and then we've had visitors from Wales, and then we've learnt about their school, and then we've talked about other schools as well and then we've watched TV, a documentary or whatever it was... like for example... that not everyone in the UK wears those school uniforms.[187] *(58)*

In the following, the student perceptively points to the usefulness of regular revision as well as how we have worked with increased concentration on certain contents from grades 7 onwards.[188] The integration of linguistic and cultural contents is pointed out once more:

[(...) what works and what doesn't?] Well, we've had it sort of year after year, sort of a little, year after year sort of that you sort of... increase [and revise a little] yeah, one sort of remembers, because we've sort of- we've talked about (different groups) quite a lot...

(---) Then some grammar and then... everything- otherwise you'd forget about (insights about different groups), but [yes] we've had both grammar and then we've had (about groups) as well.

After this I leave the notion of difference and diversity and go on exploring the student's spontaneous recollections of the activities in connection to developing the ability to decenter from what we regard as the most commonsensical and normal ways of life. First I show the cartoon[189] used to evoke the alien perspective to help distance ourselves from behavior and ways that we take for granted. Again the notion of difference and diversity is the first issue that comes to the student's mind. However, after some further probing the ability to decenter is suggested:

[Can you recall... what you were thinking when we had that-?] (...) mm [Can you remember... your thoughts or reactions or... was it just a funny picture?] Yes (thoughtful voice) it was both fun- but then it was also sort of, how can I- maybe everybody doesn't do what we do, maybe they- like when we greet someone we say "Hi" or we can wave our hands and say hi, but like in France or is it Italy, no it's France [Do you mean when they kiss?] yeah [mm] they kiss each other on the cheek, and sort of show "hello" in that way [Mm, so (...) for one thing you were thinking that they- that we do different things] Yes, everybody doesn't

---

[187] The activities listed here can all be found in Table 4.
[188] See the Action Log in Appendix I.
[189] See e.g. Excerpts G and M in the Action Log in Appendix I, and Section 6.1.2 above.

have to do the same thing [mm (...) but what about if you think that what we do is normal?] But... this is how it works: They think that what they do is normal [But maybe they're wrong, because they're strange. We're the ones who are right] No, not if you think about it! [Why not? How can you think to understand this?] No, 'cause everyone doesn't behave in the same way, I'm sure they think we are completely nuts as well and... sort of...“What the he- what are you doing?”, sort of “What the heck are you up to?” [(---) How can you see this on your own, without some of them coming here telling you this?... What do you have to realize?] Well, that what we do is not normal. (2)

I go on to explore the student's recollections of the story in Herlitz (1999) about the African student in Sweden[190] and her/his reflections and reactions in connection to this story. Again, the notion of difference is first evoked. After more probing, the student offers a further reflection of the practice of distancing oneself from what one takes for granted in order not to see this as the norm, this time from the perspective of actually going abroad and being the outsider, experiencing a feeling that could be described as another type of *reverse culture shock* (cf. above and Section 4.2). I find this perspective interesting, since it could be suggested that a more plausible and common reaction when leaving one's own familiar environment would be a culture shock towards the foreign culture.

Yes but, you know, in Africa they might not do things the way they do them in Sweden, and we don't do like in Sweden either, do we [No] We don't have the same or celebrate the same traditions sort of in the same way (---) How do you see yourself then?] Yes... well what I see myself as is that I see it normal, or like... yes, well, OK, it's not strange here, but maybe when you come to another country (...) then you surely feel a bit strange there when- when everybody else is behaving differently. (---) and when I come there I want to greet them, maybe they sort of sit down on the ground and greet me or something, it's like... then you'll notice for sure that what I do is pretty funny compared to what they do [(...) how would you feel then coming - and then you notice...] Well not- you'd want to learn to behave like the others so you won't be so out... (74)

Interestingly enough, the student has realized the benefits of reflective discussions for the development of different insights, alongside the previously mentioned benefits of revision work:

[... how to get everyone to understand this, to see themselves from a distance and- and realize that you might not be the center of the universe?] But these pictures[191] for example, and we always sit and discuss... and we still do. We learn something new every day when we use- have these pictures, and we remember from grade 7 and 8, and we have it again... eventually it will stick in your mind. (72)

One of the activities employed to further consolidate the insights related to how we often see our own ways and values as the norm just because we are so used

---

[190] See e.g. Excerpt K in the Action Log in Appendix I, and Section 6.1.2 above.
[191] Humorous and illustrative but most of all insightful or thought-provoking pictures/cartoons that the teacher has collected to use e.g. to tune in to topics, illustrate arguments, or revise previous topics!

to them, was reflections on a text about some distinct fashion periods in Western history (September 2003; see also Section 6.1.2). To tune in to the topic I used some artifacts in the form of one of my mother's old bikinis that met with some expected laughter, as well as pointing to the type of shirt I was myself wearing and how silly all these articles of clothing can seem when they are not "in". We discussed how most of us still gradually get used to the fashion of the moment and start liking it. This also turned out to be a suitable essay topic, particularly for students who were already critical towards fashion and popularity created through those means. What I found particularly interesting in the reflections below is the way the student connects the discussion about insights from the previously mentioned activity to further examples of differences in clothing habits that either had been briefly referred to in connection to other activities and ensuing discussions (e.g. in April 2003[192]) or that the student otherwise had come to think of:

(...) we might have normal- or let's say "normal" clothes then [Yes, exactly, mm] But like for example in Africa maybe they have these baggy dresses and other these kinds that- Muslims also have- and then they have those dress- [---] those Indian ones- we had- [a sari] yes, we had one of those that you showed... and then we've watched a movie, then we saw... [Was it Bend it Like Beckham (...)?] mm. (46)

This leads on to the following interesting reflections, possibly inspired by the experience of refugees who had come to the area a few years previously. The reflections evoke the sense of how important behaving according to the norm is, i.e. what we take for granted to be the most normal and commonsensical unless we develop the ability to decenter.

[Can you use (this insight) in real situations? (---) How do you think then?] Yes, but sort of if someone comes here to this country if there's a war in their country, so then they come here and feel totally like outsiders, but we must have-how can I say, sort of accept that- the way they live... so they don't have to live according to what we do, they can have their own way of dressing and eat what they- yes eat their own food and not what we eat [But there are so many people who don't accept that, you know that] mm [(---) why don't people understand that?] They have a certain ha - or they can feel a certain hatred towards them, they don't want... other- other people into the country because they... they sort of... see that... we sort of embarrass Finland, sort of "You're not normal". (46)

Since this student has not mentioned the Roma so far during the interview, I want to explore whether the different insights the student has gained also could be applied to concern them:

I find that hard [Yes?] because (...) surely they are normal as well [mm, in their own way] Yes, the way they live, but it's like, you've heard so many rumors that they steal, about what they do, but I'm sure there are mean Gypsies and then there are awfully kind ones. (---) But surely when we discussed it some of it stuck in your mind, but still you're left with this feeling... sort of "What is that?" (41)

---

[192] See Excerpt L in the Action Log in Appendix I.

I would like to suggest that the above admission contributes to the validity of the interview findings: It would have been fairly easy for the student to give away a more politically correct or morally elevated concept, particularly since s/he actually shows the logical ability to recognize diversity and respect difference also in this context. Furthermore, what the student is also showing again is the necessity to take up these kinds of discussions repeatedly and with systematicy for them to have some effect, when considering the challenges we are posed with regarding the spreading of rumors, media influence and the like that reach students all the more often.

On the issue of how to apply insights concerning awareness of difference and diversity as well as respect for such difference to any group of people, this student concludes the following, including a suggestion of the usefulness of repeated systematic work to consolidate the message:

That... everyone isn't the same, and doesn't dress in the same way and everyone doesn't behave in the same way... [But you might still think they're strange (...)] But you have to... what we do seems strange to them, you have to get that into your head. [(...) what made you realize this?] Well, I guess you learnt the most of it in grade 8, 'cause then you had the things from grade 7 again, so you sort of started to... because we did have it in grade 7 so you sort of thought about it a little bit, but then when we dealt with it again in grade 8 you started to think even more [mm] so now in grade 9 we had it again and then you started to... think even <u>more</u>.

The following comments regarding the experience of seeing and briefly meeting with the visiting Welsh students show further examples of this student having gained an insight of diversity within different groups as well as what could be suggested as at least some ability to apply this insight to further contexts. The student also shows awareness of the need for reflective work prior to and after concrete learning experiences such as meeting with someone, so that the impressions born out of the particular experience do not turn into a (new) stereotype:

But it's actually not (the whole picture)! [... that's why I was thinking about (...) even if you see something (...) you should realize that's not everything there is] Yes, so you should both see [what's there- mm] and then you'd have to talk about it [mm and discuss it] yes. (71)

We were also considering possible reasons why this student had gained new awareness and insights, whereas others have not. Here the student suggested some recognition of possible affective defense mechanisms among some students:

To me it's fun and interesting (---) It can be because it- it might be that they don't want to know either [No] It- they want- they want for... what we do to be normal and everything else- all other people who do something differently are completely abnormal [Why do you think one might want that?] Because... maybe they realize then that they are not at all normal themselves [yes] and then... [Well how does that feel?] It doesn't feel good for them I guess [I actually think that many people are afraid of such feelings, because it's like] yes [it sort of-] But it is the same thing with those who hate- or hate these... what should I say

colored people [mm] then it's sort of "Us whites are the best, there's nothing better than u- than us whites". (12)

On a direct question regarding the student's opinion of what the contents of EFL education should be or whether we should have spent relatively more time on some contents than others, the student seems pleased with the state of affairs. Again s/he shows preference for repetitive and integrated approaches to separately treating matters only occasionally:

But what we do is pretty OK, we sort of mix grammar and other stuff we do [mm] so that we have a little about (cultural contents), then comes the grammar and we also have (cultural contents) again... that you don't have sort of first you have (only) grammar and then (cultural contents only once), but we sort of mix it together.

The student considers it as useful approaches both to include facts and statistics and to learn about people on a more personal level, whether this should be through reading and watching TV or actually meeting someone in person, i.e. to vary between different activity types and approaches. Eventually, the student considers it useful to hear about respect for difference from more teachers. This is partly because some students trust and get along with some teachers more than others, partly because of the need for revision:

(...) it might be that one is thinking about something completely different just then.

This case ends the presentation and discussion of the empirical findings. In the concluding chapter below the study as a whole will be reflected on and its implications discussed. I will suggest possible contributions of the study as well as areas and angles in need of further research efforts.

7 Conclusion

7.1 Concluding reflections and implications of the study

Against the background of today's complex and rapidly changing societies with increasing amounts of linguistic and cultural influences from different sources for students to handle, it is suggested in this study that it is also becoming the task also of the language teacher to provide students with some of the tools they will need for this both within the classroom and outside it as autonomous learners. The overall aim of the current study, informed by action research, was to further problematize and increase understanding of the implementation of cultural aspects in the language classroom by addressing the *what*, *why* and *how* of the cultural dimension within EFL education, partly through theoretical explorations, partly through a three-year classroom project where some specific methodological approaches could be explored. In the classroom, focus was put on the promotion of intercultural competence, primarily in the form of awareness of difference and diversity and the ability to decenter in order to be better able to respect such difference. One of the most important reasons for using time for such work in the language classroom is for students to become ready and able to work according to the democratic principles outlined among the underlying values for basic education in our curricula.

In the previous discussion I suggested that before starting the exploration of any specific other cultural community, there is important groundwork to be laid for the development of intercultural competence. This concerns the fact that we, both as individuals and in the form of groups that we affiliate ourselves with, often take for granted that our own ways and values are the only ones, or, in case we do know about others, the most natural and commonsense ones. Such assumptions tend to prevent the development of respect for others. To take an example from my own experience, to some students it might seem obvious not only that everybody celebrates Christmas, but also that they do it in the same way as we do. And even if differences in the form of outward appearance and certain more noticeable behavioral conventions are obvious to students, some still might not have realized that differences also exist concerning basic values and more subtle behavior. As a result many learners tend to project their own taken-for-granted behavior and worldview onto other people. In this study I have suggested that on the road towards intercultural competence, the integral ability to decenter may be reached through a cognitive activity of reasoning: Through examples, discussion and imaginative activities, the teacher can guide students to reflect on their own taken-for-granted ways and values, and beyond. From students' reactions it is suggested that affective components are also closely attached to this cognitive ability. With the ability to question their own taken-for-granted ways and values as the basic foundation and through guided reflective work on specific aspects, chosen according to the students' preconceptions and needs, insights can be reached that students might eventually

learn to apply also in other situations. Thus students can hopefully go on exploring and encountering difference and diversity with a mindset more open for authentic dialogue and less likely to be colored by stereotyped views and prejudice both in the classroom and outside school education.

In Forsman (2004a) students' cultural knowledge often seemed stereotypical and on a fairly superficial factual level, mainly consisting of background knowledge of different countries such as information about tourist monuments and traditional celebrations, whereas many seemed to lack insights into the language and everyday life of British teenagers. It was also suggested that many Finland-Swedish teenagers have a more diversified, although not always very realistic, image of both the linguistic and cultural situation in the US compared to the UK. It was concluded that in the current study the results seem more promising with respect to students' insights regarding the language and everyday life of British teenagers. However, most students also recognized how easily stereotyped concepts emerge: When asked about the origins of the often stereotypical images of British people in particular, students suggested previous school books and magazines, together with TV and movies (cf. Forsman, 2004a).

The exploratory questionnaires employed in grade 7 showed similar results to Forsman (2004a), with the exception that relatively more of the students expressed even less knowledge or seemed not yet to have formed any preconceptions regarding many aspects of the UK at the onset of the study. This was probably because the students in the current project were younger at this point, i.e. grade 7 compared to grade 8 and 9 in Forsman (2004a). This means that it is not possible to talk about an outright change in all students' views; rather, what could be suggested is a general development that at least to some extent differs from what otherwise might have been the case. This suggestion is supported by comparison with the results e.g. in Forsman (2004a), and in the previously discussed study presented in Smeds (2004). Towards the end of the project I decided to also include some information from students of the other English teachers of the school in the form of questionnaires covering a specific set of questions (see Appendix VI) in order to compare these answers to the project students' reactions to the same issues. I found that this procedure could add to my understanding of the situation, and possibly also be helpful in answering possible critique concerning whether insights reached by the students could be the result of educational projects or information that the whole school had been taking part in. Although it is not possible to draw any far-reaching conclusions from this brief comparison, it still suggests that the project group showed less stereotypical views particularly concerning teenagers in the UK and British English.

The results also seem to suggest that, on the whole, students' insights at the time of the interviews were still attached to the specific cultural groups discussed. For example, possible modified views primarily concerned aspects within UK society and seldom their stance towards cultural groups in general. This was suggested to be partly due to students being more used to modifying knowledge structures using explicit information about a specific situation, and not to drawing conclusions and applying these also in other situations.

Another important reason for lack of development probably lies in the different starting points of individual students: Those who managed to modify their views of the UK were better able to reflect on these insights and how they could be useful also in other contexts, whereas students who started to build up their knowledge more from the beginning, i.e. lacking in both knowledge and preconceptions at the onset of the project, simply did not have the same opportunities for reaching insights connected with the modification of previous preconceptions.

Furthermore, despite the fact that the students' reflections and arguments during the final evaluations seem to suggest that many of them have developed the ability to decenter and reached different insights related to intercultural competence, it is not possible to conclude that they are all a result of measures taken during this project: Groups differ regarding personality types, the spirit of the group or the whole school, and individuals' knowledge and attitudes are differently influenced by e.g. the home, peer pressure, the media, and prior and present educational efforts in different combinations (cf. Kohonen, 2005: 129-131). As was previously discussed, however, the potential of school education concerning affective development should not be underestimated, and the early teens seem to be a period when such development is perhaps at its most difficult, but therefore, as I see it, all the more important. Although it is improbable that all of the students' increased knowledge and changed concepts originate from their EFL education, many students did suggest the classroom as the main and initiating source, together with further influences from different mass media regarding increased awareness about teenagers in the UK in particular and also insights connected to respecting otherness. It was suggested that by providing new perspectives on the images and views that students have already formed, it might be possible for some of them to modify their views according to these new insights. There are probably individual differences also as to how much students depend on cognitive and affective influences respectively in the development of new viewpoints regarding other cultural groups. However, one important conclusion to be drawn from the interviews is that possible insights and changes in worldview gained by students during the project seem to be the result of the combined, systematic and repeated effort of many different activities and teaching sessions over a longer period: The importance of discussing issues connected with cultural aspects regularly was spontaneously stressed by several of the students when they were asked to comment on their learning process. It seems as if different activities such as whole-school projects or theme days and systematic teaching during EFL education have supported each other in a variety of ways to form a more complete picture composed of both raised awareness and curiosity, as well as concrete experiences to some extent. The support of different teachers together with guests and other positive role-models has probably contributed to stressing the message. These are all issues that I suggest to be particularly important in less heterogeneous contexts to make the experience less theoretical and abstract, and more experiential.

It is not uncommon for students to have an almost rigid view of what language education should be about, therefore feeling reluctant towards and sometimes

even rejecting new contents and methods[193] (cf. e.g. Kohonen, 2006: 119-120, on the challenges involved in developing ownership of learning in ELP-oriented pedagogy). Being aware of this, I tried to balance more traditional teaching with the newer elements I wanted to bring in, such as regular use of selected texts from the textbook, although much of the work with texts was conducted through the use of different magazine texts and song lyrics. Similarly, too much focus on cultural aspects is not always appreciated, although the evaluations showed that generally these students were satisfied with the balance of content. One interesting exception to this could be found: One of the students preferred not to share her/his opinions in the different questionnaires to the same extent as the others, and finally also chose not to take part in the final interview, although the family consented for the student to be part of the study. Judging from those evaluations that were answered and from my attempts at finding out about the reasons, this was to my understanding mainly due to the fact that the student had certain expectations regarding the English subject that were not fulfilled. This included a preference for the use of a textbook, including grammar as it was presented and practiced during prior English studies, as opposed to e.g. the use of magazine texts and song lyrics for exploring different aspects of language and culture. Possibly the inclusion of what could be described as affective elements added to this view. During these three years I was not able to convince this student of the benefits of giving up the knowledge-transmission model of teaching and learning for a more student-centered model, promoting e.g. more student autonomy. Here a lack of trust might also have played a role. It would have been extremely useful for my study to have access to the opinions of this student, but I did not try to enforce her/his participation since I doubt this would have contributed productively to the study. Suffice it to say that when research involves human beings instead of objects, it is impossible to control all variables.

Thus, compared to prior teaching experiences and the findings in Forsman (2004a), very few students had objections or suggestions concerning contents and activities except some suggestions for more communicative activities. Furthermore, even if most students in the project group used American English or some more neutral variety, there were few comments of the type found in my previous study suggesting that the language learnt at school is not used for real, or negative generalizations about British people or British English. Neither have students been expressing exaggeratedly positive opinions about the US, nor insisted on using slang in more formal educational contexts to protest against 'school norms' with the exception of a few single occasions, particularly in grades 7 and 8. My suggestion was that by regularly having heard different varieties and registers in the classroom, both in regular teaching materials and other sources, as well as having discussed issues such as the relative usefulness of different registers in different situations, the students probably have not experienced as strong a dichotomy between the language used at school versus outside school. However, neither have they become noticeably pro-British, despite the relative emphasis on the UK context. My suggestion is that this choice of content managed to contribute towards a balance against the much

---

[193] See example in Excerpt F in the Action Log in Appendix I.

greater influence of the US and American English reaching students through the media.

On the basis of the issues discussed in this study, it might be suggested that the best possible EFL education is not to continue to unsystematically transmit taken-for-granted, static, factual information concerning language and culture, guided only by the textbook (cf. Byram & al., 1991: 118). An interesting question within all this is whether the textbook as it has traditionally been known will be able to defend its predominant role in the EFL classrooms considering the demands of the new curriculum, needs brought about as a result of societal changes, motivational issues, and the need to break the barrier between the English learnt and used in the classroom and outside it. For example, many students suggested the possibilities of integrating language learning with contents related to the cultural dimension or other authentic topics. In this context they also addressed the limitations of the textbook in comparison with sources such as magazines, the internet and television in particular. Concerning the traditional work book, although intended as a method to activate students in their learning process, there has also been a tendency to over-use it: Described as 'busywork' in Dysthe (1996: 222), this entails the notion of a time-filler, meaning that the activities do not necessarily concern knowledge and insights that would support the development of intercultural competence, nor do the activities necessarily include a reflective or dialogical approach.

Since relatively more time within the project group than in the other groups of the school, and previous groups that I have taught, was used for cultural explorations, the students probably missed out on some opportunities that other groups might have had for learning certain linguistic aspects. For example, it might be suggested that time used for exploring cultural features in a video clip in order to increase students' cultural competence might only expand students' passive vocabularies, whereas using the same amount of time on more focused vocabulary practice could give them a larger active vocabulary. In this case, the project class studied much fewer of the same chapters and vocabulary lists from the textbook series in use compared to their peers, meaning that they lack parts of that same vocabulary. However, they have learnt other words, as well as other aspects of language and culture that also deserve their designated place in the syllabus. This was not only because of different text choices, but also because of the way we worked with these texts in order to develop competences such as learner autonomy concerning vocabulary building. For example, making our own word lists allowed deeper treatment of texts and vocabulary, but it seemed to make the process more time-consuming and somewhat frustrating for students who prefer to learn from a textbook with ready-made wordlists. The same goes for the use of song lyrics to encourage more students to use songs more consciously as sources of learning also in their spare time, with the added benefit of the melody that can help students remember complete lines and thus build larger chunks of language. Still, for students who see the specific vocabulary that comes up in a textbook as more relevant and who see no added benefit from the melody for their learning, the activity might be experienced as frustrating.

Evidently, students can learn about different cultural aspects both from school education and from out-of-school experiences such as media input and personal encounters, but without critical reflection all these sources can mediate or

consolidate stereotyped concepts. Kolb's (1984: 42) Model of Experiential Learning (see discussion in Section 4.1) constitutes a 'holistic integrative perspective on learning that combines experience, perception, cognition, and behaviour'. According to this model, different parts need to be combined in the learning process. Thus, reflective work in the classroom cannot replace experience, but the classroom can provide opportunities for reflection on experiences, prior or afterwards, that sometimes leads to awareness that the learners might not have gained on their own. The language teacher can work towards creating an environment in which such guided reflection can be carried out, and both try to provide systematic opportunities and see spontaneous possibilities for such work (cf. Byram & al., 2001; see also Dysthe, 1996). We may conclude that learning can benefit from being experiential, both in the sense that more learning in the classroom should be well integrated with learning outside the classroom, and within the classroom in the sense that opportunities are created for students to gain experiences also beyond the practice of the teacher transmitting knowledge to the students. In this process the teacher can help guide students towards new perspectives by adopting a more dialogical approach for work in the classroom.

I am obviously aware of the problematic nature regarding the use of reflections on certain social conventions or values that different group members either acknowledge or are set apart from, as such procedures entail a risk of preserving, or even creating, a simplified and static division between homogeneous in-groups and out-groups (cf. Tornberg, 2000: e.g. 71). Consequently, it is important always to set out to problematize such tendencies to further enhance students' awareness of the diversity of different groups at the same time, thus to be in control over these tools instead of letting them define people or entire groups of people in fixed terms or promote in-group behavior. Eventually, starting from students' initial knowledge and preconceptions, my main objective has not so much been to enhance knowledge about specific groups, or an understanding of their point of view, as an awareness of the existence of different worldviews and respect for such difference.[194] The use of certain tendencies as tools within FL teaching can help to enhance awareness of the possibility of such differences when encountering unfamiliar social groups, thus also providing students with some knowledge about specific social practices. However, it cannot be emphasized enough that one must be prepared at all times to find such assumptions or "working hypotheses" incorrect, i.e., they must not be taken to represent whole groups. Furthermore, it should become clear that even if many people in a country or some social group might share a certain convention, they might not be similar in other respects. Finally, the main aim is to be able to regard different ways of behavior of this kind simply as the conventions they are, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. Thus, I look at such tendencies as useful tools when developing an awareness of the existence of differences as well as a more objective and respectful view of difference, and as working hypotheses to start one's observations and analyses from, also when

---

[194] Without necessarily knowing the reasons behind each point of view; cf. discussions in Section 3.5.2 as well as Tornberg (2000: 65-68). It is also interesting to consider *whose* point of view we would decide to choose, considering the large amount of available groups at different levels in any society and the limited time at our disposal.

exploring boundaries between individuals. By being used to considering diversity as the basic state of affairs, my suggestion is that students already from their younger years can start to see culture in a manner more in tune with the reality of the world today.

The results concerning many other major English-speaking countries such as Australia and Canada will probably still be on a rather factual level for most students in the group, since the resources allocated for classroom work only allow us enough time to go deeper into some issues. Here the in-depth treatment of some countries and cultures is seen as important, but the issue of how to apply these general insights concerning the dangers of stereotyping also in such situations when we have only superficial knowledge and understanding of certain groups need to be more systematically explored. Consequently, I would like to suggest that the purpose of exploring specific cultural practices and behavior should not be limited to the possible usefulness students might find from knowing about them, due to the indefinite amount of possible issues to explore, existing individual differences within all groups, and the impossibility to know what students will encounter. Thus, there will be benefits from turning explorations of specific cultural tendencies into tools for further educative purposes, such as respect for difference in general, awareness of difference and diversity within all societies and groups, the development of independent learning and observation skills, the ability to mediate between different practices and behavior, even an openness for the possibility that 'every single social encounter potentially involves different values, opinions and world-views' (Byram, 1997: 18). The use of tendencies brings in a certain systematicity that might be necessary for us to be able to concretize and discuss difference. Dysthe (2000) states that the teacher's role is dependent on the socio-cultural context and much more complex than evolving from transmitter to that of a facilitator if we want to enhance learning through student interactivity: When creating opportunities is not enough, students have to learn how to learn, through scaffolding, through extended teacher modelling, and the teacher giving feedback and acting as mentor. What content and activities we bring in depend on factors such as the socio-cultural context, homogeneity of society and students' knowledge, attitudes and needs. I would like to emphasize the benefits gained from starting by exploring students' preconceptions and background knowledge to know what issues would be worth pursuing and where to start from. Likewise, it is helpful to monitor the development of students' knowledge and attitudes to be able to bring in necessary follow-up.

When analyzing the classroom work with Dysthe's thoughts, as well as Tornberg's discourse in the foreground, I can see at least an opening towards new creations of meaning through dialogue that have not been present, at least not obviously so, during most of my prior teaching experience: students engaging in and reacting to topics of consequence to them, expressing opinions, sharing experiences, writing essays conveying private thoughts and feelings. Particularly in the initial stages, a few also reacted to what they found to be of no consequence or uncomfortable, even out of place, in the FL classroom, either through banter, silence or snide remarks in the midst of serious discussions. All this gave us the opportunity to learn more about each other in a way that 'traditional' work with topics in textbooks seldom does (cf. Kramsch, 1993).

This suggests that through the ability to decenter, using defamiliarizing activities, students can reach insights about who they are and how they relate to what they have in common with others, even become partly someone new through this encounter with the previously unquestioned self. This is an insight that can be compared to, if not equaled with, the positioning in a 'third place' (Kramsch), of a new culture that is neither the unquestioned C1 or the perspective of any C2. I would also like to suggest that this is similar to what Tornberg describes as an encounter in an open landscape, 'a common "culture" created and repeatedly recreated in the classroom in relation to which also "foreign" cultures can be discussed' (p. 86, my translation). In this work students are not passive receivers of a constructed mainstream culture mediated by the teacher or through the textbook, nor is language mainly practiced for possible future use. In this discussion we need some point of reference, some *Other* to relate our own *self* to. In many contexts one of the most problematic issues is that this point of reference easily becomes too abstract, too distant, both in time and place. Instead, what we can do is to problematize cultural issues whenever possible, make such issues into something close to the students' own reality, show them the complexity and open-ended nature of their own group constellations and others, and provide opportunities for questioning what we/they take for granted.

My own position regularly shifted along the continuum between the two roles of teacher-researcher during the different stages of the study, although the two roles could not be completely separated. From a methodological point of view I can see both benefits and drawbacks with this double role. Among the benefits I find that, as a teacher, I have knowledge of the subject field and what needs to be done, and, most importantly, what realistically can be accomplished within the scope of the time and resources usually allocated for classroom work. As a researcher, I have been able to bring in research-based perspectives and question practices that I have previously taken for granted. As one in the group, I appreciated being able to follow the process closely and getting to know students, which could also help validate the findings.

Among the drawbacks I find that as a teacher I naturally still have certain preconceptions, whereas explorative studies can benefit from a pair of fresh eyes, not taking anything for granted or failing to perceive the unexpected. As one in the group, I also needed to keep the necessary distance to make the best possible judgment of the process. Here I found that to regularly remind myself of my role as a researcher helped me keep this distance, and the best tool for this was the regular reflective work carried out through my diary entries in the Action Log. Furthermore, I had a 10-month period when I was not involved in the study at all directly after the classroom project was ended, which provided me with the possibility to step back and later return to the study and its analysis stage more in the role of the researcher. As I see it, the benefits have outweighed the drawbacks in this particular situation.

7.2 The contribution of the study and suggestions for further research

Factors that influence the EFL classroom are manifold and complex: In this study I have addressed issues such as societal changes, prerequisites and demands brought on by increased internationalization and the influence of the media, together with the limited time at our disposal in the classrooms. More specifically, considering the fact that most students today are meeting an ever-increasing variety in terms of cultural and other types of diversity, the need for competence for respectful intercultural encounters is increasing accordingly. If we propose that the concern of FL education is to prepare learners for personal encounters with people of other societies and groups, it is important to consider Byram's (1997: 16-17) statement that it 'cannot confine its interest to the psychology of the learning or acquisition of linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, as it has hitherto.' If the cultural dimension within FL education is scarcely treated or is not systematic enough, e.g. lacking in critical reflections on cultural issues, stereotypical images can emerge or existing ones become consolidated. However, research also points to the contribution school education can make (see e.g. Buttjes & Byram, 1991). To be better able to answer to the demands of today's and tomorrow's society, I suggest that educational aims, contents, as well as methodological approaches have to be further addressed within our educational system. I see this study as a contribution to this necessary process (see also Larzén, 2005).

As was previously addressed in Section 3.5.2, from the fall of 2006 onwards students in most Finland-Swedish schools will have fewer lessons of English in grades 7-9 compared to when this study was completed. To give a somewhat more realistic view of what could be done in such an amount of time, I chose to limit this work accordingly and explore the results when close to 75% of the courses had been completed. On the other hand, it should be noted that these changes will allow opportunities for more inclusion of both linguistic and cultural aspects than before in the lower grades. This leads us to consider what competences the new national core curriculum actually will be able to advance? Will it be able to support a more extended and systematic work towards intercultural competence as early as in grades 1-6? If not, we are still going to lose out both on the utility aspect this would entail as well as a possibility to realize one of the, as I see it, most important underlying values for basic education. However, priorities will have to be set for educators to be able to work towards at least some aims properly, since there will not be enough time for everything that different stakeholders regard as most important. On what grounds will these priorities be set? Simply extending the list of contents to be ticked off is not possible, not only because of the time factor, but also since the type of aims involved in intercultural competence demand systematic and long-term work. Here an increased dialogue could help clarify the foci of this important work.

An important issue to take into consideration is that EFL education also in our classrooms will eventually be affected as ELF, or Global English, gains new ground, both as an extended variety of language in use and as the focus of research. One recent research area is the processes and strategies involved as

non-native speakers are engaged in meaningful negotiation, regardless that their 'heterogeneous background knowledge might be expected to jeopardize successful communication' (House, 2002: 259). However, Byram (1997: 32-33) points out that the success of such interaction is not only to be measured in terms of effective exchange of information, but also in terms of the ability to establish and maintain human relationships. This, in turn, depends on, for example, the ability of intercultural speakers to accept criticism of the values they share with people in their own social groups, values they might not have been consciously aware of. As Lundgren (2001) points out, there is a tendency today towards giving the concept of internationalization a Eurocentric, economic perspective rather than associating it with issues such as intercultural relations and global solidarity work (see also Byram, 2001). But as e.g. Risager (2000) also points out, language and cultural education has an ethical and political dimension: Language teachers are taking part in the development of identities and cultural images both in a positive and a negative sense.[195] Ultimately, intercultural competence can be about creating opportunities for intercultural movements, organizations and institutions to work for a better world by trying to prevent global social and environmental problems. This becomes noticeable *within* the European context when Faas (2006) proposes the concept of *multicultural European citizenship* to help transform the notion of Europe with the aim of addressing the issue of including marginalized communities, such as the Turkish Muslims.

Byram (1997: 82) gives examples of national education agencies according to whom 'intercultural competence transferable to encounters with otherness in later life is at least as important as linguistic competence', also for short language courses or other language programs where the attainment of communicative competence in the target language is not very realistic. And as Byram also points out, intercultural competence will be of use for native speakers of a language as well, e.g. in the form of awareness that non-native speakers of English might use the language differently to themselves in interactions. This suggests the importance of the systematic inclusion of intercultural competence, particularly skills, attitudes and knowledge that are transferable to other situations, in all language programs, including general education (cf. Räsänen & San, 2005). Byram states that 'teaching for linguistic competence cannot be separated from teaching for intercultural competence' (1997: 22).

Following the compartmentalization of knowledge into subject-matter fields largely corresponding to academic disciplines, and with subject teachers consequently being specialists in their own fields, school cultures have traditionally tended to avoid complex, real-life situations that cross such disciplinary boundaries and defy the predominance of a systematic, pre-defined knowledge structure lending itself so well to a transmission mode of (controlled) teaching (Posch, 1996; cf. Schön, 1983: 329-336). The tendency to try to safeguard the interests of specific school subjects at the cost of the interests of students or the school seen in its totality is not uncommon. For example,

---

[195] Cf. Byram's concept of *critical cultural awareness/political education* e.g. in Byram (1997, 2000, 2004).

Kohonen (2001b: 11) points to the prolonged time spans usually connected with paradigm shifts due to the fact that those who have worked successfully within the old paradigm are emotionally and habitually attached to it and can experience it as threatening to challenge and replace old assumptions, since this implies that part of our current understanding has become obsolete and needs to be restructured. Hargreaves (1994) stresses that aims are to be formed through ethical and moral choices collectively agreed upon by teachers, students, parents and other stakeholders in the educational field: His point is that we must not lose the feeling of having common, binding goals to strive towards. And in our work towards handling complex and accelerating changes in today's schools, prevailing systems and structures cannot remain intact: We have to be able to unsettle the structures and cultures of the schools. Otherwise, if we just try to handle each new demand in isolation without being prepared to sacrifice anything of the old, the result will be even more overload, uncertainty, guilt, cynicism and burn-out among teachers (see also Byram, 1997: 17).

For a school culture that will be able to find answers to the social changes of the future, Posch (1996) argues for the retention of the strengths of static elements, complemented with the necessary dynamic ones. Thus, he advocates a culture that comprises and balances contraries. To quote Posch (p. 68):

> In the future it will be necessary for students and teachers also to express and realize their views of the society in which they want to live. Action research is in a sense only another word for this.

Posch (1996) notes that teachers moving from the safe ways of structured, pre-defined teaching to engage in open-ended, uncertain, unpredictable situations entailing risks, often find an increased interest in communication and interdisciplinary cooperation following the new demands of the job (cf. professional development of teachers discussed in Jakku-Sihvonen & Niemi, 2006; Sjöholm & Hansén, 2006).

However, it needs to be stressed that it is seldom possible to offer recipes for simple solutions for use in the classroom. Takala (1984) points to several reasons for caution in pedagogical recommendations. Among these we have the fact that more emphasis on certain issues will lead to less time for others, and we have to take into account the likelihood of not achieving the intended outcome for any of our aims if we do not have enough time for each of them. I agree, suggesting that ultimately we have to decide what aims we consider the most important and then try to find ways of working towards these aims as efficiently as possible within our limited resources. I would, however, like to suggest that generally it is attainable to put relatively more emphasis on intercultural competence and still be able to reach good linguistic levels by considering language and culture more holistically (cf. e.g. Kramsch, 1993). In this study it has e.g. been suggested that the choice of texts for use in the classroom can be based on whether they deal with cultural aspects that we find worth pursuing, through the use of reflective discussions and other approaches that explore the topics in accordance with our aims, at the same time as different language skills are practiced. Furthermore, when considering relative efficiency one could argue that teaching towards more awareness is time efficiently spent, since awareness of both linguistic and cultural aspects can be applied in many other contexts and

situations than in those they are learnt, also for observing and learning on one's own.

Still, bearing in mind the range of unique and unpredictable experiences in the form of a diversity of cultural perspectives possible, the question is how EFL education will be able to open up for the creation of culture in the language classroom. How experience from encounters in the classroom can be used in other encounters with difference that learners will have is not necessarily a simple task. Can all classroom contexts provide an environment that is challenging and diverse enough, and are the experiences gained applicable in other situations? Suggested approaches always have to be contextualized (cf. Dysthe, 1996: 221; Takala, 1984). These are complicated questions, but as I see it, one possible approach could be similar to the one suggested in this study, i.e. the enhancement of general cultural awareness or intercultural competence with the help of reflections on a process involving increased awareness of difference and diversity as well as respect for such difference through the ability to decenter and change perspectives. The evaluation of the educational process explored in the study suggests the possibilities for work with the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity concerning some specific context that, based on students' prior knowledge and preconceptions, would merit further work. In this case this specific context primarily concerned different aspects of both cultural and linguistic conditions in the UK. It was also suggested that many students had developed the ability to decenter at least to some extent. What mostly merits further work are approaches connected with the development of the ability to apply insights gained in these specific situations also to more general contexts.

The conclusions drawn here are based on views and insights as they have been expressed by the informants; whether this represents their actual knowledge and honest views cannot be stated with certainty (see also Section 5.4). Thus, the objections to these results can be several: Are the opinions expressed really authentic? Maybe students did not develop these insights during English lessons but had such attitudes and abilities from before, or gained them as a result of other educational experiences? And how deeply rooted are possible respectful attitudes when it comes to behavior and actions? However, the results in other studies, e.g. by Virrankoski and Smeds, presented in Smeds (2004) concerning racism and prejudice among teenagers in Finland, suggest the need for systematic efforts in the direction of promoting respect for difference during the comprehensive school years. This project has shown one possible way forward in such a direction.

Although the main purpose was not to compare between groups due to the impossibility of generalizing findings to other student populations, I have pointed to some interesting regularities and irregularities concerning e.g. gender profiles during the analyses. Thus, these are discussed not as a basis for any far-reaching conclusions, but as interesting food for thought possibly to be followed up in future observations or research. The students represent both individuals that have reached certain insights, the ability to decenter in particular, but also students that had not reached noticeable insights. There were students of both these categories among students of both genders and with differing academic results. During the interviews I found it interesting to note how some students

were able to remember and also had reflected on topics that we had dealt with, whereas others were totally unaware of the issues I asked about. However, the most unexpected was not so much the difference between students; instead I was surprised to find certain individuals among the ones who seemed unaware, whereas others that I had not expected to, turned out to be both reflective and outspoken on these topics.

An interesting tendency emerged from the analysis in that the girls seemed to be more apt than the boys in reaching insights in the form of the ability to decenter and respect for difference. Of interest were also the findings suggesting the development of students not intending to continue their education at upper secondary school, i.e. a category of students showing higher values for xenophobia than those continuing to upper secondary according to Smeds (see Section 6.3). Possibly this was due to approaches that these students found meaningful and interesting, and in tune with their level of potential development. Further focus would need to be put on exploring more individualized approaches to including the cultural dimension in EFL education, also concerning unmotivated students or students challenged with different learning difficulties.

Furthermore, there were students who did not experience any significant modification concerning the way they regard British people or British English. This turned out to be primarily because these students did not know much about the UK in the first place or otherwise lacked stereotyped views. Consequently, these students could not be expected to gain any insights that could be applied when meeting other groups (cf. Marton & Pang, 1999: 9, on learning as being able to discern certain aspects of a phenomenon). In such cases, attempts at modifying stereotypes become a question of individualizing the educational process more: My suggestion is to make the process more transformative (cf. Section 4.1) by finding groups that also these students can modify their views of through increased insights, and then also trying to develop an ability to apply such insights in other situations. Similarly, in the case of attempting to modify prejudiced views in general, the suggestion here is to start out by actually finding a way to modify some specific prejudice and then practice the application also of those insights to other contexts. Thus, in this study it seems to have been partly a question of modifying stereotypes and partly of developing awareness that possibly can contribute towards preventing stereotypes concerning a specific society from forming. As a consequence, I would like to suggest that further explorations could also look into whether specific stereotypes actually can be regarded as important and useful tools, maybe even necessary ones, for learning how stereotyped views come about, and, thus, for learning to modify stereotyped views in general.

In this study I have described the development of intercultural competence as a cyclical process from simple to more complex levels through a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral elements within a framework of experiential learning. I would like to suggest that the basic foundations for work with intercultural competence were successfully attained in this project, but that more systematic consolidation would still be useful in order to offer (more) students the possibility of further development. In relation to this, future work could also include more stress on awareness of the extended role of ELF, something that was only sporadically focused on in the classroom during this project, but that

still constitutes an important part of the framework of the study when considering the aims and contents of the EFL education of today and tomorrow (see discussion in Sections 1.1 and 3.3). Larzén's (2005: 99) interpretation from her study was that the teachers generally conceived of the English language as international, whereas the cultural dimension within EFL education was regarded as national. This is possibly a feasible approach as this new role of English makes it necessary to reach some sort of compromise between the needs of the specific language subject and these more extended international needs, but only in the sense that the national cultures are used as tools and applications to other contexts.

As was previously discussed, many teachers naturally hesitate to add on more contents to their already over-loaded schedules. However, the suggestion is to look for ways of integrating cultural contents more systematically, and also become more aware of looking for opportunities of bringing up or referring back to earlier cultural topics on an almost daily basis, thus making it possible for cultural contents to permeate or at least become a more genuine part of school culture (see e.g. Kohonen, 2001b). Here, teacher education and in-service training programs have an important task in advancing a more comprehensive view of language and culture to further support teachers in their work instead of just contributing to the adding on of new demands. Otherwise we are left with the alternative, as I see it, of going for more sporadic projects that do not have the same effect as more systematic endeavors, and usually entail a tremendous overload of work for those involved. The worst case scenario is to let cultural aims remain politically correct phrases and buzzwords that continue to be included in the curriculum and other documents, but are left no room in the daily classroom routines.

On a personal level I recognize a professional development as a teacher-researcher, particularly considering a more comprehensive view of different curricular aims and how to prioritize between them within a more experiential framework based on both theoretical and empirical considerations. My suggestion is that through the inclusion of approaches aimed at developing the ability to decenter as well as seemingly self-evident issues such as the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity, education can have an impact as long as the efforts are systematic and adapted according to context and student needs. These elements are regarded as the foundation and backbone for the development of intercultural competence within EFL education in this study.

Future classroom work on my part would include attempts at including more elements of critical multiculturalism and critical cultural awareness/political education (*savoir s'engager*) into the educational process (cf. Byram, 1997, 2004), e.g. different global issues and reflections of power relations within different groups as a further step in the process of recognizing more diversity within cultural groups on different levels. This also includes more discussions of the recognition of problems in all cultures, including our own.[196] This is further

---

[196] I am aware of the relative nature of such issues and the problematic situation with respect to deciding what constitutes a problem in different contexts, including the issue of who has the right to decide this. However, at this level I would like to argue that it is enough to address such common features as the existence of inequality, crimes and

supported by the fact that several students expressed an appreciation of learning more about how other people might look at the world. This could be combined with increased efforts on applying these insights also in other situations. An example of the beginning of a more critical multicultural education that engaged many students in the current study could be our critical examination of our own taken-for-granted discourse regarding the Roma as a continuation of the work on developing respect through decentering activities and awareness of diversity within different groups.

Furthermore, future plans include even more focus on experiential education and less inclusion of teacher-mediated contents (cf. Kaikkonen, 2005), also in terms of providing and encouraging opportunities for more personalization of out-group members through personal encounters. This would enable more discussion and dialogue *with* other cultural representatives, not merely discussion *about* them, and at the same time allow for more elements of active experimentation within the experiential process. For example, students could try out new abstract conceptualizations in further settings. In addition, my suggestion is that for many students the processes aimed at developing the ability to decenter and modifying stereotypes need to become more transformative, and that means adapting the process more to their individual levels. As was previously addressed in Section 5.4, students could also be even more included in the discussion of aims and development of contents from the beginning than in the current project.

It was interesting to note how the discussions during the concluding evaluative interviews in grade 9 seemed to help both to consolidate and even develop some additional awareness of the aspects discussed. I would still like to suggest attempts at including more writing in future educational endeavors to trigger the developmental processes of all students, also those who rather listen than express themselves orally in whole-class discussions (cf. Dysthe, 1996: 240), and thus perhaps even include more possibilities to support the further learning of students in group (3) (see Section 6.3). This would include the use of different types of follow-up on what students write to further trigger reflections and development when necessary. Such a procedure would entail more efforts at meeting individual students on their level concerning the cultural dimension and not only concerning linguistic scaffolding, particularly through more dialogical interaction of the type that the final interviews seemed to give.

To conclude, I am aware of the fact that there are many more approaches and specific techniques that could have been included in the classroom work, specifically literature, drama and the treatment of case scenarios or critical incidents. However, since all activities do not engage or appeal to all teachers (or students), I decided to see this project through with the use of a set of activities that might be regarded as less challenging. The benefit of the chosen approach is that teachers interested in putting more focus on similar contents need not be put off by the required level of engagement. I would like to suggest, however, that

---

violence in societies in general. Thus, the focus is not on acting as "value judges" but, again, to work towards developing more awareness around the diversity of all groupings: The same way stereotyping can be seen as a simplified version of reality, so is the view that everything or everybody would be either good or bad, or that we could have positive attitudes towards everybody (cf. discussion around excerpt 51 in Section 6.2.1).

this means that we have also missed out on certain important effects of having more affective involvement of students,[197] but the benefits are that others will have felt less threatened. Other studies will have to show what can be gained by applying other, different approaches. It is also necessary to explore the use of the suggested approaches in a wider range of different contexts. Last but not least, to these endeavors the challenging issue of developing evaluation practices of the cultural dimension within FL education, both relating to research and educational efforts, needs to be added.

---

[197] See Dysthe (1996: 235) on the benefits of role plays for engaging students on a personal level, also by attempting to see a situation from a different perspective.

Svensk sammanfattning

Introduktion

Avhandlingens titel lyder på svenska *Den kulturella dimensionen i fokus. Att främja medvetenhet om mångfald och respekt för olikhet i engelskundervisningen i en finlandssvensk skola.* Mer övergripande gäller avhandlingen engelskämnets roll i grundskolan, dess möjligheter och begränsningar samt de utmaningar som framtiden kommer att föra med sig. Nya samhälleliga krav och den begränsade tid som står till förfogande i klassrummet gör det nödvändigt att ifrågasätta vedertagna mål och innehåll. Som en följd av detta betonas fördelarna med att övergå från förmedling av ett begränsat faktainnehåll till att i stället hjälpa eleverna att utveckla medvetenhet och kompetenser som de kan tillämpa i många olika sammanhang, också i perspektiv av livslångt lärande.

Självständigt lärande behövs inom många olika områden: I avhandlingen ligger fokus på *interkulturell kompetens*, huvudsakligen enligt Byram (1997) och de olika element som inkluderas i hans interkulturella kommunikativa kompetensmodell (se figur 4 i avsnitt 3.2). Ett huvudsakligt mål är förmåga till interaktion med och respekt för olikhet *i allmänhet*, inte bara när det gäller representanter för vissa målspråksområden.

Problemområde och avhandlingens syfte

Avhandlingen är ett inlägg i debatten om engelskämnets framtida roll i grundskolan, mot bakgrund av dagens allt mer mångkulturella samhällen och de snabba förändringar som kännetecknar vår postmoderna tid. De flesta som lär sig engelska i dag torde komma att använda sina nya språkkunskaper i sammanhang där inga så kallade infödda talare i ordets traditionella mening är involverade, det vill säga engelska använt som ett *lingua franca*. Det är således inte längre självklart vilka språkliga och kulturella normer som skall ingå i undervisningsmålen när det gäller engelska som ett främmande språk. Snarare tycks det finnas ett ökat behov av en mer generell interkulturell kompetens innefattande öppenhet och respekt för olikhet, som ett komplement till den mer kulturspecifika kompetensen kopplad till speciella traditionella målspråksområden. I avhandlingen hävdas att en förändring av läroplanens tyngdpunkter och engelskundervisningens innehåll i en sådan riktning kunde anses motiverad både ur rent instrumentell synvinkel och med beaktande av läroplanens värdegrund.

Utgångspunkten för studien finns huvudsakligen i min licentiatavhandling (Forsman, 2004a), en explorativ undersökning av kunskaper och attityder gällande vissa språkliga och kulturella aspekter hos finlandssvenska skolelever (årskurs 7–9). Trots att undersökningen på det hela taget visade på en tillfredsställande situation, var slutsatsen den att det fortfarande finns utrymme för utveckling av både kognitiva och affektiva aspekter av den kulturella dimensionen. Som exempel kan nämnas att många elever visade prov på stereotypa uppfattningar om brittiska tonåringar, och eleverna tycktes också

sakna insikter om att Storbritannien är ett multikulturellt samhälle. Amerikansk engelska var mer populär än brittisk, som i sin tur ofta beskrevs som gammaldags och i avsaknad av slang. Mediepåverkan sågs som en av huvudorsakerna till dessa resultat. En annan orsak som diskuterades var att kulturella aspekter generellt inte har behandlats tillräckligt systematiskt i språkundervisningen.

Mot denna bakgrund är således det övergripande målet med föreliggande avhandling att ytterligare problematisera och öka förståelsen för implementeringen av kulturella aspekter i språkundervisningen genom att fokusera på frågorna *vad*, *varför* och *hur* runt den kulturella dimensionen i engelskundervisningen (jfr Larzén, 2005). Detta har gjorts genom teoretiska diskussioner inom området vid sidan av ett försök att främja interkulturell kompetens på ett mer systematiskt och insiktsfullt sätt inom ramen för egen undervisningspraxis. Tyngdpunkten för det interkulturella utvecklingsarbetet i klassrummet har legat på främjande av:

• medvetenhet om olikhet och mångfald både mellan och inom olika grupper för att förhindra och modifiera stereotypa synsätt,

och

• en mer distanserad och relativiserad syn på egna levnadssätt och värderingar som tidigare tagits för givna för att bättre kunna respektera olikhet.

Metodologiska reflektioner

Forskningsprocessen har inspirerats av aktionsforskning (se figur 2 i avsnitt 1.2), med mig själv i rollen som forskande lärare eller den reflekterande praktikern. Pedagogisk aktionsforskning betonar förändring och förbättring genom reflektion och handling i en specifik kontext med empiriska data som grund.

Studien kan placeras både inom den konstruktivistiskt tolkande traditionen och det kritisk-emancipatoriska paradigmet, det senare i synnerhet genom att forskaren öppet förespråkar vissa värderingar (se tabell 3 i avsnitt 5.1). Ontologiskt är min position närmare den konstruktivistiska tolkande traditionen genom att konstruktioner av verkligheten inte ses som sanna i någon absolut mening, endast som mer eller mindre välunderbyggda och således också förändringsbara. Lärarens grundläggande roll är den reflekterande praktikerns, men jag ser också klassrumsforskning som ett sätt att förändra utbildning och skola i ett bredare perspektiv i enlighet med emancipatorisk eller kritisk aktionsforskning.

Under hela arbetsprocessens gång har tyngdpunkten växlat mellan mina roller som forskare och lärare trots att de två rollerna i praktiken inte helt kunnat särskiljas. Ur en metodologisk synvinkel kan jag se både fördelar och nackdelar med denna dubbla roll. Bland fördelarna finns att jag som lärare har kunskap om undervisningens mål och innehåll, inte minst vad som kan tänkas åstadkommas inom ramen för den tid och de resurser som vanligen tilldelas klassrumsarbetet. Som forskare har jag kunnat ta in forskningsbaserade synvinklar och ifrågasätta praxis som jag själv tidigare tagit för given. Som en i gruppen har jag uppskattat att kunna följa med processen på nära håll och lära känna eleverna, vilket också har bidragit till att validera resultaten.

Bland nackdelarna finns att jag som lärare ändå har haft vissa förhandsuppfattningar som påverkat processen. Som en i gruppen var jag också tvungen att hålla den nödvändiga distansen för att kunna bedöma processen på bästa möjliga sätt. Här fann jag att det bästa verktyget för att påminna mig själv om forskarrollen var mina reflektioner främst i form av dagboksanteckningar i vad jag har kallat en *Action Log*. Jag hade dessutom en 10 månader lång period direkt efter att klassrumsprojektet hade avslutats då jag inte alls var involverad i studien, vilket gav mig en möjlighet att stiga tillbaka och senare återvända till arbetet och dess analysskede med lite nyare ögon och mer uttalat i forskarens roll. I det skedet föll också mycket på plats som jag under processens gång varit för nära för att urskilja. Som jag ser det har fördelarna övervägt nackdelarna i denna specifika situation.

Teoretiska utgångspunkter för klassrumsarbetet

Mycket av arbetet i klassrummet i den empiriska delen av studien är influerat av Kolbs (1984) erfarenhetsbaserade inlärningsmodell (se figur 5 i avsnitt 4.1). Också valet av forskningsansats kan sägas vara det genom tillämpandet av aktionsforskningsstrategier. Kolb understryker att modellen inte är ett tredje alternativ till beteendeinriktad och kognitiv inlärningsteori utan snarare erbjuder ett holistiskt perspektiv på inlärning genom att integrera erfarenhet, varseblivning, tanke och handling. Exempelvis kan traditionell lärarcentrerad undervisning kompletteras med elevcentrerade aktiviteter där eleverna får göra nya erfarenheter och har möjlighet att bli mer engagerade. Men enbart erfarenhet leder inte automatiskt till inlärning: Eleverna behöver också få möjlighet att reflektera kring sina erfarenheter, bilda nya begreppsmodeller och experimentera med dessa i nya sammanhang. Modellen sammanlänkar således inte bara teori och praktik utan också affektiva och kognitiva domäner.

Gemensamt för de metoder och tillvägagångssätt som tillämpats i klassrumsarbetet är att de är baserade på en konstruktivistisk sociokulturell och kognitiv syn på lärande, där kunskap således konstrueras och rekonstrueras genom interaktion med ens sociala och kulturella omgivning. Reflektiva processer föregår eller sker samtidigt som inlärning av grundläggande faktakunskap. Detta innebär att lärande ses som en progression från enkla till mer komplexa modeller snarare än som en progression från fakta till förståelse och analys. Här ser jag utvecklingen av interkulturell kompetens som en cyklisk process från enkla till mer komplexa nivåer genom en kombination av kognitiva, affektiva och handlingsorienterade aspekter av kultur inom ramen för en mer holistisk erfarenhetsbaserad syn på lärande (se figur 6 i avsnitt 4.2).

En grundläggande del av det interkulturella arbetet i klassrummet är inspirerat av Byrams (1997) diskussioner kring vikten av att vilja relativisera eget levnadssätt och egna värderingar genom att se på sin egen kultur ur någon annans synvinkel (*the ability to decenter*). En annan utgångspunkt är den diskussion som förts av Kramsch (1993) kring att försöka hitta en så kallad tredje plats mellan ens egen och den andres kulturella hemhörighet för att få den nödvändiga distansen. I avhandlingen argumenterar jag för nyttan av att först och främst utveckla förmågan att kunna distansera sig från sin egen förgivet-tagna syn, innan man försöker rekonstruera andra människors referensramar, se förhållanden ur deras

synvinkel eller utforska andra kulturer. Jag betonar således fördelarna med att kunna se på sig själv och sin egen kultur som ett första steg i denna process (se figur 7 i avsnitt 4.2), i detta fall inledningsvis med hjälp av "en utomjordings ögon", något som man kan kalla en mer neutral utgångspunkt än en annan specifik kulturell utgångspunkt.

En annan viktig del av det interkulturella arbetet var att utforska dels olika tendenser, dels mångfalden speciellt inom brittiskt samhällsliv. Detta arbete syftade till att ge eleverna möjligheter att modifiera eventuella stereotypa åsikter. Fokus lades bland annat på mångkulturalismen och brittiska tonåringars liv både i skolan och på fritiden. En ytterligare aspekt var att eleverna kunde utveckla en mer realistisk och nyanserad bild av brittisk engelska.

Den empiriska delen

För att genomföra projektet fick jag tillåtelse att ta hand om all undervisning i engelska från årskurs 7 till 9 i en slumpmässigt utvald klass på 17 elever. Med bakgrund i resultaten från min licentiatavhandling var målet att inom ramen för läroplanen försöka befrämja medvetenhet om olikhet och mångfald samt respekt för olikhet. Genom att utforska elevernas insikter i olika aspekter av brittiskt samhällsliv med hjälp av en uppsättning frågeformulär var det möjligt att planera arbetet med den kulturella dimensionen i klassrummet för de följande tre åren. Arbetsprocessen evaluerades vid specifika tidpunkter, och den avslutande projektevalueringen genomfördes genom individuella intervjuer med eleverna i årskurs 9. I intervjuerna låg fokus på tre olika områden. Fokusområde I gällde en eventuell utveckling av elevernas insikter om olika kulturella aspekter. Detta rörde främst elevernas medvetenhet om olikhet och mångfald, inklusive modifiering av stereotypa åsikter, samt förmåga till mer distanserad syn på eget levnadssätt och egna värderingar för att bättre kunna respektera olikhet. Fokusområde II undersökte elevernas medvetenhet kring och åsikter om olika aktiviteter och tillvägagångssätt som använts för detta arbete i klassrummet samt deras tankar kring olika så kallade handlingserbjudanden (engelskans *affordances*) för inlärning både under och utanför lektionerna i engelska i förhållande till de mål som ställts för inlärningen. Fokusområde III i sin tur koncentrerades till elevernas uppfattningar av hur relevant den kulturella dimensionen inom språkundervisningen kan anses vara.

Resultat

Fokusområde I gällde således främst elevernas ökade medvetenhet om olikhet och mångfald med syfte att modifiera stereotypa åsikter, samt ökad respekt för olikhet genom en förmåga till mer distanserad syn på eget levnadssätt. Utgående från elevernas svar kunde konstateras att de alla hade utvecklat en (större) medvetenhet om skillnad och mångfald, speciellt om Storbritannien som ett multikulturellt samhälle. Detta inkluderade för det mesta en (mer) varierad och realistisk bild av tonåringar i Storbritannien och olika varianter av brittisk engelska. Denna utveckling var däremot inte kopplad till en modifiering av stereotypa uppfattningar för alla elever, främst på grund av att deras kunskaper och eventuella förutfattade meningar om förhållandena i Storbritannien hade

varit på olika utgångsnivåer. Processen hade således inte varit transformativ i tillräckligt hög grad för alla. När det gäller förmågan till en mer distanserad syn på eget levnadssätt konstaterades att många elever visat förmåga att argumentera för nya insikter, medan andra också i den processen skulle ha haft nytta av mer individuell handledning utifrån sin egen nivå. Likaså var slutsatsen den att många skulle ha kunnat dra nytta av mer stöd för och tillfällen till att tillämpa specifika insikter också i andra, mer obekanta situationer. Med detta menas exempelvis att kunna använda sig av insikten att alla britter inte motsvarade ens förutfattade meningar till att dra mer försiktiga slutsatser också i fråga om andra stereotypa uppfattningar.

Fokusområde II visade att de flesta elever var väl medvetna om påverkan från olika massmedier, i detta fall speciellt den bild som förmedlas av representanter för olika engelskspråkiga samhällen och deras språk. I avhandlingen konstateras att på grund av denna påverkan ökar också behovet av fostran till kritisk mediemedvetenhet (se också Forsman, 2004a). Angående konkreta tillvägagångssätt som använts inom projektet såg många elever fördelarna med att använda specifika filmer, videoinslag, tidningstexter och sångtexter för att modifiera stereotypa åsikter både gällande språkliga och kulturella aspekter. Många elever hävdade att de kulturrelaterade insikter som nåtts åtminstone delvis var ett resultat av allt det som gjorts inom engelskundervisningen, medan specifika aktiviteter sällan kunde pekas ut som speciellt avgörande. Elevernas svar tyder också på att reflexivt arbete, bland annat kring elevers individuella lärandeprocesser, hade bidragit till en större medvetenhet och mer åsikter kring interkulturell undervisning än vad som framkom i Forsman (2004a). Detta gällde inte enbart elevernas förslag på möjliga aktiviteter och tillvägagångssätt, utan också insiktsfulla reflektioner kring *varför* specifika tillvägagångssätt skulle vara användbara, det vill säga mer abstrakta begreppsbildningar på en metakognitiv nivå. Det var speciellt intressant att observera de många hänvisningarna till olika dimensioner av erfarenhetsbaserad inlärning (Kolb, 1984). I dessa fall gav eleverna inte bara förslag på hur man kan lära sig mer genom konkreta erfarenheter, utan de framhöll också nödvändigheten av att reflektera kring sådana erfarenheter och fördelarna med emotionellt engagemang. Fördelarna med ett systematiskt tillvägagångssätt där viktiga aspekter behandlas upprepade gånger och med jämna mellanrum under processen betonades också.

Trots att ingen av eleverna spontant föreslog kulturella aspekter bland det som de såg som viktigast av allt de lärt sig inom engelskundervisningen, sågs kulturella aspekter i allmänhet som relevanta, intressanta och viktiga när frågan ytterligare diskuterades (Fokusområde III). Min slutsats från deras svar tillsammans med mina insikter om deras språkliga utveckling är att för majoriteten av eleverna var de tillvägagångssätt som använts lämpliga för att stödja elevernas utveckling mot mer medvetenhet om de kulturella aspekter som fokuserats i studien utan att åtminstone märkbart påverka deras språkliga utveckling. Ett fåtal elever reagerade mot obekanta arbetssätt, men då huvudsakligen med anledning av praktiska betänkligheter såsom en större mängd papperskopior och tidningar att hålla reda på. Endast en elev tycktes motsätta sig undervisningens innehåll och metoder mer genomgående. En elev ansåg också att det specifika kulturella innehållet i språkundervisningen var för begränsat. De flesta i gruppen verkade ha anpassat sig till och till och med tagit

till sig ett annorlunda sätt att lära sig engelska trots eventuella förutfattade meningar gällande hur engelskundervisning skall se ut. Slutsatsen är att för de flesta elever är det fullt möjligt att komma över sådana förutfattade meningar om läraren kan möta deras behov men också motivera dem och hjälpa dem att se behovet av inlärning som de kanske inte inser på egen hand.

Sammanfattning och diskussion

Avhandlingen visar på en möjlig väg framåt när det gäller utvecklandet av interkulturell kompetens inom engelskämnet. Denna utveckling ses här som en cyklisk process från enkla till mer komplexa nivåer genom en kombination av kognitiva, affektiva och handlingsorienterade aspekter av kultur inom ramen för en mer holistisk erfarenhetsbaserad syn på lärande. Jag föreslår att det konkreta arbetet i klassrummet kunde fokusera på att befrämja medvetenhet om olikhet och mångfald med utgångspunkt i någon specifik kontext som, enligt elevernas bakgrundskunskaper och förhandsuppfattningar, är betjänt av ytterligare arbete. I denna studie låg fokus främst på olika kulturella och språkliga förhållanden i Storbritannien. Resultaten tyder också på att många elever hade utvecklat åtminstone en viss förmåga till mer distanserad syn på eget levnadssätt. Mer fokus borde ändå läggas på att utveckla individualiserade angreppssätt med tanke på elevers olika utgångspunkt. Dessutom skulle många ha varit betjänta av fler tillfällen för och mer handledning i att tillämpa de kulturella insikter som utvecklats i specifika situationer också i mer generella sammanhang. De tillvägagångssätt som utprövats inom ramen för denna studie behöver också prövas ut och utvecklas i andra kontexter.

Det är förståeligt att många lärare kan vara tveksamma när det gäller att lägga till mer innehåll i sina redan överfulla kursplaner. Här krävs en mer omfattande diskussion kring de prioriteringar som kunde göras bland språkundervisningens mål med tanke på de behov som dagens och morgondagens samhälle kan tänkas föra med sig. Inom ramen för denna studie har samhällets ökade internationalisering med medföljande krav på interkulturell kompetens fokuserats. Det hävdas i studien att denna kompetens gäller kulturmöten i allmänhet, inte bara möten med representanter för specifika målspråksområden. I denna diskussion borde också engelskans roll som ett lingua franca beaktas.

Vidare föreslås att lärare kunde bli mer uppmärksamma på att integrera kulturellt innehåll i undervisningen på ett mer systematiskt sätt, och också försöker se spontana möjligheter till kulturreflexivt arbete i den dagliga undervisningen. På så sätt kan det kulturella innehållet genomsyra eller åtminstone bli en mer genuin del av skolkulturen. Här har alla som arbetar med läroplansutveckling och lärarutbildningen en viktig uppgift i att föra fram en mer enhetlig syn på språkliga och kulturella aspekter för att ytterligare understödja lärarna i deras arbete i stället för att enbart lägga till nya krav. Alternativet är att ta till olika projekt av mer sporadisk natur som inte antas ha samma genomslagskraft som mer systematiska åtaganden, och som dessutom ofta innebär mycket merarbete för de som är involverade. I värsta fall kommer kulturella mål att förbli politiskt korrekta formuleringar i läroplanen och andra styrdokument som saknar utrymme i det dagliga arbetet i klassen.

References

Alred, G., Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Intercultural Experience and Education.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Alvesson, M., & Sköldberg, K. (1994). *Tolkning och reflektion. Vetenskapsfilosofi och kvalitativ metod.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Bailey, K. M. (1990). The Use of Diary Studies in Teacher Education Programs. In J. C. Richards & D. Nunan (Eds.), *Second Language Teacher Education* (pp. 215-226). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bailey, K. M. (1991). Diary Studies of Classroom Language Learning: The Doubting Game and the Believing Game. In E. Sadtono (Ed.), *Language Acquisition and the Second/Foreign Language Classroom* (pp. 60-102). Singapore: SEAMEO Regional Language Centre.

Baker, C. (1992). *Attitudes and Language*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters 83.

Banks, J. A., & McGee Banks, C. A. (Eds.). (2004). *Handbook of Research on Multicultural Education* (2nd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bendtsen, M., Björklund, M., Fant, C., & Forsman, L. (Eds.). (2006). *Språk, lärande och utbildning i sikte. Festskrift tillägnad Kaj Sjöholm.* Rapport från Pedagogiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi, Nr 20. Vasa: Pedagogiska fakulteten.

Bennett, M. J. (1998). Intercultural Communication: A Current Perspective. In M. J. Bennett (Ed.), *Basic Concepts of Intercultural Communication* (pp. 1-35). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Björklund, M. (2004). 10-åringar beskriver Storbritannien och USA - utmaningar för engelskläraren. In M. Björklund, T. Gullberg, & K. Sjöholm (Eds.), (pp. 69-86).

Björklund, M., Gullberg, T., & Sjöholm, K. (Eds.). (2004). *Språk som kultur - brytningar i tid och rum, vol. 2/ Language as Culture - Tensions in Time and Space, Vol. 2.* Rapport från Pedagogiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi, Nr 12 . Vasa: Pedagogiska fakulteten.

Bredella, L. (2003). Afterword: What Does it Mean to be Intercultural? In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), (pp. 225-239).

Brown, S. (1990). *Planning Small-Scale Research*. The SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow. Retrieved May 20, 2006, from <http://www.scre.ac.uk/spotlight/spotlight27.html>.

Burbules, N. C. (2004). Ways of thinking about educational quality. *Educational researcher*, 33 (6), 4-10.

Buttjes, D., & Byram, M. (Eds.). (1991). *Mediating Languages and Cultures: Towards an Intercultural Theory of Foreign Language Education.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (1991). Teaching Culture and Language: Towards an Integrated Model. In D. Buttjes, & M. Byram (Eds.), (pp. 17-30).

Byram, M. (1997). *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M. (2000). Evaluering af interkulturel kompetence. *Sprogforum. Tidsskrift for sprog- og kulturpædagogik*, *18 (6)*, 8-13.

Byram, M. (2001). *Pedagogical perspectives to intercultural learning, teaching, learning materials and assessment (using student portfolios).* Paper presented at the national foreign language teaching seminar *Minne menet, kielikasvatus?* at the University of Tampere, Finland, May 21-22, 2001.

Byram, M. (2004). Researching Political and Cultural Education in Foreign Language Teaching. In M. Björklund, T. Gullberg, & K. Sjöholm (Eds.), (pp. 11-37).

Byram, M., Esarte-Sarries, V., Taylor, S., & Allatt, P. (1991). Young People's Perceptions of Other Cultures: The Role of Foreign Language Teaching. In D. Buttjes, & M. Byram (Eds.), (pp. 103-119).

Byram, M., & Fleming, M. (Eds.). (1998). *Language Learning in Intercultural Perspective*. *Approaches through drama and ethnography.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Byram, M., Morgan, C., & Colleagues (1994). *Teaching-and-Learning Language-and-Culture.* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Byram, M., & Zarate, G. (1995). *Young people facing difference. Some proposals for teachers. (Language learning for European citizenship and European Youth Campaign against Racism, Xenophobia, Anti-Semitism and Intolerance.)* Strasbourg: Council of Europe Publishing.

Canagarajah, A. S. (1999). *Resisting Linguistic Imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cenoz, J., & Jessner, U. (Eds.). (2000). *English in Europe. The Acquisition of a Third Language*. Bilingual Education and Bilingualism 13. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters.

Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment. (2001). Council of Europe. Cambridge University Press.

Corson, D. (1995). *Using English Words*. Dordrecht, Holland: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Costa, A. L., & Kallick, B. (Eds.). (1995). *Assessment in the Learning Organization: Shifting the Paradigm*. Washington, D.C.: ASCD.

Crystal, D. (1997/2003). *English as a Global Language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, J. (2000). Putting Language Proficiency in its Place. In J. Cenoz, & U. Jessner (Eds.), (pp. 54-83).

Doyé, P. (1999). *The Intercultural Dimension. Foreign Language Education in the Primary School*. Berlin: Cornelsen Verlag.

Dysthe, O. (1996). *Det flerstämmiga klassrummet*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Dysthe, O. (2000). The teacher's role in the multivoiced classroom. In K. Sjöholm, & A. Østern (Eds.), (pp.55-72).

Elliott, J. (1991). *Action Research for Educational Change.* Milton Keynes, Philadelphia: Open University Press.

Elliott, J., & Adelman, C. (1996). Reflecting Where the Action Is: The Design of the Ford Teaching Project. In C. O'Hanlon (Ed.), (pp. 7-18).

Faas, D. (2006). *Multicultural European Citizenship: Possibilities and limitations of transforming the concept of Europe*. Paper presented at ECER in Geneva, 13-15.9.2006.

Fjellström, R. (2004). *Skolområdets etik. En studie i skolans fostran.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Fleming, M. (2003). Intercultural Experience and Drama. In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), (pp. 87-100).

Forsman, L. (2004a). *Language, Culture, and Context. Exploring knowledge and attitudes among Finland-Swedish EFL-students with particular focus on extracurricular influence.* Report from the Faculty of Education, Åbo Akademi University, No 7. Vaasa, Finland: Pedagogiska fakulteten.

Forsman, L. (2004b). Promoting Intercultural Competence in a Finland-Swedish EFL Classroom. In M. Björklund, T. Gullberg, & K. Sjöholm (Eds.), (pp. 87-101).

Forsman, L. (2006). En förändrad värld - ett förändrat språkklassrum? Om engelskämnets roll i postmodern tid. In A.-L. Østern, K. Sjöholm, & S.-B. Arnolds-Granlund (Eds.), *Kulturella mötesplatser i tid och rum* (pp. 125-134)*. Rapport från Pedagogiska fakulteten vid Åbo Akademi, Nr 18. Vasa: Pedagogiska fakulteten.

Forsman, L. (in press). Att utveckla medvetenhet om mångfald och respekt för olikhet i engelskklassrummet. In U. Tornberg (Ed.), *Aspekter på 'kultur' i det mångkulturella språkklassrummet: En konferensrapport* (9 pp.).

Framework curriculum for the comprehensive school. (1994). Helsinki: National Board of Education.

Fritzell, C. (1999). *Om pedagogikens värdeorientering och integrativa uppgifter.*Installationsföreläsning vid Växjö universitet 1999. Retrieved October 4, 2004, from <http://www.iped.vxu.se/publikation/personal/c-fritzell/Om-vardeorient.htm>.

Fritzell, C. (2003). *Towards a deliberative model of democratic competence in pedagogic practice*. Points of departure for a presentation at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association in Chicago, April 21-25, 2003. Retrieved October 4, 2003, from <http://www.iped.vxu.se/publikation/personal/c-fritzell/Towards.htm>.

Gagnestam, E. (2003). *Kultur i Språkundervisning: med fokus på engelska*. Karlstad: Karlstad University Studies.

Graddol, D. (2006). *English Next*. *Why global English may mean the end of 'English as a Foreign Language'*. British Council. Plymouth: Latimer Trend & Company.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1988). Naturalistic and Rationalistic Enquiry. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), (pp. 81-85).

Hansén, S.-E., & Sjöberg, J. (2006). Lärarutbildning och kvalitet. In M. Bendtsen, M. Björklund, C. Fant, & L. Forsman (Eds.), (pp. 273-288).

Hargreaves, A. (1994). *Changing Teachers, Changing Times: Teachers' Work and Culture in the Postmodern Age*. London: Teachers College Press.

Herlitz, G. (1999). *Vem är inte riktigt klok? En kulturguide för ungdomar*. Uppsala: Argument Förlag.

Heusinkveld, P. (1997). *The Foreign Language Classroom: A Forum for Understanding Cultural Stereotypes*. In P. Heusinkveld (Ed.), *Pathways to Culture: Readings on Teaching Culture in the Foreign Language Class* (pp. 487-497). Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press.

Holme, R. (2003). Carrying a Baby *in* the Back: Teaching with an Awareness of the Cultural Construction of Language. In M. Byram, & P. Grundy (Eds.), *Context and Culture in Language Teaching and Learning* (pp. 18-31). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.

Holter, H., & Kalleberg, R. (Eds.). (1996). *Kvalitative metoder i samfunns-forskning.* Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

House, J. (2002). Communicating in English as a lingua franca. In S. Foster-Cohen, T. Ruthenberg, & M-L. Poschen (Eds.), *EUROSLA Yearbook*. Volume 2 (pp. 243-261). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Hughes, G. (2001). The Ambiguity of English: Adding Value or Devaluing Identity. In E. Kimonen (Ed.), (pp. 15-17).

Huttunen, I., & Takala, S. (2004). Euroopan neuvoston toiminta kielikoulutuksen kehittämiseksi ja sen vaikutus kielisuunnitteluun Suomessa. In K. Sajavaara, & S. Takala (Eds.), (pp. 325-342).

Hämäläinen, K. (2003). "Koulu, opettaja ja nuori ihminen." Mistä tulemme, minne menemme. *Kasvatus, 3*, 303-307.

Jaeger, K. (2001). Den interkulturelle sprogbruger og tidens krav til sprog- og kulturkompetence. *Sprogforum. Tidsskrift for sprog- og kulturpædagogik*, *19*, 52-56.

Jakku-Sihvonen, R., & Niemi, H. (Eds.). (2006). *Research-based Teacher Education in Finland - Reflections by Finnish Teacher Educators*. Research in Educational Sciences 25.Turku: Painosalama.

James, A. R. (2000). English as a European Lingua Franca. Current Realities and Existing Dichotomies. In J. Cenoz, & U. Jessner (Eds.), (pp. 22-38).

Jenkins, J. (2000). *The Phonology of English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Jenkins, J. (2004). The ABC of ELT ... "ELF". *IATEFL Issues, (182)*, 9.

Jokikokko, K. (2005a). Perspectives on intercultural competence. In R. Räsänen, & J. San (Eds.), (pp. 89-106).

Jokikokko, K. (2005b). Reflections on interculturally oriented teachership. In R. Räsänen, & J. San (Eds.), (pp. 183-205).

Kaikkonen, P. (2001). Intercultural learning through foreign language education. In V. Kohonen, R. Jaatinen, P. Kaikkonen, & J. Lehtovaara (Eds.), (pp. 61-105).

Kaikkonen, P. (2004a). *Kielenopetus kielikasvatuksena - nuoren vieraan kielen opettajan kehityspolut*. Jyväskylä: Opettajankoulutuslaitos, Jyväskylän yliopisto.

Kaikkonen, P. (2004b). Opettajuutta etsimässä - vieraan kielen opettajaksi valmistuvien kokemuksia ja käsityksiä. In R. Jaatinen, P. Kaikkonen, & J. Lehtovaara (Eds.), *Opettajuudesta ja kielikasvatuksesta. Puheenvuoroja sillanrakentajille* (pp. 114-129). Tampere: Tampere University Press.

Kaikkonen, P. (2004c). *Vierauden keskellä. Vierauden, monikulttuurisuuden ja kulttuurienvälisen kasvatuksen aineksia*. Jyväskylä: Opettajankoulutuslaitos, Jyväskylän yliopisto.

Kaikkonen, P. (2005). Monikielinen ja monikulttuurinen identiteetti - kielenopetuksenkin haasteena. In J. Smeds, K. Sarmavuori, E. Laakkonen, & R. de Cillia (Eds.), (pp. 89-100).

Keeves, J. P. (Ed.). (1988/1990). *Educational Research, Methodology, and Measurement. An International Handbook* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Kemmis, S. (1988). Action Research. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), (pp. 42-49).

Kemmis, S. (1994). Action Research. In T. Husen, & T. N. Postlethwaite (Eds.), *International Encyclopedia of Education.* London: Pergamon Press.

Kemp, P. (2005). *Världsmedborgaren: politisk och pedagogisk filosofi för det 21 århundradet.* Göteborg: Daidalos.

Kerlinger, F. N. (1964/1973). *Foundations of behavioral research* (2nd ed.). London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

Kimonen, E. (Ed.). (2001). *Curriculum Approaches*. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.

Kohonen, V. (2000). Portfolio-oriented foreign language education and the teacher's professional development. *Babylonia*, *4*, 11-14.

Kohonen, V. (2001a). Promoting awareness of language and language learning through the European language portfolio. In R. Jaatinen, J. Lehtovaara, & V. Kohonen (Eds.), *Ammatillisen kielenopetuksen monet kasvot* (pp. 147-162). Pirkanmaan ammattikorkeakoulun julkaisusarja A4. Tampere: Pirkanmaan ammattikorkea-koulu.

Kohonen, V. (2001b). Towards experiential foreign language education. In V. Kohonen, R. Jaatinen, P. Kaikkonen, & J. Lehtovaara (Eds.), (pp. 8-60).

Kohonen, V. (2005). Experiential learning, intercultural learning and teacher development in foreign language education. In J. Smeds, K. Sarmavuori, E. Laakkonen, & R. de Cillia (Eds.), (pp. 123-136).

Kohonen, V. (2006). Facilitating student ownership of learning in FL education through the European Language Portfolio. In M. Bendtsen, M. Björklund, C. Fant, & L. Forsman (Eds.), (pp. 113-126)*.

Kohonen, V., Jaatinen, R., Kaikkonen, P., & Lehtovaara, J. (Eds.). (2001). *Experiential Learning in Foreign Language Education*. Harlow, UK: Longman.

Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential Learning. Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Kramsch, C. (1993). *Context and Culture in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kramsch, C. (2004). The language teacher as go-between. *Utbildning & Demokrati. Tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik [English Edition], 13 (3),* 37-60.

Kubota, R. (2004). Critical multiculturalism and second language education. In B. Norton & K. Toohey (Eds.), *Critical Pedagogies and Language Learning* (pp. 30-52). Cambridge Applied Linguistics Series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Kullberg, B. (1996/2004). *Etnografi i klassrummet* (2nd ed.). Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews. An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing.* Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Kvale, S. (1997). *Den kvalitativa forskningsintervjun*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Kyburz-Graber, R., Hart, P., Posch, P., & Robottom, I. (Eds.). (2006). *Reflective Practice in Teacher Education*. Bern: Peter Lang.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics Across Cultures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Lahdenperä, P. (2004). Interkulturell pedagogik - vad, hur och varför? In R. Lahdenperä (Ed.), *Interkulturell pedagogik i teori och praktik* (pp. 11-31). Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Lammi, K. (2004). Kielisalkku lukion kieltenopetuksen kehittämisessä. In K. Sajavaara, & S. Takala (Eds.), (pp. 343-353).

Larsson, S. (1986). *Kvalitativ analys – exemplet fenomenografi.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Larzén, E. (2005). *In Pursuit of an Intercultural Dimension in EFL-Teaching*. Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press.

LeCompte, M. D., & Goetz, J. P. (1982). Problems of Reliability and Validity in Ethnographic Research. *Review of Educational Research*, *52 (1)*, 31-60.

Linnarud, M. (2006). Language education - an arena for co-operation or conflict? In M. Bendtsen, M. Björklund, C. Fant, & L. Forsman (Eds.), (pp. 139-146).

Lintunen, P. (2001). *The relaxed RP and elegant GA: does your accent reveal your true character?* Paper presented at the inaugural conference of FISSE (The Finnish Society for the Study of English), in Turku, Finland, on September 29, 2001.

List, P. (1994). Om stereotyper, især nationale. *Sprogforum. Tidsskrift for sprog- og kulturpædagogik*, *1*, 14-18.

Little, D. (1991). *Autonomy. Definitions, Issues and Problems*. Dublin: Authentik.

Lundahl, B. (1995). *"Den var bra. Har du en till likadan?" – "Autentiska" texter i allmän kurs engelska på högstadiet.* Ämnesdidaktiska studier nr 5. Institutionen för metodik och ämnesteori vid Lunds universitet. Malmö: Lärarhögskolan.

Lundahl, B. (1998). *Läsa på främmande språk. Om autentiska texter, kreativ läsning och läsförmågans betydelse för språkinlärningen*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Lundgren, U. (2001). *Att utbilda för interkulturell förståelse. En studie av styrande texter för grundskolans engelskundervisning*. Malmö: Institutionen för pedagogik, Malmö högskola.

Marton, F. (1986). Phenomenography – A Research Approach to Investigating Different Understandings of Reality. *Journal of Thought*, *21 (3)*, 28-49.

Marton, F. (1992). På spaning efter medvetandets pedagogik. *Forskning om utbildning. Tidskrift för analys och debatt, 4*, 28-40.

Marton, F., & Booth, S. (2000). *Om lärande*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Marton, F., & Pang, M. F. (1999). *Two Faces of Variation*. Paper presented at the 8th European Conference for Learning and Instruction at Göteborg University, Gothenburg, Sweden, August 24-28, 1999. Retrieved August 4, 2006, from <http://www.ped.gu.se/biorn/phgraph/civil/graphica/fmpmf.pdf>. (12 pp.).

McDonough, J., & McDonough, S. (1997). *Research methods for English language teachers*. London: Arnold.

McGarry, D. (1995). *An integrated ESL and cultural studies syllabus*. CLCS Occasional Paper, no. 42. Trinity College Dublin: Centre for Language and Communication Studies.

National Core Curriculum for Basic Education. (2004). Helsinki: National Board of Education.

Nevalainen, R., Kimonen, E., & Hämäläinen, S. (2001). Curriculum Changes in the Finnish Comprehensive School: The Lessons of Three Decades. In E. Kimonen (Ed.), (pp. 123-141).

Nilsson, R. (2001). *Historieämnets legitimitet i en postmodern tid*. HumaNetten 9. Institutionen för humaniora, Växjö universitet. Retrieved September 20, 2004, from
<http://www.hum.vxu.se/publ/humanetten/nummer9/art0114.html>.

O'Hanlon, C. (Ed.). (1996). *Professional Development through Action Research in Educational Settings*. London & NewYork: Routledge Falmer.

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language Learning Strategies. What Every Teacher Should Know.* New York: Newbury House Publishers.

Paige-Smith, A. (1996). Seeing-off Cuts: Researching a Professional and Parents' Campaign to Save Inclusive Education in a London Borough. In C. O'Hanlon (Ed.), (pp. 89-102).

Parker, S. (1997). Reflective Teaching in the Postmodern World. A manifesto for education in postmodernity. Buckingham, PA: Open University Press.

Paulson, L., Paulson, P., & Meyer, C. (1991). What makes a portfolio a portfolio? *Educational Leadership, 48,* 60-63.

Pelkonen, P. (2005a). Intercultural learning for international cooperation. In R. Räsänen, & J. San (Eds.), (pp. 69-87).

Pelkonen, P. (2005b). Learning from experiencing cultural differences in north-south cooperation - a Finnish-Kenyan example. In R. Räsänen, & J. San (Eds.), (pp. 133-156).

Posch, P. (1996). Changing the Culture of Teaching and Learning: Implications for Action Research. In C. O'Hanlon (Ed.), (pp. 61-69).

Pulverness, A. (1999). Making it strange: literature and culture shock. [First published in *ELT News and Views* (Argentina) Year 6, No 1, March 1999]. Retrieved May 21, 2005, from http://elt.britcoun.org.pl/elt/forum/strange.htm

Richards, J. (1996). Redefining, Reconstructing and Reflecting on the Group Process. In C. O'Hanlon (Ed.), (pp. 103-118).

Riley, P. (2000). 'What has posterity done for us?' The language classroom in the third millennium. In K. Sjöholm, & A. Østern (Eds.), (pp. 17-40).

Risager, K. (1999). Globalisering og internationalisering - venner eller fjender? *Sprogforum. Tidsskrift for sprog- og kulturpædagogik*, *13*, 7-11.

Risager, K. (2000). Lærerens interkulturelle kompetence. *Sprogforum. Tidsskrift for sprog- og kulturpædagogik*, *18*, 14-20.

Risager, K. (2001). Sprogpolitik i klasseværelset. *Sprogforum. Tidsskrift for sprog- og kulturpædagogik*, *19*, 57-61.

Räsänen, R., & San, J. (Eds.). (2005). *Conditions for Intercultural Learning and Co-operation*. Research in Educational Sciences 23.Turku: Painosalama.

Rönnerman, K. (Ed.). (2004). *Aktionsforskning i praktiken - erfarenheter och reflektioner*. Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Sajavaara, K. (2006). *Kielivalinnat ja kielten opetus peruskoulussa ja lukiossa.* Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto.

Sajavaara, K., & Takala, S. (Eds.). (2004). *Kielikoulutus tienhaarassa*. Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto.

Schön, D. A. (1983). *The reflective practitioner.* New York: Basic Books.

Sen Gupta, A. (2003). Changing the Focus: A Discussion of the Dynamics of the Intercultural Experience. In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), (pp. 155-178).

Sjöholm, K. (2000). Attitudes towards English and two second national languages in Finland. In K. Sjöholm, & A. Østern (Eds.), (pp. 121-141).

Sjöholm, K. (2004). Swedish, Finnish, English? Finland's Swedes in a changing world. *Journal of Curriculum Studies, 36 (6),* 637-644.

Sjöholm, K., & Hansén, S.-E. (2006). *Developing teacher professionalism in a changing world. Dynamics of dichotomies.* Paper presented at ECER in Geneva, 13-15.9.2006.

Sjöholm, K., & Østern, A. (Eds.). (2000). *Perspectives on Language and Communication in Multilingual Education.* Reports from the Faculty of Education, Åbo Akademi University, No 6. Vasa, Finland: Pedagogiska fakulteten.

Smeds, J. (2004). Språk, nationell identitet och xenofobi: niondeklassisters väg till världsmedborgarskap. In M. Björklund, T. Gullberg, & K. Sjöholm (Eds.), (pp. 53-68).

Smeds, J., Sarmavuori, K., Laakkonen, E., & de Cillia, R. (Eds.). (2005). *Multicultural Communities, Multilingual Practice. Festschrift für Annikki Koskensalo zum 60. Geburtstag*. Turku: Annales Universitatis Turkuensis.

Stern, H. H. (1992/1996). *Issues and Options in Language Teaching* (2nd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Stevens, D. (2003). English for the English: An Intercultural Approach. In G. Alred, M. Byram, & M. Fleming (Eds.), (pp. 179-195).

Suortti, J. (2003). Pääkirjoitus: Demokraattinen yhteiskuntasuunnittelu ja kasvatuksen arvot. *Kasvatus, 4*, 323-324.

Säljö, R. (2000). *Lärande i praktiken. Ett sociokulturellt perspektiv*. Stockholm: Prisma.

Taft, R. (1988). Ethnographic Research Methods. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), (pp. 59-63).

Takala, S. (1984). *Evaluation of Students' Knowledge of English Vocabulary in the Finnish Comprehensive School*. Reports from the Institute for Educational Research. Jyväskylä: University of Jyväskylä.

Takala, S. (2002). Jerome Bruner: kasvatuksen, kielen ja kulttuurin monitieteinen uranuurtaja. In H. Dufva, & M. Lähteenmäki (Eds.), *Kielentutkimuksen klassikoita* (pp. 307-334). Jyväskylä: Jyväskylän yliopisto.

Taube, K. (1997). *Portfoliometoden – undervisningsstrategi och utvärderingsinstrument.* Stockholm: Gothia.

Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). Cultural Awareness. Resource books for teachers. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tornberg, U. (2000). Om språkundervisning i mellanrummet – och talet om "kommunikation" och "kultur" i kursplaner och läromedel från 1962 till 2000. Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Uppsala Studies in Education, 92.

Tornberg, U. (2001). Interkulturalitet - en relation på gränsen mellan dåtid, nutid och framtid. In R. Ferm, & P. Malmberg (Eds.), *Språkboken. En antologi om språkundervisning och språkinlärning* (pp. 181-191). Stockholm: Skolverket.

Tornberg, U. (2004). 'Multiculturalism' - a dead end in conceptualizing difference, or an open-ended approach to facilitating democratic experiences in the foreign language classroom? *Utbildning & Demokrati. Tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik [English Edition], 13 (3),* 127-143.

Trost, J. (1997). *Kvalitativa intervjuer.* Lund: Studentlitteratur.

Tuokko, E. (2000). *Peruskoulun 9. vuosiluokan englannin (A1-kieli) oppimistulosten kansallinen arviointi 1999*. Oppimistulosten arviointi 3/2000. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.

van Lier, L. (1988/1994). *The Classroom and the Language Learner. Ethnography and second-language classroom research*. London: Longman.

van Lier, L. (1996). *Interaction in the Language Curriculum. Awareness, Autonomy & Authenticity*. London: Longman.

van Lier, L. (2000). From input to affordance: Social-interactive learning from an ecological perspective. In J. P. Lantolf (Ed.), *Sociocultural Theory and Second Language Learning* (pp. 245-259). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

van Lier, L. (2004). The semiotics and ecology of language learning. Perception, voice, identity and democracy. *Utbildning & Demokrati. Tidskrift för didaktik och utbildningspolitik [English Edition], 13 (3),* 79-103.

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in Society*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Watt, J. (1995). *Ethical Issues for Teacher Researchers*. The SCRE Centre, University of Glasgow. Retrieved April 4, 2004, from <http://www.scre.ac.uk/spotlight/spotlight49.html>.

Ödman, P-J. (1988). Hermeneutics. In J. P. Keeves (Ed.), (pp. 63-70).

Audiovisual Media:

Chadha, G. (Director). (2002). *Bend It Like Beckham* [Motion picture]. (Available from Fox Searchlight Pictures).

Spurlock, M. (Director). (2004). *Super size me* [Motion picture]. (Available from IDP Films, 1133 Broadway, Suite 926, New York, NY 10010).

Appendices

Appendix I: Excerpts from the *Action Log*

The purpose of including the following excerpts is to provide the reader with more concrete insights into the work in the classroom. Thus, although most of these excerpts have been included and referred to with the purpose of illustrating specific points of the work with the cultural dimension, they also aim at illustrating some of the variety of issues included within the framework of the regular curriculum. The Action Log itself should be conceived of as a tool for providing a deeper understanding of both my own and students' learning process, both during, but particularly after the classroom teaching period (see also Section 5.2.4). This public version of the Action Log (originally written in English) has been somewhat tidied up and edited to clarify meaning, e.g. some footnotes have been included to explain certain issues to the reader, as well as a few extracts from other diary entries to provide a more complete picture of the aspects discussed. However, it has not been formally checked concerning language since I wanted the excerpts to reflect the freer style of the original entries as opposed to the language of the study itself.

Excerpt A:

Week 33, August 16, 2002 (2 x 45 minutes)

Beginning of Course 1 and my first meeting with the group (2 x 45 minutes)

Aims:

- I will start to get to know the students and they will get to know me

- the students will know some of the basic routines for the coming work

- the students will learn about some benefits of cooperative work

- the students will be reminded of the usefulness of knowing English and start seeing a connection between their need of English outside the classroom and what we do in class

- to learn about the students' levels of English

- to find out about the students' awareness of unintentional learning through conducting Part I of my pre-test.

Now I have met my new class for two lessons that went incredibly quickly!

I started out in English with some small talk to set the mood in the class, followed by a short presentation round. Most students chose to speak English during their one-line presentations. After that we went through some practical things concerning the schedule, books, the use of authentic material (I had brought a copy of Bliss[198] that we are going to use for our first text), notebooks and working-methods.

---

[198] British youth (girl) magazine.

(---)

The use of the notebook was very much in focus during the first lessons. I had chosen a notebook of size A4 to be able to use it for gluing in exercises and other copies of that same size. The following "rules" for use were presented to begin with: write in pencil on every second line whenever you do exercises or write free text (i.e., not necessary when copying text from the teacher); use the back of the notebook to make your own alphabetical word list (English > Swedish) of interesting, new words used e.g. on TV, in song lyrics, and on the computer. We outlined the word-list and the students were encouraged to add to the list on a regular basis. (We also looked at a few "difficult" letters like A, E, and I, and I told them that they can find the alphabet as well as help with pronunciation in the beginning of the WRaP-book.[199]) I will look at the word-lists again on Monday to ensure that everyone has all the letters in place, and to show that this is an important exercise. I will also tell them to remember to always date their work in the rest of the notebook and start by adding the date of that day when we continue working.

After that I wanted to show the students the benefits of cooperation. I showed a picture on the OHP of a "building" with lots of details in the form of circles, triangles, and squares in different places and asked them to memorize the structure. After less than a minute I turned off the OHP and asked then students to draw as much as they could remember of the figure on the first page of the notebook. Then they were told to move into the four groups that we have formed and to compare their drawings for a short while before I showed the original picture again so that they could see what was missing. Finally I asked them to consider whether the picture they drew would have been more or less like the original if they had been asked to cooperate in the groups on a single drawing. They concluded that cooperation probably would have been useful in this case![200] I will refer to the drawing in their notebooks again next time to see if they can remember this message.

Next on the agenda was a general discussion in class of the following issues:

1. When you learn a language, what do you want to learn?

2. When do you use/need English?

3. Have you had contacts with the world outside the classroom in your English education (visits, through the Internet, other means)?

The first question did not lead to any discussion at all, so I moved on to the second one. Then we got the following list: when travelling; when using the computer; when reading books and magazines in English; when writing letters; when watching TV. Very few students have read books or magazines in English,

---

[199] Grammar book with exercises used at the school at this time.

[200] Later addition (from August 26): 'Last week a member of the Red Cross had given the students advice on what to do when arriving as the first person to the scene of an accident. This gave me an idea concerning the usefulness of cooperation: If you are alone at the scene you have to remember everything on your own, but if you are several people you can help each other remember what to do. They seemed to understand this argument very well.'

and the letter-writing had been done at one of their previous schools as a project with contacts to Lithuania. This was also the only contact they had had from their schools with English outside the classroom so far.

After the break I reminded them of what they had concluded regarding the usefulness of learning English. I particularly emphasized vocabulary work (e.g. their own word-lists), and for them to remember the importance of vocabulary work I showed them a Far Side-cartoon[201] on the OHP of a man that have painted the name of his things on them in order to know what they are, e.g. THE HOUSE, THE DOG, THE CAT!

Then to the first part of my pre-test: I told them that in order to make their English education more effective and useful, I wanted them to answers a couple of questions in written form (questionnaire in Swedish). We went through the questions, and they could choose whether they wanted to answer in Swedish or English (one boy answered in English). They did this in 7-12 minutes. These questions on the topic of unintentional language learning were the following:

1. How do you learn English on your own in your spare time? Is this your own idea, or has anyone helped you?

2. How do you know that you learn English in your spare time?

3. Has your teacher (or anyone else) talked about the fact that you learn English in your spare time? What has your teacher said (for example, about lifelong learning, has she given you ideas on how to learn,...)?

4. What do you learn in your spare time (words, expressions, grammar, pronunciation,...), give examples!

5. Where do you use what you learn on your own? Do you use it in your spare time? For example, on the Internet? Or at school, for example in essays? If not, why?

After this I wanted something lighter but still a check-up concerning their level of English so I told them that we were going to have a LC. This made a few of them sigh, but I wanted them to see that all kinds of work in English can be listening comprehensions. The task for them was to listen to me read a sentence or a few in English (explaining and checking up on unknown words as we went along), and then trying to guess the explanation of the situation. This exercise often gets strong reactions since the students naturally try to interpret the situations as something real or serious before they get the hang of it and start using their imagination. The activity was successful, but they did need a lot of help with the vocabulary.

We then went on to work with our first real text, a page that I had copied from a British youth magazine called Bliss, containing published letter from readers telling about their most awkward moments. I assured them that I do not expect them to find these texts easy, since they are authentic texts that native speakers

---

[201] *The Far Side* is a popular one-panel comic created by Gary Larson. Its surrealistic humor is often based on uncomfortable social situations, improbable events, an anthropomorphic view of the world, logical fallacies, impending bizarre disasters, or the search for meaning in life. (From *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia)

of English read, but that I wanted them to try their wings by cooperating and helping each other in the groups to see, again, that they can accomplish a lot this way. Of course I also wanted to emphasize the fact that learning English at school means learning for all kinds of authentic needs. (---)

Excerpt B:

Week 34, August 19, 2002 (45 minutes)

Aims:

- revision: the benefits of cooperation; the connection between English learnt outside the classroom and at school; rules of behaviour and work in the classroom

- increased awareness of the importance of the continuous process of learning that takes place outside the classroom

- to guide students to start practising working with authentic material in groups the way we will work a lot during the year (responsibility of each of the groups to learn their own areas and to teach the others).

After some small talk about the weekend I asked them if they had used or noticed any English during the weekend. At first no one had, but after I had asked about possible use of TV and music, they realized that they actually had used some English! Since I had already checked up on their initial awareness of unintentional language learning through media in the first part of the pre-test (Aug. 16), I will continue working on an increased awareness of this aspect of language learning before moving on to next part of the pre-test and other areas of importance for this project. I reminded them of their own word-lists and gave those who needed to a few minutes to fill in the rest of the letters. To show that this issue is important I also went around to check the lists and saw that two or three students had actually listed a few words, e.g. the word 'alien' that we talked about last time. I asked them to keep the list in mind and try to find at least one word each for next time. Then I will also tell about a word or two that I have noticed myself.

We also practised the letters of the alphabet together, since I had commented on a few letters last time.

Then I checked up on their homework by showing the new words on the OHP, letting them give the words they wanted. Three quarters of the class had done their home work, the rest did not, so I told them that I will expect more in the future. However, since I hadn't exactly told them what I expect of them, I decided to leave it at that and do a better job myself in the future! Next time, we will read the words together once more to show the importance of doing regular reviewing, and I will also remind them of the words in the LC activity we had last Friday to stress that we can learn from everything we do.

I also reminded them of the activity we did last time concerning the OHP and the drawing they were supposed to memorize. I got the response that the activity was intended to show them that they can remember more together than on their own!

However, the actual group work did not succeed tremendously well in all groups. The main obstacle for successful work seemed to be motivational problems among a few boys. Still, this is only the beginning of a new term with a new class and a new way of working. I believe that the time and effort spent on learning cooperation will pay off later on, even if it seems like we are progressing very slowly in the subject itself. We will practise more next time and then move on to some individual work with something easier to give variation both concerning working methods and material. I want to save the individual reflection concerning different working methods until we have been working for 3-4 weeks to give the students some perspective and not let initial frustration with a new task be the only one in focus. And two of the groups were very successful, they worked efficiently with the words, checked meaning and read the text aloud, helping each other with the pronunciation, and actually seemed to be having fun! (---)

At the end, we had a serious discussion about the inefficient work of a few of the students, at this stage this means that I was the one discussing, of course... On the other hand, the class had no problems (except a little bit of whining from one boy) concerning the cooperation around straightening up in the classroom before leaving together. Wonderful!

Excerpt C:

Week 35, August 30, 2002 (2 x 45 minutes)

Absent: Je, Ma

Aims:

- the students notice their progress so far by being able to read authentic material (= the new texts) with less difficulty than before.

- to guide students how they can learn from a text of their own choice that is to be included in their individual learning process.

- students become more aware of their way of working with exercises: to read through instructions; to get a context for the sentences to help understand them better. This will also work as a way to begin practising reflection of work procedures and how to learn more effectively.

Besides stressing the continuous process of learning languages also outside the classroom, I want to make the students aware of their own progress as they go on learning. Now as the students had worked with the texts and the vocabulary I asked them to silently read through their own letter as well as one of the others once more and hopefully notice that they have done good work with these texts since they are much easier to understand than before. One might argue that this is only natural since we have been working with these texts, but I wanted to point out that the students themselves had done most of the work with texts that were above their level, and that no intensive text work in the form of word-for-word translation or traditional "underlining" under the lead of the teacher had been taking place. Besides showing the benefits of helping each other in groups, this exercise helps the students to see how they can learn languages from

basically any authentic text without having to be tied down to the traditional textbook and the teacher.

As a continuation of the process to make the new words part of the students' active working vocabulary, I asked them to choose 7-10 of them and to use these in an elaboration exercise. When a student asked if they could write in pairs I realized that I needed to explain that a second reason for this task was that I have not so far seen a text that the students have produced, and this is important for me as I can plan our future work better when I see what they need to practise. Later, when we go on working with the past tense of verbs, I will refer to this task again and make students aware of an important reason to learn grammar and new words: many of them were asking me for help with the past tense when writing since they needed this form to tell their story (and most of them seemed to have missed making up stories since they were very eager to write this one)! To create a real and motivating communicative need is a great way to motivate students for further work with the language.

I worked towards today's third aim by bringing up the fact that all students do not read/make use of the instructions for exercises as they fill them in (e.g. the spelling of DON'T and DOESN'T was given "for free" in one of the exercises, but some students still had not noticed/made use of this as a help for their spelling.) I also showed them the help they can get by reading and understanding the complete sentence as they fill in gaps or the answer to a question that they are supposed to form. This, again, is something that I will have to stress repeatedly.

Finally, we started working with another authentic text in the form of song lyrics: a parody of a popular song that I have found on the Internet. Besides being a highly motivating and useful task (contains useful vocabulary on the topic of meals and food, and the familiar melody and the rhythm make both words and phrasal expressions, even complete sentences, easy to learn[202]), this task serves as another introduction to how they can find texts and work on their own, something that we will start on next Friday. At the end of the lesson as I was explaining their homework, one girl asked whether they were also supposed to study the extra words at home. At first I did not understand what she meant, but then I realized that "the extra words" were words that were not in the lyrics of the song that we had written down in the margin since they were connected to the others in certain ways. Then I only had time to say that they were supposed to study those words as well, but I realized that this is an important issue that we will have to discuss next time: Are there "extra" words that one does not need to

---

[202] Excerpt from September 2: 'I hope the students will start seeing the connection between what they learn outside and inside the classroom and to make conscious use of their knowledge in all situations. They should realize that not remembering the exact words from the homework does not necessarily mean that they cannot express themselves in English: there are different strategies to turn to. There was a good opportunity to point this out as I was checking up on their homework: very few remembered the word to starve, but when I asked them to think about the line in the song where this word is used ("What are the children doing in the song? "), another couple of hands immediately flew up!'

learn and for what reasons? That they cannot be found in the textbook? What words are important and for what reasons? Frequency? Individual needs? Interests? Are these words that can be found in the textbook or in some other source? Since the students are going to work quite a lot with individual texts and unintentional learning outside the classroom will be encouraged, they will all learn different words and expressions. They need to understand that this still means learning interesting and useful language.

Excerpt D:

Week 37, September 9, 2002 (45 minutes)

Absent: B

Aims:

- to raise the students' consciousness of the importance of the process of learning through work with texts and other language material in several stages (e.g. the students notice that new grammar they learn can be used to improve the texts they have written earlier

- to guide students concerning practical procedures connected to process writing/work

Issues of importance:

- the students got their elaboration tasks and written tests[203] back. I had not corrected their work except for underlining issues that they should work with and think about as we go on.

- Concerning the tests, I gave them a few minutes to find the song lyrics and the words and get started with the corrections on their own, but then I also wrote the sentences on the black board. I had also given them a grade and asked them to consider whether they would be pleased with this grade or whether they need to work harder from now on. They were supposed to correct the test using a pen or pencil of other colour so one can see what they had written originally and what they had corrected. They also glued the test into their notebooks so that we have concrete proof of their progress at a later stage.

- In the elaboration task, I had not given any grades at this stage. I told them that we will go on working with these texts later on and make changes into them and write new versions (not take out the original texts) as they learn more grammar and expressions. I took the past tense as an example: I told them that soon we will learn how to express the past tense with all verbs, and at that stage they will be able to make these changes in their texts. I think it is a good way to motivate learners by showing them the need for learning certain issues. To me, this type of process working seems like a good way to both show their progress and how issues they learn are meant to be used, not only learn grammatical issues out of context and then leave them.

---

[203] One of the regular language tests conducted each course.

- I tried to connect everything we did with familiar aspects in the new texts, e.g. when talking about the use of the present continuous, I reminded the students of examples in the song lyrics.

Excerpt E:

Weeks 39-42, September-October 2002

Several weeks spent working on establishing previously set aims as well as preparing for and writing first test[204] (+ fall break 2 lessons).

During these weeks, I started working on developing an understanding that a test is only one type of work out of several that students receive their grades from, and that one of the main aims of the test actually is to help them and me to summarize our work so far and see what we need to work more on.

The test results were not as good as I expected since the test didn't include either a lot of material or particularly difficult material in my opinion. Still, there were many good results. Just like other written check-ups we have had in this group, the results tend to be either very high or very low, few in-between.

I marked the tests by underlining mistakes, and left it for the students to do corrections themselves using their books and notes while I had some time to go around in class, helping out and discussing individual issues. I wanted to focus on three issues: 1) To try to explore and understand the students' thoughts as they were completing certain tasks during the test in order to be able to explain unclear aspects to them in a way they can relate better to. 2) To discuss (both as whole-class but individually in most cases) how much work and concentration they had put into the homework and preparing the test to see whether this gives both me and them a clue as to why they have a certain result. 3) Eventually I want them to consider how they will go on working: their personal aims for the nearest future (e.g. to get equally good results alternatively better results from future work, and for being able to use these structures and words in letters, when chatting, on trips, etc). Since most students are unaware of these issues, much of this reflective work quite naturally seems unproductive in the beginning. For example, students might say that they have studied for a test for several hours without realizing that they were not fully concentrated most of the time. But through reflective practice and discussions I hope that they can become more aware of how their own efforts and their results are related.

It turned out that it was difficult and felt strange for some of the students to do corrections on the test on their own, but they still did a good job for a first time. However, I think that they will feel more secure next time and understand that this actually is a good way of practising and learning more from what we do (concerning both exercises, essays, and tests).

In the test, the students were asked to give examples of what they had learnt from the work with individual texts. Naturally, they knew that this task would be included, but all of them did not succeed that well. I will try this some more to

---

[204] One of the regular language tests conducted each course.

see whether they were just insecure about what this really would mean in the test, whether they had forgotten about it, or something else that will not affect them as much next time since it will be a more familiar task. However, for many of them this went well, they knew a lot of "complicated" new words. I will check up on these same words right after Christmas to see whether the students remember their "own" words as well as other words that we read (e.g. compared to other words from the same test).

It is difficult to judge whether this is an effective way of working, it depends on what one wants to measure, of course. In a way, we spent lot of lessons on work that did not amount in a great deal of concrete, "correct" language, e.g. measured in words and expressions. In more traditional text work, by using the teacher as a mediator instead of finding out very much on their own, all students would be able to go through new things faster. Thus, this is a slow way of working, especially for slower students. They probably face so much new linguistic information that it is very confusing. However, what can we do with students that still do not seem to learn, that do not study at home, that do not know what the teacher has mediated? At least all students worked very intensely, and especially the slower students. Although they did not actually learn a large amount of new language, they did it in a way that kept them more motivated than "traditional" text work does, and probably helps keeping up the interest in a difficult subject. But on the whole, I want to vary this approach with more traditional text work to see if they can support each other: the amount of words learnt by slow students using one way of working or the other probably do not vary a great deal on the whole, but I have noticed tremendous benefits for individual students. Compared to all other groups that I have taught, the slow students in this group have the highest motivation that I have experienced, despite the difficult challenges they constantly meet.

After the introductory exercise into self-reflective work, the students were asked to fill in their first self-evaluation sheet, which focussed on their strengths and weaknesses concerning their work with the test as well as on their work so far. I will give feedback on the evaluations concerning test results connected to the students' work so far and the grades I give them for the first course. I will also ask students to show them to their parents to get their feedback on this work and what we are focusing on to develop the situation of each student at the moment. I will save all students' reflection and evaluation sheets so we will not lose them and take them out for conscious reflection together with the students with regular intervals, e.g. as a reminder of different aims. I decided to make this evaluation sheet together with the test results and course grades the first issue to get feedback for from parents. I want give the parents a sense of in which direction their children are headed in their work at the moment as well as to remind them that not only the test results are decisive for grades. The students' own evaluation of their work together with my comments on how students work in class will give them a more comprehensive picture of their children's work, compared to only a grade or a test result.

The result of the work with the self-evaluation sheets was mainly very basic comments from students, no revolutionary insights; not much feedback from parents but among the ones I got on students' work and working habits there

were also a few very positive comments on working with self-evaluations. Still, I think we did a good work for a first time.

During this time we have also considered the activity of explaining/defining words to each other in English as well as guessing what word is being described, an activity that we are going to practise regularly from now on: besides developing the students' language (need to consider meaning and thus process language more deeply; close to authentic oral communication), this activity practises a strategy for communication that is useful: the students become used to explaining and describing words and concepts instead of maybe panicking and giving up or staying silent altogether for the fear of having to use words they need but do not know.

I see a great need to foster more learner independence in most of my students. Naturally, at this point, they are very much dependent on what the teacher chooses to teach and on the initiatives of the teacher for practising and learning. I want to work towards more initiatives from the students considering issues they do not fully understand or are interested in, and also for more independent work, since it is hard for the teacher to predict or guess all individual issues when there are so many students to consider.

As we go on in the spring term, the students will set their own personal goal for future work in writing for the first time. The different individual and reflective discussions in class as well as the self-evaluation that I asked them to fill in after their first test will have served as an introduction to this work. (As a part of this work, I will also have shown them the aims of the second course that are stated in our curriculum so they can use these in their achievement considerations if they want to.)

Excerpt F:

Weeks 46-47, November 2002

The travel project[205] did not turn out to be a tremendous success: While many students were motivated by this relatively free and creative way of working and were active and efficient, others were inefficient (playing games, talking about other things when I went out of the room) and/or were unable to take initiatives. A couple of students simply failed to see what they could do to fulfil the tasks of the project and that the work itself is also an aim, not only the result. A few students would have benefited from doing work on topics of their own choice. Now that we have tried one more "open" way of working, I, and the students themselves, know which ones do not enjoy this but need more concrete, teacher-supported tasks. Thus, I will try to provide these students with more individual support as we go on practising the use of similar activities in the future. As we evaluated the project, we discussed the fact that everyone did not learn efficiently from this project and possible reasons for this, as well as how we can go on to provide more individual solutions for more students to reach the aims

---

[205] To plan a trip together in groups, e.g. deciding on the destination, finding out costs, where to stay and what to see during the trip, and then to present it to the rest of the class, using posters or the OHP.

of such an activity. Still, the students thought that the project, especially the presentations, was useful practice. During presentations I wanted all members of the group to stand together in front of the class to practise this even if they did not really have anything to say. The atmosphere in the group is open and relaxed, and hopefully by having stood in front of the class with the support of the other group members, the really shy ones will also feel more comfortable practising this in the future.

One group chose Afghanistan just to be "funny". I allowed this, hoping for the opportunity to discuss some issues of cultural awareness. This actually succeeded as the groups presented the home page of an information site on Afghanistan including cultural issues. The text on the web page was "Welcome to Afghanistan, the friendliest country in the world." This raised some laughs and comments, which gave me the opportunity to ask about/point out possible differences between the political regime of a country and the friendliness of ordinary people living in the country. And, actually, the reactions of the students to this were understanding and positive.

Cooperative learning activities are important to bring into this group (as well as into most groups!) as the cooperation between some of the students needs to become better. Naturally, this travel project was not a cooperative learning experience but simply traditional group work, since I had not e.g. ensured that everyone felt responsibility for certain (or the same) issues within the groups. However, the problematic issue this time was not really cooperation within the groups, but the nature of the working tasks and the topics. As was concluded above, the tasks were too open for some students. Concerning the topics (where students would like to travel), these allowed for too much personal feelings and investment, e.g. where to go became more important than the learning goals. When we do practise cooperation, the topic probably needs to be less personal and more confined, e.g. a structure that everyone in the group learns before going on to teach others.

After the project, we went on to link some aspects of teaching into a comprehensive whole: students used words from the travel project to write about an imaginary trip. This included revision and use of the past preterit now that we have practised this both with regular and many irregular verbs. This activity also allowed students who had not enjoyed the democratically selected topics of the travel project to write about something of their own choice.

Positive is that during "traditional" class activities, most slow students are working well and making more efforts to participate in class by now. Probably the result of many influencing factors: remedial teaching, conscious encouragement and support by me as students have tried to fulfil small aims that were set during remedial teaching, more parental support after students' self-evaluations and grades of Course 1 were shown at home and parents could give feedback on their children's work (feedback not given by all, but by many). The use of a more systematic way of learning irregular verbs, i.e. according to the way they sound or the way words are inflected (e.g. all verbs with the same form repeated as one group), has also turned out to be helpful compared to the results from when we started to study them "the way I always taught" earlier. I can also see an extra benefit of my use of less "traditional" teaching methods such as

project work, reflections around activities and learning and other awareness rising activities: even if students find less traditional school work exciting at first, they also start to enjoy more traditional methods again after a while, at least occasionally. This was noticeable after the efforts made during the travel project and its presentations, when most students suddenly really enjoyed a usually not so inspiring activity like reading dialogues from the text book. In pairs, they were first reading the original dialogue - about buying trainers and jeans - from the textbook, then translating some of the lines orally from Swedish into English, the other having an English translation as a support for difficulties. After having finished the given task, many students started to read other dialogues in the textbook, or making up a new content to the given dialogue. I was very pleased to notice how efficiently they were working as they were making up funny lines, trying to get the best bargain or otherwise being silly, and practising pronunciation better than ever in a playful manner! Naturally, the fun was to have a dialogue that was slightly crazy and speak with funny voices, but this was still tremendously good language practice from where I see it, since such a creative spell normally very seldom is created through a routine activity like this! Afterwards some students said that this was the best English lesson we have had so far...I do not really know how to react to this, other than that I have had plenty of activities like this one as routine activities in other classes and it has never or at least very seldom been this fun!

Excerpt G:

Weeks 50-51, December 2002

This test[206] included mostly tasks where students were expected to explain/define/tell about/create free dialogues, since this is also what we have been practising in class lately. In my grading, I concentrated on their ability to convey a message, not as much on spelling. As a result, most students reached a result one grade or more above their usual results, and more in line with the course grades they received for course 1 since these were raised by their high motivation and activity in class (also very good at the moment!). I wanted the opportunity to reflect on the fact that ALL language skills count, especially in real life and different skills in different situations. I gave my own German skills as an example: even if it mainly comprises receptive skills, this is still a lot compared to someone with no skills in German whatsoever. The ability to get a message conveyed should not be punished as a burden, which we do if we only consider the students' production as defaulted (withdrawing points for spelling until there is nothing left that is worth something!), not as a positive gain that they can do this much! This is of special importance to slower students who might actually believe that they do not know anything, when in fact they know a great deal! Working with spelling is also necessary, but that mustn't decrease the sense of progress a student achieves in other language skills. It might feel more motivating for many students to work with these other skills if they do not feel that the whole enterprise of language learning is beyond them.

---

[206] One of the regular language tests conducted each course.

The last part of this fall semester I used for cultural awareness-raising. The discussion around the origins of Santa Clause (that have finally cumulated into the figure and custom that we now take for granted in all its randomness, while we actually sometimes think that others have strange customs or traditions) managed to emphasize at least two very important issues through the students' reactions and our discussion: 1) That we have these traditions because we enjoy them, to which I was able to add that this is what others also do, e.g. as in the case of celebrating Guy Fawkes' Night with fireworks and bonfires. 2) That we are used to our tradition with our version of Santa Clause, something that I underlined by adding that we are so much used to our own way of living that we sometimes think that others are strange, even if what we do might also be seen as strange from an outside perspective. Here, my Far Side-cartoons on taking an alien perspective[207] on life on earth were useful as illustrations for my "argumentation" for several reasons. Or rather, the concept itself of taking an alien perspective is useful, maybe even indispensable for the process to develop. First of all, since this perspective is on us humans in general, one cannot counter-argument when feeling threatened that one does not have to care about someone else's (e.g. a certain cultural group's) opinions with reasons such as "THEY are the ones who are strange". In this case I did get the impression from the reactions and comments of some of the students that they were not yet able to reflect so much on possible more nuanced views on the strangeness of others at this point as react to the idea that something they take for granted might not actually be that self-evident (e.g. an impulsive "protest": "But it's fun!!" as a reaction towards a sudden insight that our Christmas celebrations include elements that might be seen as silly). Such insights were probably experienced as somewhat threatening since they question the world-view and concept of normality of the students and thus their sense of self and security, especially if they are somewhat insecure in themselves. But this might actually be a useful if not necessary reaction for some people, a sort of reversed cultural shock, on their way to becoming able to decentre. Thus, I think the more "neutral" alien perspective on earth was useful on this occasion so as not to create strong reactions AGAINST another group. Furthermore, by being funny the cartoons gave us all a chance to laugh and relieve possible tensions.

Humour and a relaxed atmosphere are actually very important aspects in the classroom, since students need to feel safe and confident that although we take a serious look at our own way of life, what they enjoy doing is theirs to hold on to as much as they want and need to. I will use and refer to these cartoons and this discussion whenever necessary, especially concerning the last issue: We are all allowed to behave the way we are used to and enjoy our customs and traditions! Our everyday customs are not better nor worse than those of others. But by realizing the randomness of how we end up behaving the way we do, that it is more a question of "cultural sense" than "common sense", it might be easier for us to tolerate the "strangeness" of others. After all, we eat with knives, forks and

---

[207] *The Far Side* is a popular one-panel comic created by Gary Larson. Its surrealistic humor is often based on uncomfortable social situations, improbable events, an anthropomorphic view of the world, logical fallacies, impending bizarre disasters, or the search for meaning in life. (From *Wikipedia*, the free encyclopedia)

spoons now, but our tools might as well have been totally different: Why not let the students design possible candidates!

Weeks 2-3, January 2003

Now it is time for the students to consider how they will go on working: their personal aims for the nearest future (e.g. to get equally good results alternatively better results from future work, and for being able to use these structures and words in letters, when chatting, on trips, etc). Unfortunately, the important launch of this work was delayed due to a great number of absent students throughout weeks 3 and 4.

The first weeks we have treated the topic "school" and "school subjects" mainly by comparing and contrasting our own school with a typical American junior high school (adapted text from the Internet). I chose this text as a starting point because of the prior knowledge students already have of American high schools from TV and movies, but their knowledge is partly faulty and most of all inexact. (Later I will include the British system more systematically; now I've only briefly referred to some differences to emphasize that we are only discussing the American school system/s.) Naturally, I also wanted the opportunity to discuss the fact that terms and conceptions as well as e.g. grading systems and how we divide the school year and school day into different time periods are only conventions that even differ somewhat within most countries; some concepts do not even exist or they may have another meaning in another English-speaking country! And this is yet another good reason for practising definitions and the ability to explain words and concept since we cannot take it for granted that everyone understands the meaning of the concepts we happen to use.

I also decided to start off by trying to give everyone this insight using a fairly neutral topic situated in a country that is quite popular through TV-series and movies, i.e. the US, before further stressing what was discussed right before Christmas concerning the origin of our way/s to celebrate this holiday: that we may think that different conventions are strange just because we are not used to those habits (e.g. how Christmas is celebrated, how we eat our food, what we eat, other religions). Such topics might be less neutral if discussed in connection to countries and cultures that are less "popular" or less familiar, and that is when it will be good to be able to draw parallels and refer to the prior more neutral discussion. "Remember, we eat with knives and forks, but this is not more right or wrong than what others do, often just a question of what people decide to do for practical reasons or end up doing out of habit!"

Week 5, January 27, 2003

Among the activities this lesson was a communicative activity where students were supposed to define words/concepts as well as guess the intended words/concepts related to American schools. I reactivated the students' cultural awareness schemata by reminding them of the discussion around conventions in connection to Christmas celebrations last time and went on by pointing to other

conventions (in connection to topics treated during the school-year) that are not "better" or "worse", more "right" or "wrong", simply what people happened to decide on and simply have become used to: school systems (terms; grading systems; lunch habits), and the use of eating utensils (knives and forks, that we use hands for e.g. buns and chicken but not much else, chopsticks). We ended with a brainstorming exercise: What else could we have used as eating utensils? > One answer was a sort of vacuum cleaner. I suggested that everyone within our own group would have considered this normal: it is a question of habit, of becoming used to doing something > I will use this discussion in class as a useful reminder always when we discuss customs and behaviors of others and ourselves in the future!

Excerpt J:

Week 13, March 2003

Started working with the topic Sports. There is a text in the book that tells about how some common sports were invented. I briefly introduced some more unfamiliar ones (lacrosse and hurling) using mind-maps on the OH to show the method again before students were asked to do the same with some of the sports in the text. I find sports to be a suitable theme when it comes to drawing parallels to other phenomena like cultural traditions: you get used to doing something, follow certain rules, do not really see the absurdity of it from the outside, still allowed to enjoy it, etc. This metatalk will follow after the text had been treated.

Excerpt K:

Week 14, March-April 2003

This week I used the sports topic to draw parallels to how we get used to doing and thinking the way we do about phenomena in our own culture, trying to show how we can take an outsider's perspective to these phenomena to try to realize that there are phenomena in other cultures and other perspectives than our own that we have to respect. We discussed e.g. that some people are not interested in sports and feel that the seriousness which sports fans put into their interest as almost absurd. This was recognized on a personal level by some of the students. They also knew examples of the absurd amounts of money some sport stars make. Eventually I moved on to show an outsider's perspective on some cultural phenomena such as traditional ways of celebrating different holidays that are familiar to us here in Swedish-speaking Ostrobothnia: Järtelius' story[208] about an African who spent a year in Sweden and came back to tell his family about the strange and exotic people that loved animals so much that they e.g. dressed in white and sang about horses and cats during the darkest period of the year! This story really helps putting things into perspective, and students enjoyed the realization very much. There were a lot of laughs, but the comments on how silly things might seem also pointed towards the intended reactions and insights.

---

[208] See References: Herlitz (1999).

Hopefully, these insights will stay with them and come back when they need them, if not now then maybe later on...

Excerpt L:

Week 16, April 2003

Since the movie[209] was watched partly on the students' language arts lessons, they had been given as an assignment by their teacher in that subject to fill in a paper with questions on the movie. I (naturally!) volunteered to hold the follow-up discussion in connection to that assignment on another of their language arts lessons since we are losing several double lessons of English due to different holidays in April and May this year.

I based the discussion partly on their assignment and partly on the questionnaire on Great Britain that the students answered week 10. I wanted to show them how the movie actually had taught them issues they did not know about before, and the tool to really make them aware of this was the questionnaire.

With the help of the movie we could agree on the following issues: There are a lot of Indian immigrants in Great Britain; these immigrants have brought Indian food to Britain, e.g. different curries, that are very popular and also referred to and cooked in the movie; not all British teenagers have red hear and freckles, wear a school uniform, or speak standard British "posh" language. As a follow-up activity we considered having spoken with the main character on the phone before meeting her, would we have expected her to look the way she did on the basis of how she spoke English? The last point about language registers was discussed in relation to the students' L1 as well: To make an even more concrete illustration of how we also can use different registers in different situations I reminded them of how we use our Swedish dialect as well as standard Swedish according to situation (assuming that we know both!). Admittedly, I was the one doing most of the talking during much of this session, probably due to another early morning and an unfortunate time-span of one week since watching the movie. I still believe that our session could help the students to gain some new perspectives on some of the aspects that were brought up. Not that all of these students showed a stereotyped view of Britain and the British in the questionnaire. However, those who had a rather one-sided view from before hopefully gained some new perspectives and are able to notice the variation more in the future. And those who knew very little about Britain from before probably have a more informed picture to start from as they go on learning from both school and media and other sources in the future. At least the students should be better equipped to question stereotypes and images they receive from different sources.

To remind them of some of the contents in the movie and make the reflexive work more concrete, I had also brought two traditional dresses to the lesson, one from India and one from China. This was appreciated! We dressed one of the girls in the sari and I pointed out that different cultures have different conventions, e.g.

---

[209] *Bend It Like Beckham*, directed by Gurinder Chadha in 2002, see References.

considering what colors that are seen as more suitable for weddings than others, e.g. white in the students' culture, red in the Asian community in the movie. A great coincidence was the fact that this was the last day before Easter break, meaning that this was a good opportunity to remind the students of our "memma"[210] that we are so used to (even if everyone does not like it) but that most of us realize that people from other cultural groups might find both bad-tasting and dull-looking, if not gross! Also, just like before[211], there were some reactions against having to question a familiar and much enjoyed tradition: "But it's good!!" cried out with emphasis and protesting voices. Again, reassurance that we can enjoy it as we let other enjoy theirs.

Excerpt M:

May 3, 2004

For the two courses (4 and 5) in grade 8 nothing has been written in the log until today, two weeks into course 5. The reason is that I have already written a lot especially about course 4 elsewhere, e.g. in an article[212] and two presentations, and all the material and lesson plans together with some notes are neatly put in order in several files. However, today I decided to continue writing about course 5 since we are now at the point where we are getting into what were only preliminary thoughts and plans in the article and presentations.

Following the plans in the article I have been concentrating texts and some discussions on UK as well as on some decentring with the same Far Side-cartoon[213] since one student had some negative comments about people in Wales (only very unspecified, probably to have a chance to discuss his own "pet people"). I asked whether they were able to say why I had chosen to show the cartoon again, what I wanted to say with it. One boy said that it was to say that different people have different customs, so I agreed and added that we get so used to our own that we risk to look negatively upon others and do not even stop to consider that our customs and traditions might not be the most "normal" either. I asked them to think back a few weeks to Easter and consider whether they were doing something that might seem strange to outsiders. A girl said: "Sitting next to a bonfire in the middle of the night!" I added that maybe some of us even had been eating our "memma", and of course many had, so we were reminded of how strange this can be to many people, but that we are free to enjoy our customs and should let others enjoy theirs. No "protests" this time (cf. entry Week 16, 2003). I also used the tradition surrounding student caps among university students in Finland, at what times different students "are allowed" to put it on on the last of April each year in connection to the May Day celebrations, that we do not use it between the end of September and this date, and so on, as another example of a rather strange and silly tradition that we are

---

[210] Traditional Easter pudding basically made out of rye flour, malt and dried orange peel; dark brown and unassumingly looking; usually sprinkled with sugar and eaten with milk or a mixture of milk and cream.

[211] See Excerpt G above.

[212] See Forsman (2004b) and (forthcoming).

[213] Used for decentering activities using an alien perspective, see e.g. Excerpt G above.

still free to enjoy, to show what a familiar custom suddenly looked like to myself when I took a different perspective. I do not know whether this de-familiarization activity worked for anyone but me: many students seemed to react with curiosity and a willingness to have this tradition themselves!

Before I had had the chance to give the results of the fieldwork on drinking tea and eating baked beans in the UK that I had written about in the article[214], to show the logic impossibility of stereotypes that I had mentioned in so many discussions, a real challenge surfaced on April 30 in the form of some comments on Roma people. I do not know what brought up the topic, but since I noticed the reactions the topic evoked, I wanted to take the chance to apply possible previous insights into the danger of stereotyping using the Roma as an example. However, this turned out to be a tough task: many students bubbled with stories they had heard and seemed to believe about Roma being thieves despite of my regular in-passes that not everyone is the same, that there are thieves among all groups of people, that there are people who have to sell their homes because they cannot pay for them in other groups as well, and so on, as comments to their stories. A few boys protested against my arguments saying e.g. "Gypsies stole money of X" and "I don't feel sorry for their situation, they have to reap what they sow". To this last comment I reacted with a sharp tone, saying that I suspected that others have sowed more for them than they ever can reap, and as time was running out we had to leave the topic for that time.

I was disappointed with myself afterwards, since I do not think that I encouraged them to say their own minds as much as preach. At home I tried to find a good way to approach the topic again, with logic and valid arguments, and decided to use something concrete and close to the students' own reality, at the same time ensuring students that it is safe to discuss such difficult issues in my classroom without having to fear that they need to be saying what I obviously want to hear, a balance that is not so easy to strike. I tried to comfort myself with the thought that I will have many more chances (after all, I did not burn any bridges in the discussion, it was not THAT bad!), and it is a serious issue where I do want to show how seriously I support the idea that no human being should be judged according to other people's doings.

The following lesson I asked the students for their reaction one of the previous days during a lesson in the computer class when I got angry with some students who tried to do something else on the computer than they were assigned to do and gave the usual comment: "If you can't behave we won't spend any more time in front of the computers, you choose!" and one of the non-guilty students immediately got upset that everyone would have to suffer because some of them could not behave. Well, there we had it, judging even those who are innocent! I repeated the message about no group members being exactly the same, not all teenagers are the same, not all Roma. I added that it is strange that we call someone who steals a thief, but if it is one of the Roma who steals it is suddenly because s/he is a Gypsy, not because s/he is a thief. And that we are innocent until proven guilty, whereas they have to prove that they are innocent! That there are people who steal and people who do not steal in all groups! I probably

[214] See Forsman (2004b) and Section 6.1.3.

still sounded a little upset saying some of these things, and I really do not know whether this was a smart move or not. There were some sort of protesting comments still suggesting that this thinking cannot be used for Gypsies, and although I was disappointed about this, I was also very pleased that students feel confident enough to say these things after my obvious engagement! I want to find a way to discuss more in-depth with these students to try to find out if they themselves know why they have such strong feelings although some of them are very "logical" in their thinking and seem to reject much of my teaching that is not aimed at instrumental motives. This time I also asked for more of their reactions, that I was interested to hear what they think, and I do think that I had managed to keep my comments to the level where I mainly discussed what kind of prejudice we have (including myself) and how hard this must be, for example for teenaged Roma who have to live with this prejudice all the time, not accusing the students so they would not dare to answer honestly. Not so many reactions to this, mainly a girl who said that it is difficult because older people always have been saying these negative things, it is all we ever hear about them. Another student came up to me after the lesson and said that some Roma who sometimes visit X are Christian, something she had not known they could be.

I actually forgot to remind the students of how common it is to have prejudice against groups of people that we do not know very well or know much about, as many of them did about British people before learning more about them, but I will bring up this analogy later when we look at how much the students now know about the UK compared to before grade 7 and 8. These issues need to be brought up again, and maybe it is good to have some time to think about these issues in between instead of getting to much "preaching" at one single time that they cannot digest...

Appendix II: Questionnaire I-II *Exploring the UK*

What do you know about the UK?   Name: _____

1. Name some typical food (besides pizza, spaghetti, hamburgers)!
_____
_____

2. Describe the way teenagers in the UK speak compared to US teenagers!
_____
_____
_____

3. Describe the way adults in the UK speak compared to adults in the US!
_____
_____
_____

4. Describe young people in the UK, compared to American teenagers,
the way they dress_____
_____
what they look like_____
the way they are_____

5. Tell about traditions and holidays in the UK!
_____
_____
_____

6. What movies and TV-series from the UK do you know about?
_____
_____
_____

7. Mention some famous British people within

film & TV_____

music _____

sports _____

politics _____

others_____

8. What is your image of the country itself?

_____
_____
_____

9. Do you know from what countries many immigrants have come to the UK?

_____
_____
_____

Appendix III: Questionnaire III *Reflections on change (UK)*

Look at your answers about the UK.   Name:_____

1. Has your **knowledge** (of the UK, teenagers, the language,...) changed? If not, why?
_____
_____

If your knowledge has changed, what are the most significant changes? concerning the
language:_____
_____
teenagers:_____
_____
_____
habits:_____
_____
_____

What specific activities/discussions/happenings/etc. have caused these changes? concerning the
language:_____
_____
_____
teenagers:_____
_____
_____
habits:_____
_____
_____

2. Have your **opinions/attitudes** towards **people** in the UK changed? If not, why? If so, describe your thoughts **before** and your thoughts **now**!
_____
_____
_____

What has caused these changes?
_____
_____
_____

3. Have your **opinions/attitudes** towards the **language** in the UK changed? If not, why? If so, describe your thoughts **before** and your thoughts **now**!
_____
_____
_____

What has caused these changes?
_____
_____
_____

Appendix IV: Questionnaire IV-V *Final grade 8, I-II*

<u>Part I:</u>

1. Describe how your image of the UK (people, language,...) changed by watching *Bend It Like Beckham* and clips from *Ali G?*
_____
_____
_____
_____

2. We have discussed how we can use a change of perspective to see ourselves in a new light (e.g. using an 'alien' perspective; the African student watching Swedes worshipping poultry, horses and cats; discussions of how fashion works).

Have these discussions affected your thoughts in any way? If not, why? If so, describe in what way!

_____
_____
_____
_____

3. Did you become frustrated/irritated/sad by discussing the fact that what we do might be seen as strange by others? Describe your thoughts!
_____
_____
_____
_____

4. An exercise: Think of a group of people that you have negative opinions about/consider strange. Then try to think of something **you/we** do that might seem strange when taking another perspective, but something you are used to and might even like.

Also consider that in no group everybody is the same.

That there are good and bad things everywhere, also within our group.

Does this way of thinking help you to respect the group you were thinking about?

Yes, because...

_____
_____

No, because...

_____
_____

5. Complete the sentence: "When we were talking about Roma/Gypsies, I was thinking..."

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. What is your reaction when teachers talk about respecting other cultural groups? When do you listen, when don't you? What do you want to know?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Why don't we automatically respect all others? What/how do we think?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

8. a) How could you think in order to respect others better?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

b) Could it for example be helpful to think "all Germans/Finns/Roma/etc. might not be the way I thought since neither were people in the UK"?

Why is it possible to think this way?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Why is it not possible to think this way?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

9. Do you think it is important to talk about respecting others? Why/why not?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix V: Interview Protocol

What are the most important issues/aspects that you have learnt during EFL education?

What do you think has been most important for me that you learn?

Thoughts on contents/activities: too much, too little, that you would rather have had...

Do you have specific examples of having started to think differently about some group (of people)/culture as a result of something we have done? Through what activities? **If suitable:** Have you been able to use this insight about a certain group also in <u>other</u> situations? How is it possible to think in such a case?/What did you think? What activities have helped you in this? How?

Questionnaire: Student comments/reflections on progress concerning the UK?

By what did you learn? <u>Why</u> is the previous good to know?

Have you been able to use this insight about a certain group also in <u>other</u> situations? How is it possible to think in such a case?/What did you think? What activities have helped you in this? How?

Can you recall the following activities/events and your thoughts around them:

- cartoon with the alien perspective

- brainstorming about behavior we take for granted (applause, eating utensils)

- the story about the African student in Sweden

- fashion sequence

- visitors from Wales

- movies/video clips

For each: What were your reactions? What insights/thoughts from this activity?

Are these insights important/useful? Why/why not?

Have these insights caused you to think differently about some group (of people)/culture? Tell about your thoughts!

If suitable: What can we think to be able to respect others? Where/how did you learn this? **If suitable:** Reflect on the questionnaire on possible ability to decenter/respect others.

<u>How</u> could X have been done differently?

How do you know that you have realized X?

Has your thinking about Muslims changed? Roma? (Why do your insights not apply in reality?)

<u>What else</u> could we have done to understand X better?

Appendix VI: Questionnaire for other 9th-graders

Circle: boy/girl

1. How do British people speak compared to Americans?

_____
_____
_____

2. Describe the way young people in the UK
dress

_____
_____
_____

look

_____
_____
_____

are/behave

_____
_____
_____

3. What is your image of people in the UK and how they live?

_____
_____
_____
_____

4. What are your thoughts when you hear that a bride in India can be dressed in red?

_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Do you agree **completely, partly,** or **not at all** with the following statements? Also give arguments for your views.

a) Gypsies steal. _____

This is my view because _____

_____

b) What we do in our culture is more normal than what others do.
_____

because _____

_____

c) In my opinion other cultures are worse than ours. _____

because _____

_____

Please exemplify! _____

_____

6. How could you think to be able to respect other people and cultures better?
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Where and how did you learn what you wrote in question 6?
_____
_____
_____

8. Other thoughts and reactions concerning these questions?
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix VII: Letter of consent to students' parents

<div align="right">Vasa den 12.4.2005</div>

Till ___:s föräldrar!

Jag har nu undervisat era ungdomar i engelska i tre år och samlat på mig många nyttiga erfarenheter förutom alla minnen med denna toppenklass! Med detta brev vill jag be om er tillåtelse att publicera en del av mina erfarenheter i form av en undersökning om engelskundervisning (ev. doktorsavhandling) för att på så sätt också kunna dela med mig av dessa erfarenheter till andra lärare. Det kommer nog att ta några år innan något blir klart eftersom jag just blir mammaledig!

I en sådan undersökning skulle jag beskriva målen med undervisningen och aktiviteter med vars hjälp jag försökt nå dessa mål, vad som lyckats och vad som kunde göras annorlunda. Detta skulle naturligtvis vara konfidentiellt, d.v.s. inga namn används, inte heller hemort, eller andra kännetecken som gör att det skulle gå att lista ut vem enskilda elevsvar kommer från. Om jag t.ex. vill beskriva hur vi arbetat med att göra eleverna mer medvetna om engelskan de möter i massmedia och dess olika för- och nackdelar skulle jag beskriva vad vi gjort, och också ge exempel på vad elever sagt både före och efter behandlingen av ämnet, t.ex.

"De flesta elever uppger att de försöker lära sig engelska med hjälp av TV genom att aktivt lyssna på språket. Däremot är det få elever som systematiskt jämför TV-språket med textningen till svenska. Vissa har t.o.m. upplevt textningen som en nackdel:

- Det finns ofta fel i textningen.

En del elever ser också nackdelar med TV-språket:

-TV-språket är dåligt, bara slang och svärord! "

För att undersökningen skall bli så bra och användbar som möjligt är det viktigt att så många som möjligt kan vara med. Om ni fortfarande är osäkra på vad detta kan innebära eller har andra frågor nås jag på tel. _____ eller _____. I övrigt vill jag önska er god fortsättning och tacka för den här fina tiden med era ungdomar!

Varma hälsningar

Lotta Forsman

Var vänlig och returnera denna del undertecknad till skolan, tack!

□ Ja, _____ får vara med i undersökningen.

□ Nej, vi önskar inte att _____är med i undersökningen.

_____ den ____/____ 2005

_____

Målsmans underskrift

This study addresses the role of the education of English as a foreign language in a time when it is argued that competence for encountering increasing cultural diversity will be useful, even necessary, for both individuals and societies. Its overall aim is to problematize and increase understanding of the implementation of cultural aspects in the language classroom by addressing the interrelated *what, why* and *how* of the cultural dimension within EFL education. This has been conducted by means of theoretical explorations into the area, alongside an attempt at promoting intercultural competence within the framework of the researcher's own educational praxis. In the study, the development of intercultural competence is described as a cyclical process from simple to more complex levels through a combination of cognitive, affective and behavioral elements within a framework of experiential learning.

The classroom project was conducted during the three years of upper comprehensive school of a class of 17 students. The focus of the intercultural work in the classroom was on the promotion of awareness of difference and diversity, as well as respect for such difference through the ability to distance oneself from cultural norms and behavior that previously have been taken for granted. The results suggest that this project has shown one possible way forward concerning the development of intercultural competence within EFL education through a more systematic and comprehensive approach regarding linguistic and cultural aspects.