Educating for Intercultural Competence

A European Comenius Project promotes intercultural cooperation

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Master’s Thesis
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July 2011
In this research topics of intercultural development are examined through a phenomenographical case study. The study centres around a Comenius Multilateral School Partnership Project, which aims to improve cooperation and intercultural learning between European schools. As part of the initiative to promote intercultural learning of children in the countries of the European Union, the European Commission launched a Comenius Project in 2009-2011 linking schools in Austria, England, Finland and Germany. The partnership of these countries actualised on multilateral and bilateral level. This study provides an analysis of the practises and learning outcomes from the Finnish perspective through a school partnership between a fifth grade class in Finland and a seventh grade class in Austria.

The main focus of the study is the experiences and learning outcomes of the 22 Finnish pupils, that were participants in the Project. Research data is comprised of interviews of pupils, their parents and class teacher, pupil surveys, written narratives and observation of the researcher. Practical aspects of implementing the multi-faceted intercultural learning situations, which culminated to a 7-day study visit as the Austrian pupils visited Finland and were hosted in homes, are addressed. Key themes of the study involve various aspects of intercultural learning, such as development of intercultural sensitivity, role of national identity, situated learning, language acquisition and curricular frameworks. These themes are approached from theoretical as well as practical viewpoints and aim to build a holistic understanding of intercultural learning in practice.

The theoretical basis to intercultural matters discusses the current need for intercultural competence, a challenge posed by globalisation and its various representations. In short, the demand for international cooperation and intercultural skills has increased while the notion of global citizenship has gained ground. The postmodern concept of globalisation is covered in this study through argumentation by scholars such as Anthony Giddens and Zygmunt Bauman. An inseparable element of intercultural development, national identity is discussed based on theories of Stuart Hall. At the core of the theoretical framework, Milton Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity outlines the fundamental components of intercultural development setting the standard for analysis of research findings.

The most significant learning outcomes from pupils’ viewpoint are increased competence and courage to speak a foreign language as part of developed intercultural skills, and motivation to become acquainted with foreign cultures and people. Pupils also shifted in their thinking to a more accepting attitude towards cultural difference while learning to appreciate and embrace the uniqueness of their own culture. Eagerness to claim every culture as equal increased as well as understanding of global issues. Other findings suggest that teaching intercultural topics may be integrated into the objectives of the National Curriculum, although readiness to integrate and implement these topics require intercultural awareness and competence from teachers. Overall, participation in the Comenius Project was regarded a positive experience and a privilege by nearly all participants, which indicates a progressive development to the direction where the countries of European Union are encouraged.

Key words: intercultural learning, intercultural sensitivity, intercultural development, national identity, global citizenship, curricular integration, situated learning
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1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 The demand for intercultural learning

Globalism and multiculturalism are a reality in today’s world. The traditional structure of communities has changed drastically from tight, familiar village communities towards an era where people are in constant motion and the Internet has enabled the forming of postmodern independent communities and identities, which are adaptable and even anonymous in nature. Immigration, the need for international cooperation in politics as well as in economy, and the striving for European unity are current trends that force individuals to acquire skills that enable them to be recognised as interculturally competent.

As a response to the challenge of globalism, the European Commission manages Comenius Lifelong Learning Projects. At the school-wide level, Multilateral School Partnership between European countries is created through individual Comenius Projects. One such Project named Europe4you is examined in this case study. In order to establish clarity regarding usage of the Comenius terminology, I will refer to the main focus of this research - bilateral school partnership - as the Comenius Project.

The key themes of this research involve various aspects of intercultural learning, such as the development of intercultural sensitivity, the role of national identity, situated learning, language acquisition and curricular frameworks. These themes are approached from theoretical as well as practical viewpoints and aim to develop a holistic understanding of intercultural learning in practice. A closer look at the core theories and practices is provided later in this chapter.

It is pertinent to acknowledge the process stages of intercultural learning; developing intercultural sensitivity level by level can eventually lead to intercultural competence but requires conscious effort to improve. Therefore, addressing the topic as ‘intercultural sensitivity’ along the process rather than ‘intercultural competence’, which marks the desired learning outcome, will establish conceptual clarity. Chapter 3 explores in more detail the terminology that refers to intercultural learning and cooperation, such as global citizenship.

In Finland, issues relating to multiculturalism and minorities have not been at stake as much as in many other European countries. The number of incoming immigrants remains low compared
to most European countries, and the majority has perhaps not acquired an approving and positive attitude towards minorities. Prejudice and stereotypes still flourish among certain groups and foreigners are, in many occasions, seen as a threat to the welfare state. Häkkinen & Tervonen (2004, 22-36) describe how this ethos roots back in history to times when the nation experienced trying times in fighting for its independence and constructing a welfare state. The turmoil resulted in a strong national spirit in which the mainstream idea of “Finnishness” is stereotypical and excludes minority cultures. On the other hand, young people today are likely open to ‘cosmopolitanism’ and notions of global citizenship (Gordon 2004, 144-157). Concepts of national identity and its historical development in Finland, as well as the current trends, are studied in chapter 2.

As cultural diversity has become ever more common with differing values and social norms, basic education also has faced the challenge of creating sensitive pedagogical environments that support tolerance of difference, teach intercultural skills and mould the attitudes and mindsets of young people towards global citizenship (see Banks 2008, 5; Husu 2006, 85). Existing prejudice can only be overcome with education, by making individuals aware of multiculturalism, interdependency and the wealth of cultural difference. Räsänen (2005) argues that the point of intercultural learning is not only to learn about other cultures but is rather a holistic transformative process in which the learner acquires competencies and sensitivity that support understanding, dialogue and adaptation from one cultural concept to another. Optimally, ethical dimensions are addressed, too, in order to become aware of global issues that ultimately concern all humans. Themes regarding the ethical principles and value basis of international cooperation are touched upon in chapter 3.

Various theories have been created that try to depict the essence of intercultural learning. Chapter 3 attempts to draw conclusions and find common ground within the theoretical field. Pelkonen (2005, 73) encapsulates intercultural learning in two main phenomena. Firstly, improving one’s cultural self-awareness is a key in understanding other cultures. Encountering cultural difference, which will support understanding and dialogue between different cultural contexts and eventually foster an intercultural mindset and skills, can naturally develop this. Secondly, in order to comprehend the measures of the need for global cooperation, one has to become aware of global interdependency - social, political, environmental and economical interconnectedness. The culmination of the theories touched upon in this research is Bennett’s comprehensive and exemplifying Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, also studied in chapter 3.
With intercultural learning being at the core of the focus, it is relevant to next discuss how such learning can be implemented. It is necessary to note here that intercultural learning is not something that can be taught or imposed upon an individual. Instead, one must be willing and motivated to acquire skills needed in intercultural interaction. Moving to a more concrete level, the theory of situated learning offers a framework for learning in social situations. Lave & Wenger (1999) argue that learning involves participation in a community of practice – situations of co-participation. Situated learning requires an authentic context as well as social interaction and collaboration (Smith 1999).

Pupils in school often experience lack of motivation to study languages, claiming that the methods used are mechanical and the learning environment lacks authenticity. The current methods also do not encourage free and spontaneous usage of language in real life situations, and thus the existing potential remains unharvested. In other words the high level of language teaching, which results in intermediate grammar and vocabulary skills, fails to equip the pupil when applied to practice. The findings of this study strongly support the effectiveness of situated learning in an authentic context (see chapter 8.3). Accordingly, situated learning methods used in intercultural learning and language studies could be a means to maximize the acquisition of desired learning outcomes in intercultural and language learning. Situated learning and communities of practice are explored in more detail in the latter part of chapter 3.

1.2 Identities and common values in diverse communities

Addressing the concept of identity is also essential when discussing cultural awareness, intercultural sensitivity and international relations. As stated before, postmodernism has shaped the reality we live in by forming new communities and identities. As for national identity, which is also in the state of transformation or, as some say, ‘disintegration’, theories exist which claim it to have a crucial role in identity as a whole. According to Scruton (1986), an individual can only truly exist if he/she is able to identify as a member of a select nationality or grouping. (Hall 1999, 45.)

Whether or not national identity plays as important a role in the framework of identity as stated above is debatable. It is, however, widely accepted that identity is about belonging and it is being formed in social relationships that are contingent on personal location. What makes identities problematic is that the identities surrounding us can be of contradictory nature. Not only do different communities have different identities in relation to each other but individuals are also
being induced to adopt varied and even opposing identities simultaneously, such as the identities of a housewife, career woman, environmentalist, Finn and European.

Therefore, it may seem impossible to avoid conflict and strive for peace and unity in our communities and in the world at large. Jeffrey Weeks (1990, 88) emphasises the importance of common values that can work as the basis on which individuals build their differing identities. Figuratively speaking, common values at the centre would enable reconciliation between our collective needs as humans and our specific needs as individuals and members of hybrid communities. Identity in relation to postmodernity, globalisation and the themes of national identity and European identity are examined in chapter 2 through the scholarly reasoning of Stuart Hall, Zygmunt Bauman and Anthony Giddens.

The aim is to discover the common values that create balance between collective needs and individual needs within diverse communities. Therefore, one must question what is needed in order to establish unity on a larger scale. And ultimately, what is the underlying ethical assumption of the exertion for intercultural competence? The crux of the answer can be found in the objectives the United Nations has established in its agenda for alleviating poverty and declaring human rights. The ethical purposes can however be criticised, especially in terms of suspected Western hidden agendas. This is because good intentions may appear biased and one-sided when examined from different perspectives. Critique of the human rights process has also been voiced in regard to the emergence of continuous violations against them, despite the myriad of discussions, declarations and conventions (see Noddings 2005, 3). The line between peace education and political advocacy can be narrow as the impact of ideological and subjective political positions often goes far beyond sensitive and objective academic discourse (Steinberg 2006, 15).

However, Räsänen (2005, 28) asserts the viewpoint of hope, affirming that despite the weaknesses, the work that has been done has greatly improved the quality of life in various parts of the world. Therefore, tireless strides for achieving a better quality of life should be continued. Guidelines for improvement in terms of intercultural and international cooperation are studied closely in the first part of chapter 3.

1.3 The Comenius Project faces challenges of globalism

Discussion on postmodernity, national identity and the necessity of developing intercultural skills lays the groundwork for the case of intercultural cooperation studied in this research paper – the Comenius Project in the Practicing School of Tampere University in 2009-2010. The Project is fully introduced in chapter 4. The European Commission operates several Education & Training
Programmes as part of the strategic framework of promoting cooperation and reciprocal learning among European countries (European Commission – Education & Training 2010a). The Comenius Project is one of these endeavours, operating under the umbrella of the Comenius Lifelong Learning Programme. As per stated on the official website of the European Commission Department of Education & Training, the Comenius Programme aims to ‘help young people and educational staff better understand the range of European cultures, languages and values’ while fostering personal growth and development towards active citizenship (European Commission – Education & Training 2010b).

The Comenius slogan ‘Europe in the classroom’ indicates the notion of Europe as a unitary entity. Although the existence of such unity is disputed among scholars (see Beck 2000, 156), the European Commission sees increasing partnerships and mobility between European countries to promote cultural understanding as crucial for future development. Beck’s statement parallels these objectives from the viewpoint of facing globalisation; “without Europe there can be no response to globalization” (ibid., 158). Emergent diversity in the postmodern context has begotten ‘transnationalism,’ in which national context to diversity fails to suffice the demand for global mobility and interconnectivity (Rizvi 2010).

In addition to addressing the challenges globalisation poses at the collective level, the Project is also aimed to foster intercultural sensitivity within the mindsets of young Europeans as individuals. Awareness of global matters and the adoption of a participatory role in societal issues are vital for young citizens whose worldview is characterised by postmodern life strategies (see Bauman 1996, 19-32; chapter 2). These themes can best be implemented into the school curricula by ensuring up-to-date objectives, availability of relevant materials and – perhaps most importantly – the multicultural competence of teachers (see Talib, Löfström & Meri 2004, 148). As a response to the lastly mentioned requirement, the Comenius Project has declared professional development of teachers as one of the primary objectives. According to Gaudelli (2003, 175) conscientious teachers would optimally challenge pupils thinking on paradoxes, dilemmas and moral quandaries of a global nature, thus educating them towards dynamic global citizenship.
2 BUILDING IDENTITY IN THE POSTMODERN ERA

2.1 Identity

“Identity only becomes an issue when it is in crisis, when something assumed to be fixed, coherent and stable is displaced by the experience of doubt and uncertainty.”

This widely cited statement by the cultural critic Kobena Mercer (1990, 43) poignantly sums up the relationship that postmodernity has with identity and its concepts. I will now examine different elements of identity, focusing on national identity, its meaning and manifestation. Postmodernity and counterparting phenomena such as globalisation will also be addressed in relation to identity-building processes. The primary focus of this paper – elementary level education – is addressed from the viewpoint of teaching European identity to young children. The practical elements of the realisation of identity are studied in the data analysis in chapter 6.1, and a comparison with the theories presented in this chapter to research results are discussed in the conclusions of chapter 8.

2.1.1 Definition

The distinction between cultural, national, social and personal identity is vague as the terms are closely related and potentially interwoven in an individual’s self-conception. The term ‘identity’ is commonly used in everyday language, hence the multiple ambiguous and even contradictory conceptions of the word. Brubaker & Cooper (2000, 2) express their frustration of the semantic obscurity of ‘identity’:

“Conceptualizing all affinities and affiliations, all forms of belonging, all experiences of commonality, connectedness, and cohesion, all self-understandings and self-identifications in the idiom of "identity" saddles us with a blunt, flat, undifferentiated vocabulary.”
They demand conceptual clarity by suggesting replacement - or at least completion - of ‘identity’ with more flexible and precise terms such as ‘self-understanding’, ‘social location’, ‘identification’ and ‘connectedness’ (14-20).

Sevänen (2004, 41-46) gives an account of the scholarly development of the term in the decades following the Second World War, after which ‘identity’ emerged and generalised. The American psychologist Erik H. Erikson was a central figure in defining and introducing the term. The Eriksonian tradition underlines the comprehension of identity as the subjective self-definations of a person. Due to the following wave of constructionist thinking in the academic world, identity has also been defined as constructions; an individual’s personal and cultural identities are not innate properties but rather take shape in a socially, culturally and historically specific context.

2.1.2 Narrating national identity

As for the definitions of cultural identity as a scientific concept, they gained its present position in the 1980s, according to Sevänen (2004, 34). However, preceding the establishment of the concept of cultural identity, terms such as ‘national character’, ‘national spirit’, ‘national feeling’, ‘national consciousness’ and ‘national peculiarities’ had been subjects of research among some disciplines. Narrowing down the concept of identity towards the national level, Sevänen argues that cultural identity is the wide phenomenon of which ethnic and national identity are subspecies (see also Hall 1992, 291). Historically speaking national identity has been an essential part of political discourse. At the turn of 18th and 19th century national study became particularly substantial when traditional European states began to transform into nation-states. This development evolved into a mass phenomenon in Europe. National awakening also took form in Finland.

What is essential here, however, is the regarding of national identity as an essential part of an individual’s existence. In the 1980s philosophers such as Scruton and Gellner emphasised the significance of the sense of national identification, of belonging to a nation (Hall 1992, 291). What then is the core essence of national identity and how does it take form?

The renowned cultural theorist Stuart Hall argues that national cultures are one of the principal sources of building national identities. Producing meanings, representations and ideas of the nation, with which one can identify, develops these identities. Simply put, one must acquire a narrative of the nation. Hall distinguishes five elements of building national identities in his theory *Narrating the Nation* (ibid., 292-295).
1. *Narrative of the nation* is told in national histories, literature, the media and popular culture. It is comprised of representations and shared experiences that give meaning to the nation and, when an individual has a participating role, a sense of belonging.

2. *Origins, continuity, tradition and timelessness* refer to national identity as primordial, as if the national spirit has always existed in the same form.

3. *The invention of tradition* implicates the valuing of practices that are claimed to date back to the ancient times, although they are often recently invented.

4. *A foundational myth* is a story in which the origin of the nation is located so early that it is lost in the “mythic” time. All nations have a creational myth of their past, and in Finland it is embedded in the mythic stories of the “Kalevala”.

5. *The idea of a pure, original people or ‘folk’* is a symbolic perception in which there is a sense of primordial people who persist despite external influence.

These elements of constructing common features of a national identity can be clearly seen in the Finnish culture. It is natural for the human nature to strive towards unity, familiarity and sameness within a community, and therefore it can be argued that education for intercultural sensitivity and acceptance of difference is an attempt to change the “natural behaviour” (Bennett 1993, 21). The five elements that are characteristic of narrating a nation aim to unite people of the same origin. Paradoxically, in the constantly globalising world where multiculturalism has become the rule rather than the exception, sameness in its traditional meaning no longer exists. As Segers (2004, 89) observes, the illusion that ‘home’ or one’s fatherland is ‘normal’ is false, as there is no normal in cultural matters. The way the world is comprehended is contingent upon one’s individual perception of reality.

### 2.1.3 Three concepts of identity

Stuart Hall (1992, 281-291) introduces the conceptual shifts that caused the emergence and disintegration of the modern subject. The so-called Enlightenment ‘subject’, which had a fixed and stable identity, underwent a profound transformation or, as Hall puts it, “was de-centred into the open, contradictory, unfinished, fragmented identities of the post-modern subject”.

Hall has distinguished three concepts of identity (1992, 275):
1 *The Enlightenment subject* regarded the human person as a fully centred, unified individual whose actions were governed by reason and consciousness and whose centre consisted of an inner core that was innate and unchangeable by nature.

2 *The sociological subject* conception acknowledged that the formation of the inner core occurred in relation to ‘significant others’ and that culture was conveyed to an individual in interactive situations. This concept evolved according to the structural and institutional changes that shaped the modern world, reflecting growing complexity and incipience of fragmented and multiple identities.

3 *The post-modern subject* is a product of the prevailing trends of modernity, which define identity as temporary and historically, rather than biologically, based. It allows for contradictory and possible multiple identities, which an individual can identify with in an ever-changing process of building identity.

The modern society, in comparison to traditional society, is characterised as being in constant, rapid and permanent change (Hall 1992, 277). According to Giddens (1990, 37-38), in traditional societies “the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations”. The far-sighted philosophers Giddens, Harvey and Laclau had a somewhat similar emphasis in their perception of the nature of changes in postmodernity in the early 1990s. They discerned discontinuity, fragmentation, rupture and dislocation (Hall 1992, 297). In the chapter 2.3, I will examine what form this development has taken, particularly in reference to 21st century Finland.

### 2.1.4 European identity and young children

It has been generally acknowledged that in order to maintain its status as a functional political and economical entity, Europe must strive for common values and policies. Giddens (2007, 220-221) sees the key to a flourishing Europe being ‘community’, a collective space in which citizens can identity as members. He continues by stating that such a community can be cosmopolitan, and Europe undoubtedly is just that. Moreover, a powerful tool to help create a more integrated European community, i.e. European identity, in his opinion, is education. While Giddens lays emphasis on higher education, other scholars see the value of elementary education as the initial building block of European identity. Kuscer & Prosen (2005, 10) argue that the importance of elementary level teaching should not be underestimated and that intercultural experiences and
opportunities on the primary school level can have a profound influence on the pupils’ understanding.

Elementary school education by nature aims to the holistic development of an individual. Thus, all aspects of identity building are encouraged. Chen et al. (2004, 91) make a distinction between the three aspects of identity as experienced at an individual, relational and collective level. *Individual identity* refers to the conception of oneself as ‘an entity separate or independent from others’. However, the emergence of identity is widely acknowledged as being a social process. Therefore, the second and third aspects resonate more clearly with the assumption of social interaction; *relational identity* sees a person in relation to significant others and the third aspect, *collective identity*, describes the belonging to a specific group or a collective. The third aspect is particularly relevant in regard to the discussion of European identity as a form of supranational or transnational identity. Education is used as a means of responding to the challenge of teaching value-laden, intercultural content aiming to build global citizenship skills that include respect, tolerance and cooperation.

### 2.2 Globalisation and postmodernism

Firstly, for the sake of clarity, it is necessary to define the concept of ‘globalisation’, as the term has been widely used - and misused - in the discourse of recent years (Beck 2000, 19). One of the most prominent authorities on modernisation of our time, sociologist Ulrich Beck, provides a scholarly definition:

> Globalization means that borders become markedly less relevant to everyday behaviour in the various dimensions of economics, information, ecology, technology, cross-cultural conflict and civil society. --- Money, technologies, commodities and information and toxins ‘cross’ frontiers as if they did not exist. -- It means that people are thrown into transnational lifestyles that they often neither want nor understand --. (ibid., 20)

Semantic confusion is induced partly due to the variety of related terms such as ‘globalism’. Beck goes on to define globalism as the current liberalist ideology that describes globalisation as an inevitable process, thus implying an undercurrent assumption (Segers 2004, 14).

The definitions of ‘postmodernity’ and ‘postmodern’, for their part, follow the same pattern in which ‘postmodernity’ marks the period after modernity - a socio-economic condition (Hutcheon 1989) - and ‘postmodernism’ is defined as the cultural expression of postmodernity. (Usher & Edwards 1994, 8-12.) In postmodernity ‘the decentring of knowledge is paralleled by the decentring of the subject’ and furthermore, in postmodernism, ‘cultural practices and media are
seen as having an unprecedented impact and a central role in framing sensibilities and identities (ibid., 12-13). Having defined the essence of these terms, I will next introduce theories of characteristic features of postmodern individuals.

2.2.1 Postmodern life strategies

The Polish sociologist Zygmunt Bauman has committed his lifework to the research of modernity and postmodernity. His cutting-edge analysis of our time is composed of various metaphors and characterisations. One of the metaphors he uses is that of life played as a game. In the life-game of postmodern consumers, as he has chosen to call postmodern individuals, the rules keep changing as life goes forward. Therefore, the sensible strategy is to keep each game short, in order to avoid long-term commitment. This means that the postmodern consumer refuses to be tied to the place, commit to one vocation only or swear consistency and loyalty to anyone. As history and future appear uncontrollable and severed from the present, life is all about the ‘continuous present’ (Bauman 1996, 24).

Bauman (1996, 19-32) uses another metaphor ‘pilgrim’ to depict the modern life strategy. In the shift from modernity towards postmodernity, he argues, the world is no longer hospitable to the pilgrims. He suggests four successors to the pilgrim: the stroller, the vagabond, the tourist and the player. In order to outline the essence of the postmodern view of life in relation to identity-building I will take a closer look at the four postmodern characters.

The stroller possesses all the pleasures of modern life but takes no responsibility for the consequences. Figuratively speaking, the stroller spends time in malls - not in the tracts meant for strolling, but for shopping. There they choose their direction ostensibly independently, but in reality following the baits, pressures and seduction that have cleverly been set up for them. The stroller’s social relationships consist of encountering strangers and being a stranger to them; encounters without an impact and responsibility. The conception of others is reduced into ‘surfaces’ which means that what is seen is what one is.

The vagabond can be described as ‘masterless’, free to move, out of control and prone to make unpredictable decisions. In comparison to the pilgrim, who has a sewed-up itinerary, the vagabond has no advance plan of direction or destination and therefore every new place is a stopover. This makes the vagabond a stranger who does not belong anywhere, but this is not to be seen as worrisome, as there are yet numerous places offering new chances to explore. The underlying philosophy behind the vagabond’s mindset is to keep options open. Essential here, concerning the postmodern worldview, is that according to Bauman the world is catching up with
the vagabond at a rapid pace. Settled places are scarce and vagabonds are becoming ever more common.

Similarly to the vagabond, the tourist is on the move and a stranger everywhere he goes. This is where similarities end; where the vagabond is a directionless drifter, the tourist has a purpose. The purpose is merely to have new experiences; thereby the tourist is constantly in quest of seeking to experience difference and novelty. The world appears to the tourist as infinitely gentle, obedient, pliable and ready to excite, please and amuse. The world is fully and exclusively structured by aesthetic criteria; tough and harsh realities typical to the vagabond’s world do not interfere. Despite the mobile lifestyle, the tourist has a home, a symbol of a safe nest where the tourist can return to after an adventure, take off the mask and be himself. On the other hand, the placidity of the home is what sends the tourist in search of new adventures, thus entailing a paradoxical meaning of home being both a shelter and a prison.

The world of the player appears as a play in which the world itself is a player. Fortune and misfortune result from the moves that the world as a player makes. Time is composed of a succession of games, each of which is an entity. Each game starts from square one and does not influence the next game in the sequel or leave any lasting consequences. In order to retain intactness of each game the player must adopt a ‘this is just a game’—attitude, as there is no room for pity, compassion or mental scars.

These characterisations of postmodern life strategies are intertwining by nature. The most salient similarities are disengagement and commitment-avoidance; they render human relations fragmentary and discontinuous by promoting a distance between the individual and ‘the Other’. Their view of life begets disintegration of moral values. In the postmodern time it becomes inevitable that in the ever-continuous process of identity building, an individual acquires features of these characters. From the viewpoint of moral values and responsible citizenship, which were traditionally regarded as the core elements in identity building and life strategies, this sketches grim prospects for the future.

2.2.2 Modernity and globalisation

I will now examine globalisation, a prominent feature of modernity. Its contribution to the current worldview and, consequently, to identity cannot be denied. Modernity has brought about globalisation as Giddens (1992, 63) encapsulates: “Modernity is inherently globalising”. In terms of identity, globalisation has a strong impact on one of the categories of identity - national identity. National identity is regarded as an essential part of an individual’s existence, as stated above.
Concepts of national identity were discussed earlier in this paper, but I will take a closer look at its current manifestation in Finland in the last section of this chapter. It is sometimes difficult to distinguish national identity from globalisation, as the two themes are profoundly intertwined.

Anthony Giddens (see 1992, 14) has largely contributed to the theorisation of globalisation in relation to modernity. He states that ‘time-space distanciation’ is an essential feature in globalisation, hence naming the phenomena where global networks diminish the value of local circumstances in the lives of individuals. However, Giddens does not see the globalisation process replacing the traditional local space, but instead notes the conflating of presence and absence through interlocking of the local and the global (McGrew 1992, 66).

Debates on globalisation implicate that the nation-state is in crisis (Gordon 2004, 145). A dramatic change has undoubtedly occurred in the general perception of national identity and its value in the identity formation process of an individual. Globalisation has been seen as a major threat to nation-states. Many scholars are of the opinion that, despite the shifts and transformation that the conception of national identity has undergone, globalisation will not overtake the stature of nation-state or the meaning of local in an individual’s life (Segers 2004, 84).

McGrew, on the other hand, defines four aspects through which the disintegration of the nation-state is seen: losing its competence, its form, its autonomy and its authority or legitimacy (1992, 87). As opposing arguments to the previous bleak prospects he suggests countervailing forces, which have the potential to diminish the dissolving power of globalisation to the nation-state. These are the state's monopoly of military power, the potency of nationalism, the empowerment of states through international cooperation and the ‘myth’ of interdependence (ibid., 92). Whether or not the nation state will be negatively affected by the overpowering waves of globalism remains to be seen. However, one can ascertain that its essence will conform to the current trends.

### 2.3 The current trends of national identity in Finland

Today’s urban Finland has ‘internationalised’ as stated above. Along with the economic growth and the realisation of social democratic values, other key indicators contributing to this development have been the disintegration of the Soviet Union, which had dictating power in post-war-period policies, membership of the EU since 1995, and the increased number of immigrants. However, it must be recognised that increasing intercultural awareness within the educational field is not only a recent phenomenon; international understanding and curriculum transformation have already been
sought in Finland for a number of decades (see European Seminar on the Adaptation of the Recommendation on International Education to Educational Curricula 1978).

In relation to the above-mentioned assertion that the nation-state is in crisis and that national identities are in the process of disintegration, the study of the current state of national identity is highly relevant. Gordon (2004) has researched the concept of national citizenship and the meaning young people give to it in Finland. Concepts such as ‘cosmopolitanism’, ‘national citizenship’ and ‘world citizenship’ have arisen into subjects of the identity forming process. Cosmopolitanism is defined as belonging to all parts of the world without restrictions from any country. Based on interviews of young people Gordon suggests that the concepts of national citizenship or ‘world citizen’ are better fitting in the social democratic model than ‘cosmopolitanism’.

Young Finns often regard themselves as citizens of the world but by no means at the expense of national citizenship. Gordon announces optimistic prospects; the nation state and nationality are still vibrant in Finland. In the discourse of young people, national citizenship is an important category in identity with an emphasis on locality. Finnish young adults value their welfare state and are of the opinion that it has provided them with a safer and more secure life than their peers in other countries. They also regard the level of equality, in terms of social class and gender, to be higher than in most other countries. World citizenship to them is closely related to national citizenship; they are willing to share the rights that have been allocated to them as members of a nation but they also would expect to gain the same right in another state (ibid., 144-157).

In this sense, it seems that national identity and globalisation are not necessarily counterpointing concepts. It is possible to value the local while embracing the global. The national curriculum of education (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004, 37) also reflects this idea; it sets reinforcing national identity as one of the objectives but also emphasizes the importance of acquiring capabilities for functioning in a multicultural community and in international co-operation.

**Conclusive remarks**

The elements of identity and postmodernity are diverse and, therefore, I will not attempt to discuss these issues from top to bottom. Postmodernity and the tendencies it has brought along have shaped the process of identity building in an utterly transforming way. In summing up the examination regarding identity, postmodernity and globalism, I would like to cite Zygmunt Bauman once more. He sees the world as desert-like. In the early modern times the ‘pilgrim’ built his identity step by step in the desert. Eventually it became evident that “the real problem is not how to build identity
but how to preserve it. -- The easier it is to emboss a footprint, the easier it is to efface it. A gust of wind will do. And deserts are windy places” (Bauman 1996, 23). The discontinuity and irresponsibility characteristic of our time poses a veritable challenge to the field of education. Impermanence can hardly be seen as a desirable learning outcome in the time that constantly strives for efficient and stable learning results. Keeping in mind the existing themes of our time - status of national identity, postmodernity and globalism - which influence all activities in the background, I will next examine the more practical aspects of intercultural learning.
3 INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

This chapter dives into the concepts of intercultural sensitivity, competence and skills, global citizenship and peace education, attempting to provide definitions, present guidelines and examine the relevance those topics have in educating children in our time. A core theory of this research, Bennett’s model of intercultural development steps is studied thoroughly. Communities of Practise, as an element of situated learning, also play an important role in the construct of this research and are discussed theoretically, as well as including an integration aspect to elementary school teaching and curricular matters. In the final chapter of this paper, these theories will be contrasted with the research findings in order to monitor the impacts of the Comenius Project.

3.1 Interculturally competent global citizen

As globalisation becomes an ever-more-inevitable reality in different communities, the need for conceptualising occurs, hence the myriad of terms that attempt to depict various aspects of the phenomenon. In order to avoid ambiguity, I have chosen to use particular terminologies, which etymologically best describe the viewpoints in question. Based on existing models and theories, I would argue that achieving intercultural competence requires undergoing learning steps of intercultural sensitivity. Moreover, increasing tolerance, acceptance and appreciation of cultural difference leads to global awareness, which is a characteristic of global citizenship. Promotion of these qualities needs to be implemented by conscientious effort by means of peace education and intercultural cooperation.

Jokikokko (2005, 91) presents perspectives and provides views for definitions and dimensions of intercultural competence. Recognising multiple connotations of the term ‘competence’, and the importance of context in determining suitable behaviour, she establishes a ‘general foundation’, which entails four dimensions as building blocks of intercultural competence. These are attitudes, knowledge & awareness, action and skills. Essentially these four partially overlapping dimensions do not intend to describe the path for achieving intercultural competence - that aspect is studied later in this chapter - but rather explore the aim and ethical basis of intercultural learning.
Attitudes, including appreciation of diversity and willingness, openness and motivation to experience cultural difference in people and their ways, form crucial conditions for positive intercultural interactions (ibid., 93). Knowledge and awareness of oneself, one’s culture and others and their culture are vital for comprehensive understanding. Moreover, realisation of common structures and behaviour of prejudice and discrimination, as well as awareness of wider social and global issues, contributes to intercultural competence. Intercultural skills are necessary for successful communication as they entail the notion of empathy, which enables adaptation to new situations. They are perceived as the ability to appropriate behaviour in changing intercultural contexts. Theoretical and technical know-how alone will not guarantee functional intercultural competence. Thus, the action dimension completes the foursome, assuming transforming actions exist in the society rather than just sophisticated talk, which lacks practical application (ibid., 96).

These dimensions can be seen as forming a general foundation on the rock of intercultural competence, yet more critical and detailed perspectives to the ethical basis are needed. The stumbling block for promotion of intercultural learning is that it can be questioned by reason of unethical moral purposes. Noddings (2005, 3) discusses the possible negative implications of leading the lifestyle of ‘a global citizen’, taking a more societal and holistic viewpoint. Globalism presumes intercultural competence, which actualises in global citizenship, hence the shift in terminology. The critique is aimed to the presumption of increasing economical injustice, which, according to the critics, has been aggravated by efforts to boost globalisation. The underlying point surrounds the notion of self-interest, characteristic of western values, in comparison to global interest, which aims to strive for the common good. Indifference to global matters results in inequity and environmental catastrophes among other issues. Selfish agendas also fail to take into account issues related to tolerance of cultural diversity and social justice.

When taken a step further in regard to the existing contradiction, or ‘concern’, as Noddings prefers to call the issue, it is relevant to ask whether there is an inherent conflict between one’s own purposes, often present in financial or nationalistic actions, and global citizenship. Bennett (1993, 21) assumes that there is, claiming that demonstration of intercultural sensitivity is an unnatural act. Thus, attempts to educate for intercultural sensitivity are, in actuality, endeavouring to change the natural behaviour of human beings.

Bearing this concern in mind, Jokikokko (2005, 97) emphasises the importance of ethically oriented, value-based intercultural competence as the standard assumption on which to build individual and common goals. Scholars who endeavour to define the core criteria for developing successful intercultural competence have created numerous listings, one of which is presented
below. Räsänen (2005, 30) presents holistic ethical guidelines for fruitful intercultural and international cooperation from the viewpoint of global citizenship:

1. Willingness and motivation to cooperate
2. Treating others as subjects and as goals
3. The commitment to equity
4. The commitment to mutual learning and dialogue
5. The commitment to peace
6. The commitment to seek sustainable development

These guidelines assert the importance of motivation and commitment and assume that an individual takes a humble and accepting approach to intercultural matters. It is self-evident that such guidelines require active learning and participation in order to actualise as part of the mindset of an individual. When it comes to the fifth above-mentioned guideline, commitment to peace, various parties consider it as the critical point. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has launched worldwide projects in an attempt to promote global visions and actions for development. Highlighting the importance of peace education, UNESCO named the decade 2001-2010 the International Decade for a Culture of Peace. As defined by UNESCO, Culture of Peace is a set of values, attitudes, modes of behaviour and ways of life that reject violence and prevent conflicts by tackling their root causes to solve problems through dialogue and negotiation among individuals, groups and nations (UN Resolutions A/RES/52/13: Culture of Peace and A/RES/53/243, Declaration and Project of Action on a Culture of Peace). During its long history, rooting back to the havoc of the Second World War, UNESCO has asserted and reasserted the importance of human rights and the valuing of the dignity of each individual and culture (Power 2001, 20).

It can be questioned whether peace is a precondition for positive intercultural development and global citizenship, or whether global peace can be effectively promoted by undertaking the learning steps of intercultural development. According to Noddings (2005, 4) this debate is a chicken-and-egg argument, and indeed both viewpoints can be seen as valid. As the world’s peoples and cultures face profoundly diverse realities, the solution is to apply methods of promoting improvement by taking into account the unique circumstances of each group.

Despite the fact that the same methods cannot be impressed upon all cultures, dialogue among the world’s nations is a vital tool in striving for common values and the common good (Lasonen & Manning 2004, 146). UNESCO, among other significant parties, continues to take
action in bringing together representatives from various countries to discuss, implement and foster cultures of peace in the world at large, allowing for the development of global citizenship.

3.2 Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

This sub-chapter examines learning steps for developing intercultural sensitivity. Milton J. Bennett has created a famous model for the development of intercultural sensitivity. His Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett 1993) consists of six stages, the first three of which are categorised as ethnocentric states and latter three as ethno-relative stages. As the model is comprehensive, extensive and elaborate, I will examine it in detail. Cultural sensitivity is at the centre of this research paper and, therefore, it is justified to state that this model is the one to shed light on the most pertinent topic, cutting directly to the core of developing cultural sensitivity.

What makes the model particularly practical is that it includes a training approach. As stated earlier, intercultural sensitivity cannot be forced into an individual’s mindset. It requires, on the contrary, curiosity, openness and motivation for transformative learning, which often means radical changes in beliefs, attitudes and opinions. Pelkonen (2005, 85) describes the relationship between the educator and learner as one in which a mentor determinedly leads the learner to examine new realities by means of dialogue and reflection, thus freeing the learner from prejudiced assumptions towards a more critical, yet informed, worldview.

The Developmental Model assumes that experience is construed from the relationship between people and phenomena. In other words, intercultural sensitivity as a term is closely linked with experience and can best be defined as a developmental model, rather than as a set of specific behaviours. Thus, “it is the construction of reality as increasingly capable of accommodating cultural difference that constitutes development” (Bennett 1993, 24). It should be noted that Bennett sees the model as best fitting the mindsets of dominant cultural groups, as opposed to oppressed people, whose painful experiences cause variation in the methods by which the different developmental stages are expressed.

A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennett 1993, 29)

The ethnocentric Stages

1. DENIAL
   A. Isolation
B. Separation

2. DEFENSE
   A. Denigration
   B. Superiority
   C. Reversal

3. MINIMIZATION
   A. Physical Universalism
   B. Transcendent Universalism

The ethnorelative Stages

4. ACCEPTANCE
   A. Respect for Behavioural Difference
   B. Respect for Value Difference

5. ADAPTATION
   A. Empathy
   B. Pluralism

6. INTEGRATION
   A. Contextual Evaluation
   B. Constructive Marginality

3.2.1 The ethnocentric stages

The three ethnocentric stages cover the learner’s perceptions towards cultural difference from total denial of its existence to the minimisation of its importance. “Ethnocentric” is defined as assuming one’s own culture is in the centre of all reality similar to egocentrism, where an individual perceives their own existence to be an essential part of others’ worldview.

Denial is the purest form of ethnocentrism, as it entails a person to be totally ignorant of cultural difference. At this stage a person is of the belief that cultural diversity only occurs elsewhere. On one hand, denial appears to be a benign state where no confrontation with the others is sought. The ones practicing denial are regarded as naïve rather than prone to provoke negativity. The danger in denial, however, underlies its tendency to relegate the others to sub-human status. History tells a brutal story of extreme cases of elimination and genocide.
Isolation in its original physical form still exists among indigenous tribes around the world, where a group has not encountered cultural difference in any way. The condition of no categories for cultural difference applies to them. Nowadays physical isolation is more likely to take a relative form. Even in big cities homogenous groups may have acquired a parochial outlook aiming to exclude cultural diversity. Such partial isolation of parochialism will likely lead to maintaining broad categories for cultural difference, which leaves no room for distinguishing particular cultures but rather fosters benign stereotypes of people in certain parts of the world, such as ‘the Asians’ or ‘the Africans’.

Separation is the more active and acknowledging form of denial, taking a step forward in the development of cultural sensitivity. It is an intentional effort to build physical and social barriers in order to create distance from the culturally different group. In fact, even fervent nationalism can be seen as practising separation when the objective is to keep distance from foreigners.

Bennett’s recommended developmental strategies for the denial stage are cultural awareness activities in which the purpose is to enhance the ability to make differentiation among general categories of cultural difference. Discussion of truly significant cultural matters should, however, be avoided at this stage. In elementary school settings these goals could be achieved, for example, by carrying out Multicultural Weeks where music, dance and costumes are displayed.

Defence, as a term, is largely connected to perceived threat. The typical strategy to deal with a threat is to respond negatively. Defence occurs in people who have just undergone denial. In defence, strategies to fight the difference directly in an attempt to retain one’s worldview are sought through three forms: denigration, superiority and reversal.

Denigration takes form in negative stereotyping where attitude towards difference is openly hostile and negative remarks of individuals belonging to a certain race, religion, age, gender or other category are displayed. A more severe occurrence of denigration links cultural difference with the group’s inherent inferiority, which has been practised by parties such as the Ku Klux Klan and Nazis. There is a tendency to retreat from negative evaluating back to isolation and denial, however this should not be encouraged, but rather we should aim to build healthy cultural self-esteem.

Where denigration focuses on smearing ethnic groups, the superiority approach highlights the positive evaluation of one’s own cultural status, placing it a step higher than denigration. In superiority tolerance and recognition of difference are more likely to occur but the perspective is still ethnocentric. Reversal, according to Bennett, is not an inevitable stage in building intercultural sensitivity, yet is common enough to deserve mention. Reversal occurs when one starts to relegate one’s own culture and praise the superiority of another culture. Individuals in this stage may
appear to be more interculturally aware and likely to have travelled. However, no matter the degree of positive valuation of another culture, if it occurs at the expense of one’s own culture, it cannot be considered as ethnoretive, and additional reworking within the ethnocentric stages is required. An excellent technique to overcome defence is to stress commonality through activities that require co-operation and expose the vulnerability and humanness of each individual.

**Minimisation** is the last stage of ethnocentrism and, as its name suggests, attempts to belittle cultural difference by emphasising human similarity. What makes minimisation ethnocentric, despite its seemingly broad acceptance of difference, is that it is based on the naïve assumption that all people share basic characteristics. Often this assumption is derived from the cultural background of the majority group and entails the demand to ‘be like me’.

Minimisation takes form in two ways of thinking: physical universalism and transcendent universalism. *Physical universalism* relies strongly on the worldwide biological similarities in peoples’ behaviour, but fails to take into account the social aspects that contribute to cultural difference. Likewise, *transcendent universalism* sees all peoples in the world as ultimately similar while taking on a more spiritual approach, claiming that everyone is part of the same universal truth, ‘we are all God’s children’. Non-religious forms of transcendent universalism subordinate all humans to historical, political and economical forces.

People in the stage of minimisation are likely to find learning about cultural difference interesting, useful and relevant. A common perception is to think that in order to interact successfully one needs to just be oneself, as all people are innately similar. This naturally leads to contradiction in social interaction and can cause regression back to defence and denial. Minimisation strategies often stem from lack of awareness of one’s own culture. Therefore, it is important to educate people to discover the cultural context of their behaviour and, in doing so, make a distinction between universal and cultural behaviour.

### 3.2.2 The ethnoretive stages

Shift from the ethnocentric stages to the ethnoretive stages requires major conceptual and paradigmatic adjustments in thinking. At this stage cultural difference no longer relies on absolute standards of goodness or rightness and is regarded as inevitable and positive. This means one is aware that one’s own culture is no more central to reality than any other culture, despite the fact that individuals have different preferences by reason of upbringing and character. The ethnoretive stages spread out from acceptance of cultural difference through adaptation, in which
intercultural interaction skills are developed, to integration of one’s own and foreign cultures into a new dynamic identity.

**Acceptance** takes in notions of respecting and acknowledging cultural difference. At the stage of *Respect for behavioural difference* linguistic relativity as well as variations in non-verbal communication and behaviour is recognised. *Respect for value difference* takes the acceptance stage even further, as it allows for different worldview assumptions that underlie cultural norms and behavioural patterns. The sense of process is also essential to this stage of development. Instead of thinking that values and assumptions are static, the process approach sees assuming as a constantly changing and viable cognitive activity. This allows different cultures to value in their own unique way, enabling mutual cultural understanding and respect for each other’s conceptions without the need to be like-minded.

The next stage of development, **adaptation**, is about enhancing communication skills that are needed when interacting with people from other cultures. Intrinsically to the acquirement of new skills is the principle of an additive process. In other words, learning appropriate ways to communicate with other cultures will not happen at the expense of one’s own culture, but rather adds to the existing skills.

**Empathy** is the first form of adaptation and Bennett defines it as the ability to experience differently in a communication context. Empathy entails the intention to comprehend the others’ perspective. It has limitations, however, in terms of short-term cultural shifting. When one takes on a temporary change of perspective, a holistic cultural experience is left lacking.

**Pluralism** takes a step further away from empathy. It does not only require accommodating attitude towards other cultures but also posits experiences with cultures to be gained within the actual cultural frame, thus incorporating the understanding of cultural context. Accordingly, pluralism contains notions of ‘biculturalism’ and ‘multiculturalism’, as two or more cultural frames must exist. The development of multiple cultural frames can only happen after one has spent a considerable time living amongst another culture. Bennett claims a minimum of two years is required in order to develop basic pluralism and fuse into a culture.

As ethnocentric views do not exist at this stage, one is identified with different worldviews and considers cultural difference as internal – part of who they are – not external. A person with a pluralistic experience is also likely to support development of cultural sensitivity in people around them.

Reaching the adaptation stage could be considered as good enough, but there are still areas to be discovered in the development of cultural sensitivity. **Integration** is the last stage of ethnorelativism and offers the most holistic sense of what it is like to be a multicultural person.
possessing successful intercultural sensitivity skills. Fundamental to integration is its linkage with the identity building process, which by nature is in constant transition. The dynamic process of defining and re-defining identity in self-reflective loops is characteristic of the integrated constructing of reality.

Ethnorelative stages up to this point have avoided evaluation of difference in order to develop adaptive skills. **Contextual evaluation** enables analysing and assessment of particular situations from one or more cultural perspectives. The outcome of such evaluation is competency to judge relative goodness in specific contexts. This form of integration is particularly useful for culturally oppressed people, as it steers their attention to the evaluation of aspects in the dominant culture, which caused the oppression, without rejecting the entire culture. One becomes capable of critical yet objective evaluation of cultures, recognising strengths as well as weaknesses and the factor of individual preference.

The last stage of the Developmental Model, **Constructive marginality**, is not necessary to reach unless one possesses great interest in experiencing different cultures and has a strong commitment to principles of internationalism and multiculturalism. Constructive marginality describes the state of people who have achieved cultural ethnorelativistic thinking but, in doing so, have lost the natural cultural identity embodied by mainstream people. This creates obvious discomfort due to the lack of set cultural frames and assumptions but, with proper preparation before reaching this stage, empowers individuals to function in international negotiation and cultural mediation. It is essential to note that learning will continue in a process-like manner even after the last stage has been reached.

3.3. **Situated learning in communities of practice**

This section will complete the theoretical basis for intercultural competence in this study paper. After having defined intercultural competence and its related terminologies, and studying the learning steps for intercultural sensitivity in depth, it is now time to look at the possibilities of putting these models into action through situated learning. The purpose of this study paper, ultimately, is to capture the essence of active intercultural learning in a particular context.

Classic learning theories include the theories of **experiential learning** by David Kolb (1984), as well as the theory of **situated learning**, by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991). Characteristic of both theories is the assumption that concrete experience is fundamental to effective learning (Pelkonen 2005, 81). Kolb argues that transformative learning consists of four elements: **concrete experience, observation and reflection**, the formation of **abstract concepts**, and **testing** in new
situations. Although Kolb sees these elements as forming a spiral, thus enabling learning to begin at any element, it would be most likely, in the case of intercultural learning, to begin with concrete experiences, which are then reflected upon, conceptualised and tested (ibid.).

The definition of experience brings along questioning in regard to the application of the theory in practice. One can ask whether experience presumes direct encounter, and if mental versus physical, as well as primary versus secondary experience, count as equal. The theory of situated learning gives an answer to the dilemma, assuming an authentic context and social interaction. Simply put, learning involves engagement in communities of practice, which are social and collaborative by nature (Smith 2009). Wenger (2006) defines communities of practice as having three crucial characteristics that set them apart from other groups and communities:

Communities of practice

The domain. A community of practice is something more than a club of friends or a network of connections between people. It has an identity defined by a shared domain of interest. Membership therefore implies a commitment to the domain, and a shared competence that distinguishes members from other people.

The community. In pursuing their interest in their domain, members engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other, and share information. They build relationships that enable them to learn from each other.

The practice. Members of a community of practice are practitioners. They develop a shared repertoire of resources: experiences, stories, tools, and ways of addressing recurring problems - in short a shared practice. This takes time and sustained interaction.

3.3.1 Application to elementary school level

The application of the situated learning model in actual school environments, according to Wenger (2006), is a slow process and requires changes in practices. However, it has the potential to contribute to education practices along three dimensions:

1) Internal change in the methods used within teaching of subject matters
2) Broadening the learning experience beyond the school compound
3) Encouraging lifelong commitment to communities of practice beyond the schooling period.

It is questionable whether pupils at the elementary school level are capable of participating in functioning communities of practice individually, let alone collectively - for example, as a class of
23 pupils. However, important as pupils’ motivation for learning is, teachers’ actions ultimately determine the depth of integration of international topics into the classroom curriculum. As widely acknowledged mainstream education in Finland, among other counties, often fails to provide opportunities for situated learning in authentic contexts, due to curricular restrictions or lack of vision or resources. Despite the high quality of teacher education in Finland – requiring five years of theoretical and practical studies completed by a Master’s Degree – the initial teacher education is only ‘awakening’ to realise the potential benefits of multicultural education courses offered to teacher trainees (Matinheikki-Kokko & Pitkänen 2006, 71).

Negligence to face multicultural issues poses a serious concern, as the international awareness of teachers is vital for effective teaching to take place, especially now that we have entered an era where multiculturalism and internationalism have become inescapable. Practical experiences of cross-cultural teaching are the most effective tools for increasing the multicultural teaching competence, according to a study which aimed to track down methods on how to develop student teacher’s multicultural competence (ibid., 102). Although the terms ‘multicultural’ and ‘intercultural’ have a subtle nuance of meaning, both can be seen, in this case, as contributing to the holistic understanding of international matters. Maitles (2005, 69) concurs with the recognition of significant demand for professional development in the area of global citizenship education. He highlights that initial teacher training, as well as professional development training of existing teachers, should “concentrate on winning hearts and minds to education for citizenship”.

Crucial for successful teaching of intercultural matters, again from the practical viewpoint of teachers, is to approach these curriculum contents by focusing on examining and celebrating variety. Goldstein (2004, 127) asserts that the pitfall of the commonality approach, which centres on common human experience, sows seeds of mistrust and violence. Instead, an approach that dismantles fear of difference and promotes understanding, appreciation and respect should be adopted.

In an ideal case of intercultural education learning should involve not only the class in question but also the wider learning community, including school stuff and pupils’ families. The school should also demonstrate principals of global education in all its operations. To summarise the objectives of intercultural education in practical school context, naming each of the principles is necessary. As categorised by Swiniarski, Breitborde & Murphy (1999, 191) these principles of global education are:

1. Basic education
2. Lifelong learning
3. Cooperative learning

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4. Inclusive of all
5. Education for social action
6. Economic education
7. Involvement of technology
8. Requirement of critical and creative thinking
9. Multicultural education
10. Moral education

The principles are holistic and simple, yet powerful. This study paper will later examine the practical application of such principles and investigate the learning outcomes of the Comenius Project – practical intercultural cooperation at the elementary school level.

3.3.2 Review of curricular matters

The National Core Curriculum of Basic Education in Finland defines core subjects that are to be taught within a set timeframe. For each of the core subjects the National Curriculum defines content and objectives. While the teaching of regular school subjects within the distribution of lessons takes up the majority of school time, the Curriculum also lists cross-curricular themes. The intent is to integrate these into either core or optional subjects, where they can be implemented in events, projects and assemblies, and, more generally, will be manifested in the operational culture of the school. The National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004, 36-41) presents the cross-curricular themes as follows:

1. Growth as a person
2. Cultural identity and internationalism
3. Media skills and communication
4. Participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship
5. Responsibility for the environment, well-being and a sustainable future
6. Safety and traffic
7. Technology and the individual

It is up to the practitioner – each school and individual teacher – to decide how to transform these objectives into part of a pupil’s learning experience. This case study will demonstrate how many of these topics were taught to pupils within the framework of intercultural learning.
As asserted above, transformation in the curricula is pertinent in order to integrate intercultural topics and thus develop intercultural competence. The national elementary education curriculum in Finland (National Core Curriculum for Basic Education 2004) describes the underlying values of basic education:

The underlying values of basic education are human rights, equality, democracy, natural diversity, preservation of environmental viability, and the endorsement of multiculturalism. --- The instruction must also take into account the diversification of Finnish culture through the arrival of people from other cultures. The instruction helps to support the formation of the pupil's own cultural identity, and his or her part in Finnish society and a globalizing world. The instruction also helps to promote tolerance and intercultural understanding. (p. 12)

These values are highly supportive of multicultural matters and promote the principles of global citizenship, such as equal human rights and nature conservation. The formation of identity, in relation to pupil’s own culture and also as a part of a global interdependent world, is encouraged, thus nurturing intercultural understanding and the ability to view oneself from the perspective of other cultures (Banks 2008, 2). Although identity building is addressed as an essential value, Ropo (2009, 20) argues that the present Finnish curriculum that lays focus on school subjects ‘has the deficiency of not recognising identity development as worthy of the attention it should receive’.

These objectives underline the importance of local cultural identity in order to develop appreciation for foreign cultures. Following the idea of cherishing the local in order to embrace the global, Noddings (2005, 57) names this approach place-based education. By learning to care for one’s own environment in the form of action, studying local places with appreciation, and having opportunities to exchange these stories internationally, pupils learn to understand the meaning of a place in an individual’s life (ibid., 62). Connecting the local and global fosters responsible and conscientious life-style.

The national curriculum itself contains notable values and objectives, but issue rises with the implementation of those themes into the practices of individual schools. Each school in Finland creates their own curriculum based on the higher criteria of the national curriculum. However obediently each school-wide curriculum subscribes to the national standards, the issue at stake is the challenge to integrate numerous relevant themes into actual teaching. That is to say, intercultural themes may go by the board while other important topics gain ground, unless the teacher possesses personal insight of intercultural matters. After all, each teacher interprets the curriculum based on his/her worldview (Talib, Löfström & Meri 2004, 83).
When it comes to applying the intercultural objectives and contents into practice, there are several aspects to discuss. Firstly, in order to achieve desired learning outcomes, the changes in the curriculum must be *transformative* rather than *infusive* by nature. If new content is infused into the curriculum, pupils fail to acquire broad perspectives and are left with the traditional Western conceptions of cultural matters. In comparison, when curriculum transformation occurs, paradigm shifts are made possible in the mindsets of pupils as well as the teacher, enabling comprehension of the global picture and varied cultural worldviews (Banks 2008, 39).

Secondly, the inclusion of multicultural teaching content does not necessarily require the launching of new courses. Conscious teachers are aware of the global issues and current situations and find ways to introduce the topics within established courses. Accordingly, Noddings (2005, 123) underlines that material on global citizenship should be incorporated into existing courses, and shared across the curriculum, rather than restricted to single courses. This eases the curriculum transformation process, as major technical changes are not necessary.

Thirdly, one of the key issues in facilitating intercultural learning is the role of the teacher. Every teacher executes the given curriculum based on personal preference. Inseparable as one’s moral character and professional self are, teachers should also follow the ethical standards of their profession when intercultural matters come into question (Husu 2006, 89). Developing the multicultural competence of teachers is of utmost importance and it can be facilitated through initial teacher training, as well as supplementary training for practicing teachers (Talib, Löfström & Meri 2004, 148).

Thornton (2005, 92) also highlights the importance of teachers seeing themselves as educators, not merely as subject matter specialists. Acquainting teachers with relevant material, instructional methods and the usage of media as tools, plays a significant role in the transformation of teaching practices towards a more conscious schooling. Supplementary training for teachers is an effective means of providing teachers with practical tools, methods and material. The demand for these courses and materials directs the responsibility to higher quarters, such as the decision-makers and curriculum designers at the school-wide, municipal and national level.
4 THE COMENIUS PROJECT IN CLASS 5A

This chapter describes a case of successful situated learning at the elementary school level – the Comenius Project – which put intercultural learning into practice. The objectives and procedures of the Project required transformation in the classroom curriculum towards holistic intercultural learning. Careful consideration was demonstrated throughout the Project regarding relevant learning methods and curriculum content. The process was monitored closely in quest of examining the learning outcomes of bilateral international cooperation of this kind. The activities carried out during the Project form the data basis of this research paper.

4.1 Starting points and timeline

In autumn 2009 I received an offer to join the Comenius Project, which was to be run in Finland, in the Hämeenlinnan Normaalikoulu, the practising school of the University of Tampere in the Department of Teacher Education. My role was to be a researcher who would conduct a Master’s Thesis of the Project on a chosen theme and also observe, monitor and evaluate the process through an assessment approach.

I found it highly motivating to take part in an international project as I have had previous experience in studying and teaching abroad. Thus, issues and themes relating to international cooperation were close to my heart. I was able to contribute to the success of the Project with my advanced language skills as well as practical knowledge of international cooperation. Therefore, my participation in the Project was, I believe, mutually beneficial.

An additional factor that played an important role in the execution of the Project was the opportunity to conduct the advanced studies teaching practice period in class teacher Marja Tuomi’s class 5A, as Specialised Project Studies are part of my Master’s degree. This meant I could spend the spring term of 2010 teaching the class that was involved in the Comenius Project. This experience allowed a chance for establishing good rapport with the pupils of the 5A class, making me an active participant in the Project and allowing me to observe the class from within. I found this highly beneficial in regard to my research.
After discussing the practicalities with my research mentor professor Eero Ropo, of the University of Tampere, the headmaster of Hämeenlinnan Normaalikoulu Vesa Toivonen and the coordinating teacher Marja Tuomi, I was appointed to take part in the Project. In December 2009 I started to outline the core themes of my research, read literature in search of theoretical background and plan my role as a student teacher in Mrs. Tuomi’s class 5A.

In January Mrs. Tuomi and I decided on the topics I would teach in her class during spring 2010. It was agreed that I would teach Cultural Education and Geography, both of which are closely linked with the themes of the Comenius Project and, on a more concrete basis, with the study visit. I started to observe the 5A class in order to get to know the pupils and the classroom atmosphere. Mrs. Tuomi and I formed a cohesive team in the course of spring 2010, implementing the subject matters, which were part of the Project, and discussing future procedures. She also worked as my mentor for the teaching practice, which meant she was able to give me feedback on my periodical plans and the actual teaching.

At the end of January there was a three-day Comenius Programme Leader Meeting in Finland, which I also attended. Leaders and coordinating teachers from the six participant schools within four countries were present. At the meeting general goals as well as practical details were discussed. The outcome of this meeting was the clarification of the objectives and practical approaches of the Comenius Project, on both a school-wide and general level. I had an opportunity to meet and connect with other members involved in the Project, particularly the student teachers from Austria, who visited Finland later in the spring with pupils on the first study visit week.

From the end of January 2010 until April 2010 I taught Cultural Education and Geography in the 5A class, the number of lessons amounting to 28 in total. During this time I also carried out two surveys and pupil interviews. In mid-April, a parent meeting took place where parents were informed about practical details regarding the visit of the Austrian class. Parents were actively involved in planning the schedule, which later proved vital in engaging them during the study visit. I collected research data from parents using a questionnaire.

At the end of February I briefly visited the partner class in Austria, bringing greetings, pupil’s correspondence letters and chocolates from Finland. Seeing the Austrian pupils in their natural school environment allowed me to understand the procedures involved in their learning experiences, which was of benefit in planning the study visit in Finland. In March, a teacher meeting took place in Hämeenlinnan Normaalikoulu as part of teacher mobility in the Comenius Project. Some teachers observed my practice lessons and we were then able to discuss educational topics in groups.
Between the 27th of April and 3rd of May the Austrian class visited Finland. The study visit week was the most important event in the entire Project up to that time. I had an active role in the process, taking responsibility of certain lessons and helping out with arrangements. I also observed learning situations and student interaction very closely as part of the research data. The final data, including parents’ and Finnish pupils’ experiences, was collected shortly after the visit.

In May 2010 I finalised the research themes and questions to best match the collected data and started the writing process of the thesis. The main body of the study was constructed in early summer 2010, when all the details of the teaching projects and the study visit week remained fresh in my mind. In August-September 2010 the contents and standpoints were carefully revised and the thesis took its final form.

4.2 Introduction to the Comenius Project

The Comenius Lifelong Learning Programme is an EU-funded pilot project under the title “Learning, Language and Diversity through European networking”. Under the umbrella of the Comenius Programme, the Multilateral School Partnership, Europe4you, involves both multilateral and bilateral cooperation in six partnership schools in four countries: Austria, England, Finland and Germany. The Comenius Project in these countries is planned to take place between September 2009 and July 2011.

As stated in the Comenius Partnership Application form the goals of the partnership are to bring together pupils, students and teachers in four countries in order to develop understanding of the ever-changing world in which they live and learn through language and culture. Thus, learning and communication is enabled in three levels:

- **Pupil mobility**: learning about culture and language
- **Teacher mobility**: learn from teaching practises and procedures in other countries
- **Leaders’ role**: common theoretical outcome

The objective of the partnership is to address and promote:

1. Acceptance and tolerance of other cultures and lifestyles
2. Integration of language learning into everyday curriculum
3. Language learning and linguistic diversity from an early age for more natural learning
4. Inclusion of all children in part of an international learning community
These objectives will be achieved by key activities that are going to take place throughout the Project. Study visits include face-to-face interaction between partnership schools for both pupils and teachers. Pupil mobility is bilateral; Finland – Austria, England1 – Germany1, England2 – Germany2, whereas teacher mobility is multilateral between all partnership schools. School Leadership Meetings gather all leaders together to plan, review and evaluate partnership activities. Language acquisition and cultural understanding will be fostered in partnership schools, embedded in the partners’ own curricula, which will lay the groundwork for the more concrete activities such as study visits and theme projects e.g. practising a theme song in the three different languages: German, Finnish and English.

The more concrete impact and benefits of European cooperation that the Project is expected to have on pupils, staff and participating institutions are the following:

1. Provide a real authentic context for children to use their language skills and learn more with foreign children
2. Give children a possibility to learn and practise their social skills that are needed in international cooperation
3. Increase and deepen cultural awareness and knowledge on a reciprocal basis both domestic and foreign
4. Diminish stereotypes and prejudices towards foreign people by giving correct and up-to-date information about other nations and people and thus increase mutual understanding in the European level
5. Give a possibility to put cross-curricular themes into practice
6. Give teachers possibilities to observe and learn different methodologies and school management and adapt them to their own school environment and teaching
7. Support the development of ICT-based content and pedagogies
8. Help children to acquire skills necessary for active European citizenship

The Comenius Project focuses on physical activities and mobility. However, the leaders will conduct a closing seminar at the end of the Project and construct a report of the activities and achieved learning outcomes. Individual schools are expected to disseminate the practice, knowledge
gain and understanding to other institutions locally, regionally and into the wider learning community.

4.3 Class 5A

I find it vital to provide a comprehensive account of the 5A class, which is in the centre of action and the main focus of this research, as it has unique features. Firstly, Hämeenlinnan Normaalikoulu, the Practising School of the Department of Class Teacher Education at the University of Tampere, is not administered by the municipality, as are the large majority of Finnish schools. The administration is under the University of Tampere. The school has about 400 pupils in 18 teaching groups from pre-school up to grade six.

The school’s functioning as a practising school determines that some policies, principles and procedures differ from the practices of the public school system. For example, class teachers in most cases start with first graders and follow through with the same class until sixth grade, after which the class moves on to the secondary school. Due to this procedure the class and the teacher are familiar with each other, especially towards the end of primary school after spending years together. In Mrs. Tuomi’s 5A it was evident that the teacher knew her pupils thoroughly and had formed a mutual understanding with them over the years. Mrs. Tuomi also underlined that had she not been able to put her trust in them she would never have decided to embark on the Comenius Project, which included a lot of out-of-school activities such as hosting foreign students at pupils’ homes.

Another major difference to normal public schools is the practice school status of Hämeenlinnan Normaalikoulu. In the course of the school year several student teachers enter the classes, taking on their teaching practice period. From the viewpoint of the pupils this means having to become accustomed to conforming to new teachers’ styles of teaching as well as various teaching methods. Therefore, as I entered the classroom in the combined role of a student teacher and a researcher, the pupils and I were able to establish a good rapport in a short time. They were also very much accustomed to project-style study, as most of the student teachers teach six-week periods and, therefore, the pupils welcomed the projects I introduced with enthusiasm and experience.

What makes the 5A special, even within the school, is that the class specialises in English. They practise a methodology called CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning), in which certain curriculum contents are taught in English. The parents have chosen to enrol the pupils for the first grade. Therefore, it can be assumed that the families are, in general, more internationally
oriented than the average Finnish family. Along with the possible influence from home and the five years in the CLIL class, the pupils have adopted a positive attitude towards languages and international issues. Their level of English is naturally higher than the average fifth grader’s but, based on my observation, I would argue that the difference is not major. The proficiency of English ranges from nearly average fifth grade level of English to advanced and fluent use of English. In conclusion, good English skills and a positive attitude towards international issues made this class eligible to take part in the Comenius Project.

### 4.4 Research questions

The intention of the study is to find answers to questions concerning intercultural competence based on the collected data. The questions are as follows:

1. How does national identity affect the identity building process in an intercultural encounter in relation to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity?
2. How can intercultural themes be implemented into school curriculum in the 5th grade?
3. What are the most salient learning outcomes that emerge from the Comenius Project through situated learning?
4. How does the Comenius Project respond to the challenges posed by globalisation in the era of postmodernity?

Due to the comprehensive nature of this case study, the research questions also intend to address broad themes in order to account for the existing various aspects. Therefore, it must be acknowledged that in-depth dissection of the different topics will not be possible within the limits of this case study. Questions 1 and 4 assure a more philosophical and phenomenographical approach, whereas questions 2 and 3 can better be analysed based on the individual pieces of data.

### 4.5 Data

The data was collected in multiple forms. Firstly, I reported the actions and procedures during the project in field-note form, focusing particularly on close observation of the study visit week. Secondly, the pupils of 5A produced data by attending an interview on national identity in relation to cultural difference and other cultures. Pupils also filled in before-and-after surveys: 1) on their preconceptions about Austria and 2) their identity and national identity. Furthermore, they wrote essays on the study visit, how it went and what they learned. They also wrote about their learning
outcomes that resulted from the cultural education classes. In addition to the account of the pupils, parents wrote about their moods and experiences regarding the study visit week and hosting the Austrian pupils before, as well as after, the visit week. The class teacher, Mrs. Tuomi, gave an interview and reported her experience from a personal point of view as the coordinator and organiser of the Comenius Project.

In a case study observation, interviews and surveys are useful tools for collecting data. The role of the researcher as an actively involved project-worker who participates in hands-on teaching gives a distinct and valuable perspective to a study, which is analysed and interpreted by qualitative methods. The next chapter will explore the methodologies used in this research, diving into the concepts of philosophy of science.
5  METHODOLOGY

5.1  Phenomenographical case study

This study is a qualitative empirical case study, which aims to shed light on the themes and interpretations that arise from cultural education and international cooperation. The focus is on the perceptions that are based on the experiences that participants of the Comenius Project have produced throughout the first part of the Project. Rather than aiming to draw conclusions that can be generalised, the purpose of the study is to describe findings of this particular Project and leave it up to the reader to judge whether or not this study is applicable in a wider context. From the wide range of qualitative research methodologies available, case studies and phenomenography are best suited for this research composition. A closer look at these two methodologies will explain the methodological choice.

5.1.1  Case study approach

The case study method is widely used in qualitative research. In fact Metsämäki (2003) states that nearly all qualitative research is a form of case study. What makes this research design a case study is the low number of research subjects – 23 fifth grade students and their families – and the unique design – bilateral cooperation between a Finnish class and an Austrian class – that is impossible to repeat as such.

As implied above, generalisation is not the main goal in this research. Following Gomm & Hammersley (2000, 3), the aim of case study research should be to capture the uniqueness of the case and not necessarily to use it as a basis for generalisation or for theoretical inference. Due to the uniqueness of this Project and the difficulty to replicate the study, the design of the study could be called a single-case study. However, considering the fact that there are a number of respondents involved in the study, whose experiences and perceptions are the main focus, the notion of a wider field of research is also justified. In other words, there is a single case but multiple subjects of experiment. Stake (2000, 437-438) differentiates between three types of case studies. Instrumental case study, the second defined, aims to shed light on a phenomenon by means of examining a
single case while yielding insight on the issue. This perspective of case study best describes the research approach chosen for this research design.

5.1.2 Generalisability

One of the fundamental weaknesses of a case study concerns questions of generalisability. The traditional notion and expected outcome of scientific research is that of a valid and generalisable research result. However, within the field of qualitative research and, in particular, case study it is widely acknowledged that the ultimate aim is not generalising but understanding. Yet, this concept is always discussed in dissertations and the possibility of generalisation is examined and welcomed, if the research design allows for that.

As an attempt to compromise between the contradictory views of generalising, Kennedy (2006, 13) introduces the notion of leaving generalisation up to the practitioner. She asserts that judgement of generalisation should not be up to the evaluator but the individuals who wish to apply the evaluation founding to their own situation. In other words, the evaluator should produce and share the information but let the receiver determine whether the content is applicable to their situation. Furthermore, she suggests that the currently popular term for generalisability, ‘external validity’, should be replaced by ‘strength of external validity’, as this term implies generalisability to be a judgement of degree rather than a decision (ibid., 6).

All in all, due to the nature of case study, the researcher must subscribe to the notion that generalisability cannot be the starting point. As Kennedy (ibid.) points out

_Inferences of generalization are always tentative. Data can offer confirming or disconfirming evidence but never conclusive evidence._

This is to say that the conclusions drawn from the data analysis of a case study appear unique and very much dependent on both the original case and how the researcher interprets the findings.

5.2 Phenomenography

The focus of phenomenography is the essence of the experiences and subsequent perceptions of the phenomenon. The object of phenomenographic study is not the phenomenon per se, but the relationships between the actors and the phenomenon (Bowden 2005), which allows the researcher to use their own experiences as data for analysis (Uljens 1996). The etymological roots of the term are in the Greek words _fainemon_ (appearance) and _graphein_ (description). Thus, etymologically the term ‘phenomenography’ refers to how something appears to an individual (Niikko 2003, 8).
Phenomenography is closely related to another qualitative methodology, phenomenology. In fact, many concepts typical of phenomenography have been adopted from phenomenology. From a holistic viewpoint it can be stated that phenomenography has attached to phenomenology ontologically and epistemologically through its concepts. (ibid., 12) Despite the similarities of these two approaches – or perhaps due to that – I will next examine the similarities and differences between them in order to attain conceptual clarity for phenomenography, as it is a less known methodology and can be confused with phenomenology.

Following Niikko (2003, 12-23) I will attempt to form a synthesis based on the various viewpoints in defining the terms. Firstly, in both approaches the focus is on the individual, the subject entailing observations, emotions, impressions and thinking. Knowing is embedded in the subject, as the subject feels a sense of involvement in knowing. Secondly, both phenomenology and phenomenography are primarily interested in studying and revealing phenomena. The focus here is on the expression of experience. Experience is the base on which conceptions are created and thinking is built. As language fails to convey these experiences in an exact form, the challenge often lies with the interpretation of the produced meanings and conceptions.

In both approaches the world is comprehended as one world and one reality, which is understood and experienced in different ways. Thus, there is no objective or given conceptions of the world and the reality. The meanings and existences that individuals give to objects are dependent on the means of experiencing and comprehending acquired by the individual. Therefore, the individual’s conceptions of reality cannot be compared with the reality itself, as it is impossible to reach an absolute truth of reality. Based on these notions, the ontological assumptions of phenomenography are subjectivist (Marton & Booth 1997).

Furthermore, every new generation generates its own new interpretations of reality. This notion of a changing constitution of world can also be understood through the concept of ‘lifeworld’ (Lebenswelt), a concept that was introduced by Edmund Husserl in the early 20th century. The lifeworld has been constituted by all people living in the world, each individual from their own perspective. In the lifeworld it is possible to make a distinction between the individual and the collective experience.

The role of the researcher in both phenomenological and phenomenographical research is to examine the individual’s lifeworld as an outside observer. However, the difference is that phenomenology is a philosophical methodology, where the philosopher is primarily engaged in investigating his or her own experience. Phenomenographers, on the other hand, adopt an empirical orientation, and then investigate the experience of others (Marton & Booth, 1997). In other words,
the focus of phenomenology is the essence of the phenomenon, whereas the focus of phenomenography is the essence of the experiences and subsequent perceptions of the phenomenon.

Both approaches acknowledge the need for reduction in order to highlight the most essential contents. Reduction happens through bracketing, setting aside irrelevant things and focusing on the ‘pure’ experience. In phenomenography especially, bracketing is thought to mean ruling out the researcher’s presuppositions and foreknowledge while analysing the research data (ibid.).

Intentionality is seen as principal in both phenomenology and phenomenography, although there are subtle disparities in the way it is comprehended. In phenomenology, intentionality means that an individual’s consciousness is geared towards something other than oneself. Intentionality thus becomes a part of one’s wider mental structure and mental phenomena, which always needs an object. For example, love is not merely a feeling in itself but a relation between consciousness and an object. In phenomenography, by contrast, intentionality is regarded as depicting the world according to the views of a certain group of people; how they experience and explain the world, what the individuals’ thinking processes are directed at and how they direct. One’s mental processes are intentional only if they have a purpose, such as meaningful content. An individual’s consciousness entails two measures: one is conscious of something (what) in a particular way (how).

To summarise, there are a few key points that solely define phenomenography. In phenomenography the essence of the phenomenon is how different individuals comprehend it. The researcher studies the conceptions people have that are formed through experiences by reflecting upon them. Experiences are not mental entities or physical matters. They rather comprise interdependencies between the subject and the world. Phenomenography focuses on bringing out the research subjects’ differing ways to experience the same phenomenon. This is called variation, and it is the baseline assumption of phenomenographical analysis. To put it more concretely, phenomenography describes different ways of experiencing things, which are then categorised and set into a hierarchy. Due to the nature of experiencing, the same phenomenon can produce different meanings in the minds of individuals. The variation between the categories is known as the 'dimensions of variation' (Åkerlind 2005).

5.3 Data analysis method

A phenomenographical data analysis sorts the perceptions, which emerge from the collected data into specific 'categories of description' (Åkerlind 2005). These categories and the underlying
structure become the phenomenographic essence of the phenomenon (Uljens, 1996), forming the primary outcomes and the most important results of the research.

In regard to this research, the phenomenographical analysis method has been applied accordingly. The data that deals with the experiences and learning outcomes of pupils, as well as with the other components of the Project, were categorised in order to find iterative themes. Surveys conducted to pupils and parents concerning Austria, and pupil interviews on national identity and preconceptions about Austria, were handled likewise.

Where categorising was not possible i.e. in analysing the teacher’s interview, data was treated as a narrative. Essentially, the narrative approach to data abandons the attempt to treat the interviewees’ answers as the ‘truth’ of ‘reality’ and opens access to stories through which people generate descriptions of their world (Silverman 2010, 225). Drawing conclusions from this data was straightforward, as results mainly reported the personal experiences of individuals.
6 INTERCULTURAL EXPERIENCES

Whereas the previous chapters have been laying the groundwork for the themes theories and outline of this research, I will now shift to where the analysis of actual data occurs. Chapters 6 and 7 give detailed account of the data, as it appears in the answers of the Finnish participants of the Comenius Project and through the observation of the researcher. The focus is primarily on the experience of pupils, however, perspectives of parents and teachers are also reported. The key points in chapter 6 are perceptions of Finnishness and impressions of Austria, partner class and the study visit, before and after the study visit week. Most importantly, the perceived learning outcomes are analysed. Chapter 7 introduces data and analyses the learning outcomes of the cultural education class, discussing how pupils received topics of global issues. A summary of the key findings is presented at the end of each sub-chapter to help the reader grasp the most important elements in the results.

6.1 Pupil perceptions on Finnishness

The personal and national identity of the pupils was researched before and after the visit using a questionnaire (for viewing after-questionnaire, see appendix 1, questions 1-4). In addition, I interviewed 10 pupils in two groups, in more depth, three weeks prior to the visit. It has been recognised that identity is an immensely wide field of research containing a myriad sub-concepts, and therefore the conducted research was not intended to attempt a comprehensive account of the pupils’ identity, but rather to gain an overview of how they conceive being Finnish.

In the questionnaires the main themes of interest were:

1. What does ‘Finnishness’ mean to the pupils?
2. What are the similarities and differences between Finnish and foreign people in their opinion?
3. Do they regard Finland as superior to other countries?
4. What do they treasure most in Finland?

The following data constitutes the results and illustrates the change that occurred in the answers written after the Austrian visit week. It is apparent that the in-depth experience with foreigners has
had an influence in their thinking, both in the form of face-to-face interaction with the Austrian partner class and studying cultural education topics, hence the shifts in the tendencies of their answers. Out of 22 pupils 21 answered the before-questionnaire [B-Q] and 20 the after-questionnaire [A-Q].

In the first category – what does ‘Finnishness’ mean – 12 pupils highlighted in both cases that is it nice to be Finnish. Three pupils in the B-Q answered that being Finnish is not necessarily any better than being of another nationality, and in A-Q only one pupil asserted that being Finnish is “sometimes boring”. In B-Q five pupils wrote Finland is a safe country, one mentioned tranquillity and one well-being. A-Q, in contrast, saw two pupils mention safety, three mention tranquillity and nine well-being. The change in the perception of well-being is significant. Also, concepts of equity and fairness, as well as appreciation of typical features like four seasons and sauna emerged more often in A-Q. In A-Q one pupil announced being born Finnish is like hitting the jackpot.

In the next category, which dealt with common factors between Finnish and foreign people, there was no significant variety in answers. Humanity was mentioned to be the main unifying factor by nine pupils in B-Q, and by 10 in A-Q. Likewise, the notion of equality rose from one to two answers. There were no other significant points to be highlighted in this section.

As for the differences between Finnish and foreign people, there is clear evidence that the pupils’ conceptions had diversified and become more holistic. In B-Q 10 pupils named language as a distinguishing factor, four named skin colour, as well as better and safer circumstances in Finland, and two typical customs. In A-Q language was named by seven pupils, skin colour and culture by six and customs by four. Religion was mentioned by five pupils, whereas in B-Q it was mentioned only by one pupil. There was also a significant divergence in the culture factor. In B-Q culture was mentioned once, whereas in A-Q six pupils regarded it an important difference. Judging by the tone of the answers, it can be stated that in A-Q pupils’ answers reflected experience, insight and higher factual knowledge. They were more likely to base their answers on real life matters such as circumstances in Africa. The A-Q answers also partly reflect a narrow picture of the foreign; they generalise experiences they had with the Austrians to depict all that is ‘foreign’. However, both being European welfare states, Finland and Austria share similarities in multiple ways.

Common features in Finns and foreigners are that the cultures of each country are at least a little bit linked. The characters of Finns and foreigners are also a little bit similar.
I feel that foreigners are more polite than Finns.

Lastly, the conception of Finland’s superiority over foreign countries changed towards a more accepting attitude. In B-Q nine pupils asserted that all countries are equally good and that they cannot be compared. Four were of the opinion that Finland is superior to other countries, a fifth pupil mentioned superiority to developing countries and a sixth wrote that matters are better taken care of in Finland than other countries. The four based their opinion on the notions of Finnish stamina, culture, cleanliness and peaceful circumstances. In A-Q 17 answers contained the idea of equality of all countries, stating that it is not possible to compare. Only one pupil regarded Finland superior due to the absence of wars and natural catastrophes. Two highlighted that each country has their own special culture.

In my mind Finns are as good as foreigners because everybody is equal and normal people.

I think Finns are as good as foreigners because each country is special for some reason.

The interview with two separate groups, containing 10 pupils in total, revealed their thinking regarding national identity on a more personal level. The interview was carried out in mid-February, prior to the cultural education classes. Thus, it represents their level of thinking during the starting time of the Comenius Project. One of the main results of the interview was the different level of intercultural sensitivity (confer Bennett’s model) the pupils were at. Some demonstrated less developed thinking skills than others, whose answers appeared to be broadminded and insightful.

The interview questions dealt with features unique to ‘Finnishness’ and the answers were similar to the ones in the before-questionnaire. In addition, the interview addressed cultural sensitivity issues such as attitude towards cultural adaptation. The following fragment demonstrates positive and sensible reasoning.

Interviewer (I): Do you think it is good to study cultural education where you learn about other countries and cultures, similar to what we have recently studied in cultural education classes? Or do you think that we should just learn Finnishness in Finland and American things in America?

Pupil (P)1&2: No.

P1: If one has a job where one has to travel abroad and they go to Germany, for example, it is pretty bad if they know nothing about Germany, like what they say.
P2: I agree. It will prove useful to learn about other cultures.

I: Are you afraid that learning about other cultures affects your Finnishness in some way?

P3: Not at all in my opinion.

I: So do you feel that you have a strong Finnish identity and everything else that you learn will only enrich your own worldview, but not change who you are?

P1: I hope that it changes in a good way.

I: What do you mean?

P1: Well if, for example, I adopt a good idea from some culture.

I: Can you, for example, replace a Finnish habit with another culture?

P1: Not like that! But like, for example, in China they eat with chopsticks so I could start to do that for fun. So it’s possible to learn good things from other cultures.

One pupil took the idea of preserving one’s cultural identity further, applying the principles to the reality of immigrants. This demonstrates an empathetic and understanding attitude, indicating the ethnorelative stage of intercultural developmental skills.

I: I have a follow-up question: When you learn about other cultures, are you afraid, or do you find it positive or negative that the other culture would supersede your Finnish culture? Could that happen?

P4: There are lots of immigrants in Finland and I suppose they have had to get used to the Finnish culture and so when I study other languages and cultures, there’s some anxiety that what if I find another culture better and would want to adopt that culture, but anyway one must remember that they have their own culture, too.

P5: Well I think I wouldn’t forget my Finnish culture if I moved to America, for example.

Despite the strong statements of preference of their own culture, pupils’ awareness of the existence of cultural bias was evident in the interview. They explained that typically everyone in the world prefers their own culture due to familiarity and linguistic factors. This showed the capability of sensible reasoning without patriotic sentimentalism. They also refused to compare countries and cultures, claiming that due to peoples’ difference it’s impossible to compare, as different ways of living can be equally good.
I: What do you think about your Finnishness? If you had a choice, which country would you like to live in? Would you live in Finland?

P1: In Finland, absolutely!

I: Would you like to explain why?

P1: Well, if you have been born in Finland you would want to stay in your home country.

I: What factors are related to that?

P2: You can’t really know, because you haven’t lived in Brazil, for example, or somewhere else. If I had been born in England, I would probably want to live there.

I: Hmm. What are the things that make you want to live in your home country?

P3: Everything is familiar and you know everything, the language.

P1: And familiar environment and people and so on. The culture.

In addition to demonstrating cultural tolerance, pupils were able to make a distinction between cultural habits and general human habits. This means they have acquired an understanding of a cultural framework in at least a preliminary level. They mentioned cuisine, typical celebration of festivals and behavioural norms to be defining factors in ‘Finnishness’.

Pupils also recognised the possibility of slanted news and media coverage, which could have influenced their opinion on other cultures. By this, they demonstrate critical attitude towards media and the possible hidden purposes in the presentiong of the news.

**Key Findings:**

1) Pupils had a positive attitude towards Finnishness and appreciation of the high level of well-being
2) Humanity was regarded as the main uniting factor between Finnish and foreign people
3) Encountering the foreign transformed knowledge into holistic, meaningful practical experience
4) Pupils acknowledged the presence of cultural difference in practice
5) Understanding the uniqueness, value and equality of each country and country developed
6) Pupils demonstrated opened to learn from other cultures, while cherishing their own
6.2 Pupil experiences

6.2.1 Impressions on Austria and the German language

In order to monitor the learning processes during the Comenius Project it was necessary to research the pupils’ perceptions on their partner class and Austrian culture. Two questionnaires were designed for this purpose: one to be answered before the Cultural education and European geography lessons began, and the second before the study visit week took place. This was at the beginning of February 2010. The second questionnaire (Appendix 1, questions 5 and 6) was carried out in mid-May. Out of 22 pupils, 22 answered the B-Q and 20 the A-Q. The B-Q on Austria was carried out as a separate questionnaire, whereas the A-Q was conducted on the same day as the A-Q on national identity. The main themes in this data category were: 1) Presumptions and foreknowledge on Austria; 2) Interests and concerns regarding Austria and the study visit week; 3) Thoughts on the German language.

The majority of pupils clearly stated in B-Q that they had limited knowledge about Austria. They were, however, able to come up with impressions. A couple of pupils had previously been to Austria on a family holiday and were naturally able to share their first-hand experiences. Eleven pupils knew German to be the main language in Austria, eight were aware that Vienna is the capital city, seven mentioned beautiful landscape and six answers contained reference to the Alps. Four pupils knew that the winter is cold in Austria, three knew that it is a small country and three supposed it to be peaceful. More specific details like Mozart, ski jumping and Austria being a modern country were mentioned once.

In comparison to B-Q, after pupils had had geography lessons on Europe (approximately 20 lessons) and Austria (two lessons) in particular, and spent a week with Austrian partners, they still reported that the impression they had on Austria was shallow and ambiguous. In A-Q a shift towards concrete experience was notable. Knowledge of the Alps had increased from six to nine pupils and of Mozart from one to seven. Five wrote they could locate Austria on the map. There were two references to the flag, food and friendly people and one about EU-membership, different customs and that Austrians like the sauna.
In B-Q I asked what the pupils would like to learn about Austria. Six mentioned culture in general and four named food an interesting matter. In addition, there were singular references to nature, school, language, art, sports, other languages, sights, government, cities, typical customs and music. These results highlight which features the pupils regard as composing the significant essence of a country. It also showed they were motivated to learn more.

Virtual exposure to German language influenced the pupils’ opinion on German language in a major way. During the same time that was B-Q was conducted, students took German lessons once a week for a few months from a German teacher trainee. They had learned a series of basic words and phrases. In B-Q ten pupils asserted German being a difficult language, twelve wrote that it was ‘fun’, four mentioned its usefulness and one stated it was easy to learn. In A-Q answers from the personal experiences of pupils were reflected; four pupils wrote that German sounds ‘nice and funny’, one thought it sounded ‘weird’ and another wondered how come the Austrians understand each other. Similarly to B-Q, ten pupils thought the language was difficult, but only six considered it nice, hence the results dropping from twelve to six. Three pupils thought it was easy to learn and one expressed their eagerness to learn more. Three pupils highlighted the similarity to English and someone noted that some words even resemble Finnish words.

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<th>Key Findings:</th>
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<tr>
<td>1) Interest and motivation to learn more about Austrian culture increased</td>
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<td>2) Knowledge transformed from factual to experimental</td>
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6.2.2 Feelings, experiences and learning outcomes

This chapter explores and analyses what could be regarded as the most significant data of the experiences of pupils during the study visit week and their respective learning outcomes throughout the entire Comenius Project until the summer of 2010. Data is in the form of my personal observation as a hands-on participant in the Comenius Project, essays that students wrote a week after the visit week according to given questions, and a questionnaire (Appendix 1, questions 7 and 8) that was also implemented approximately one week after the visit. The themes that emerged in the essays were:
1. Feelings right before, during and after the visit week
2. Making friends and spending free time with the Austrians
3. Communication
4. Cultural exchange
5. Changes in attitude towards foreigners

In the questionnaire pupils’ attitude towards differences (for example language, culture, customs, religion, appearance and diet) was examined, as well as what they regard as the main learning outcomes in the entire Comenius Project so far. The following analysis and quotes attempt to unveil the perceived learning outcomes.

Excitement and nervous anticipation were strongly experienced on 27 May 2010, the day that Austrian partner class arrived. Last-minute preparations were made in a rush and pupils lined up to welcome the visitors. Greetings and hand shaking did not run smoothly, as some of the Finnish pupils were overwhelmed by their arrival. This observation was confirmed in the essays that the pupils wrote – 14 out of 20 expressed this feeling clearly. The feelings pupils reported in B-Q, where most answers reflected excitement and nervousness towards the upcoming study visit week, were realised in action. Overall, it was observed that nervousness was more apparent in the girls’ behaviour, whereas boys demonstrated an outward calmness. Although pupils reported nervousness, excitement and motivation to learn to know the Austrians and their culture was also evident.

Before the Austrians arrived I was extremely nervous. When they were here I had a lot of fun. When their bus drove away I felt sort of empty.

The first moments as hosts were no doubt a stressful time for the pupils, due to difficulty in communication and the newness of the situation. As the week progressed pupils became more relaxed and appeared to be having a good time. Ten pupils wrote about the sense of emptiness after the bus had taken the visitors back to the airport. This observation reveals emotional involvement and proves that affective learning occurred during the Project. Despite having had a good experience, some pupils also pointed out that one week was a long enough time for the visit and that, due to the stress of being a host, they were happy to return to their normal daily life.

According to the answers, one of the most significant learning experiences for the pupils was to realise that they were able to make friends with young people from another culture, despite the cultural and linguistic barriers. Being able to connect socially will be a major empowering factor in future foreign encounters.
The most important thing I’ve learned in the Comenius Project so far is that everyone can be friends.

I got lots of good friends from Austria. I made good friends, especially with my partner. -- I’m very happy about that. I got many new experiences and learned to understand different cultures.

When it comes to communication, the way pupils felt about speaking English at the end of the study visit week could be described as triumphant and self-assured. Some of them declared, happily having used so much English, that they had started to think in English.

We can communicate even though we can’t speak each other’s mother tongue.

After all the visitors felt similar to any other friends, we just spoke English to them.

Thus, is can be concluded that confidence to speak a foreign language played as important a role as the actual improvement of their language skills. This outcome is particularly essential within the Finnish culture, in which people are traditionally shy to speak in a language that they have yet to master to perfection.

Cultural exchange was initially one of the key objectives of the study visit. However, it is an item difficult to measure by means of research, as it mainly occurs during the daily interaction between the hosts and the visitors and through the habits performed in the host families. As cultural exchange appeared a somewhat abstract concept to fifth-graders, there was limited written data on that topic. Giving relevant information on one’s own culture also requires profound understanding of cultural frameworks. In other words, pupils would need to have an idea of what is considered typical of their own lifestyle and culture and what is universal. While pupils demonstrated understanding of this concept, they found it difficult to consciously address it. The following quote presents what most likely was the case in all the host families, in terms of involving the visitors in the daily life of the family and typical Finnish habits.

I didn’t speak much about culture but it came along naturally and I think a lot stuck in their minds. They didn’t tell much about their own culture either, but we got a book from them that was full of information. When we were at home we played monopoly, ate, drew, went to the sauna and did grocery shopping.

Parents’ answers, which are analysed later on in this chapter, also confirm that cultural exchange happened in this form and that the May-Day traditional celebrations were an excellent opportunity to introduce Finnish culture.
Positive changes in pupils’ attitudes towards foreigners could be stated based on both observation and pupils’ written answers. The fact that the 5A class was a CLIL class (Content and Language Integrated Learning), and originally more internationally oriented than an average Finnish class, suggests that prejudice against foreigners would occur to a lesser extent. However, pupils reported having had prejudice against the Austrians before the study visit week, but explained in the same sentence that the experiences during week had completely changed their perceptions. The prejudice was mainly caused by the age-difference and fear of having clashes in varying cultural habits.

*Perhaps the most important thing I’ve learned is that my perception of foreigners changed completely.*

*I have learned to value and respect foreigners more.*

*The most important thing so far has been the fact that I know more about customs in different countries and that they must be accepted.*

Tolerance of difference was challenged in other areas, in addition to nationality, age and language. Pupils were exposed to untypical dietary needs and religious conviction. For some pupils these issues were hard to accept, whereas others demonstrated acceptance of difference. The following quotes are good examples of different thoughts.

*Other matters I have normal attitude towards, but I respond to religion evasively.*

*Some languages sound weird, some funny and some beautiful. Appearance and religion don’t matter much, nor diet. Customs do, for example if someone has stealing tendencies.*

*[I have learned] that no matter which nationality, everyone is equal.*

*I really look forward to going to Austria, and I wouldn’t like to stay at a hotel there but in their houses.*

**Key Findings:**

1) The first encounter with foreigners was frightening, but interaction during the study visit contributed to a positive experience

2) Excitement about the success of making friends with foreigners

3) Language skills and, more particularly, confidence to speak English improved in a major way
6.3 Adult perspectives

6.3.1 Parents and host families

Parents were asked to write about their expectations and attitude towards international cooperation in the form of a questionnaire given during a parent’s meeting two weeks prior to the visit week. Fifteen parents completed and returned the questionnaire.

One of the most prominent themes that emerged from their answers was the positive attitude towards the Comenius Project. Five parents even highlighted that they regarded the opportunity to participate in the Project a great privilege. Four parents expressed their gratitude to the teachers who organised the Project. In ten answers the opportunity to get to know a new culture and new people was named a positive factor. In seven answers learning to speak and use language in an authentic situation was pointed out. Six respondents expected their children to gain more courage during the visit. Likewise, six were of the opinion that making friends, co-operating and forming contacts were key advantages of the Project. Six expected it to offer nice variety to normal school routines. The only thing they announced as an anxiety was the two-to-three-year age difference between their children and the visiting partner class.

I wanted to chart the parents’ previous experience of international cooperation in order to better understand their attitudes. It turned out that the majority of them had had a significant number of in-depth experiences with foreigners. Four of them had friends or relatives who either lived abroad or had a different ethnic background. In six answers travelling was named as the main means of being exposed to foreign influence. Four parents reported to having a job that dealt with international affairs. Three parents had previously lived abroad and two linked international influence with their hobbies. These answers show that the parents, in general, have had a lot of contact with foreign exposure and are therefore more likely to have a positive attitude towards the Comenius Project and even the challenging study visit week. It is important to note, however, that some of the parents did not have more experience of international cooperation than that of an average Finnish family.
Lastly, I asked for their opinions regarding hosting the Austrian pupils. Most of those who would host expressed their nervousness and excitement. Many said they had agreed to host not only because they felt positively about the Project, but also because of the principal of reciprocity – their children would be hosted in Austria in the following year.

Shortly after the visit week had come to an end, the parents were asked to describe their experiences. The method of contact was via email, as advised by Mrs. Tuomi. The first email was sent approximately a week after the visit, with a follow-up reminder two weeks after the visit. In total ten responses were received. Despite the low number of replies, I am confident that the responses comprehensively represent the scale of experiences and feelings, as most of the answers reflect similar attitudes and each reported similar experiences.

Overall, the parents were very pleased with the Project and felt it had positively contributed to the development of their children. They appreciate the international experience, as they were aware of the significance it has in today’s global world. They feel privileged to have had a chance to take part in this Project.

*It was very interesting and rewarding to experience internationalism in practice and see how it affected and broadened attitude towards another culture through direct communication. The timetable for the week was brilliantly planned and carried out very well. It felt reliable, the implementation of the week.*

As for the feelings and preparations before the study visit week, one parent reported the following:

*Before the visit our son felt doubtful, shy and timid. The strongest feeling, however, seemed to be natural curiosity towards something completely new that hadn’t been experienced before. We talked about the matter a lot beforehand, and preparing for the visit gave both the child and the parents shared feelings of interest towards this kind of very practical international education.*

These quotes demonstrate the active role of the parents in the Project. According to what parents and pupils reported during the week, it could be stated that serious efforts were made to accommodate the visitors’ needs through careful planning and preparation. In addition the parents offered transportation, taking the children to places where activities took place both during school time and free time.

Some parents shared the nervousness with their children, especially when it came to communicating in English or German. Many of the parents were skilled in German and, therefore, used German as the main language for communication with the Austrians. Parents no doubt did their best to assist and encourage their children and the newcomers to become friends. This is what one parent observed about communication and forming friendships:
When the visitors arrived it was funny to observe the first stages. Both pupils glanced at each other. The partner seemed peculiar at first - partly due to age and size difference. Fairly soon the careful attempts to get to know each other turned into direct and smooth communication and the greatest change happened at the end of the week when friendships really started to form. Communication followed the same pattern as becoming acquainted: first shyness, then the curiosity won and vigorous attempt to understand, or at least succeed in some level of communication, were rewarded.

Parents reported that the overall experience was tiring but rewarding. Naturally, the increased responsibility of hosting teenagers was demanding, as well as ensuring that the visitors were having a good time along with their own children. They also reported that their children felt the burden of responsibility in hosting.

Great experience. It was engaging and required responsibility, but also fun and easy-going. (Son) was a good host. He was a 100 per cent committed to the guests. He was tired after the week... but in a positive way.

The host families introduced the Finnish culture to the Austrians by leading a normal daily life, cooking meals that they would typically eat but also introducing Finnish customs, such as grilling sausages on an open fire and celebrating May Day with its special features. The school took care of presenting local cultural history with visits to Sibelius Home, Häme Castle and Aulanko Park. Therefore, parents did not have to worry about passing on cultural knowledge as much.

We cooked typical meals, grilled sausages on an open fire, the boys accompanied us to grocery shopping, we had a karaoke night at home and we showed the local ice hockey hall. We talked about Finnish holiday seasons et cetera.

On May Day we cooked a big pile of doughnuts, the girls participated in the cooking.

The schedule was filled with activities and some reported that perhaps it was a little bit too much, as there was limited free time left outside of activities arranged by school. There were a variety of things that took place in the host families whenever there was free time and in the evenings. Many of the host families lived in the same area, allowing for visitations between each other’s homes and playing sports outside. This was seen as both a positive and negative matter, as sometimes the Austrians would separate themselves from the Finns and hang out in the national group.

They played floorball together and jumped on the trampoline. The Austrians wanted to spend time together. Perhaps the problem was that nine Austrian boys stayed within a couple of hundred meters away from each other. Of course, in this kind of situation they wanted to spend time with each other. The too great age difference hindered the forming of friendships.
Boys, especially, were reported to bond particularly well during playing and socialising outside. Girls, on the other hand, spent time playing board games and watching movies.

According to the parents’ answers, they regarded learning to use language as the most important learning outcome. They observed that their children’s courage to speak in English in the concrete situations developed in a major way. The pupils also realised that in order to communicate effectively they did not need to speak perfectly, and that different levels of English between partners were not obstacles to meaningful communication.

Our son’s self-esteem, regarding his language skills as well as willingness to know and learn more, clearly increased.

The experience was rewarding. At least (daughter) gained courage to speak English. This was probably useful in regard to the future. Our own children also have the courage to go abroad to study or work. Internationalism, after all, is the trend today.

Some of them also reported that they were pleased to get a chance to speak English and German themselves. In one case a negative impression of communication emerged, as a parent realised that her child had felt like an outsider when she spoke fluent German with the visitors and the child did not understand. Overall, improved communication skills in both parents’ and pupils’ opinion was a major positive factor in the process.

Key Findings – Parents:

1) Considered participation in the Comenius Project a privilege, as intercultural competence is vital in our day
2) Age difference aroused anxiety
3) Saw the value of cultural exchange; made much effort to introduce Finnish customs
4) Welcomed the opportunity for pupils to learn to know foreigners
5) Regarded language learning as the most significant learning outcome

6.3.2 Teachers

The Comenius Project so far has relied, in many respects, on class teacher Marja Tuomi’s initiative, commitment and contribution. She has been the key figure at all levels of
correspondence and implementation, including local co-ordination between the headmaster, 5A pupils and their parents and bilateral cooperation between the Austrian partner class. She also excelled as the host of the Leaders’ meeting held in Finland as part of the entire Comenius Multilateral School Partnership Project.

When it comes to international cooperation Mrs. Tuomi is very experienced, having participated in a number of projects in the past. The fact that she pilots a CLIL class also shows her strong motivation to integrate international, cultural and linguistic aspects into the teaching. However, there were two aspects to this Project that she has not experienced in the earlier projects: pupil mobility (Finland visits Austria) and case study research monitoring the process.

In the course of the Project, from November 2009 to May 2010, Mrs. Tuomi and I formed a cohesive team in planning and carrying out the on-going Project. In this chapter I will examine the processes from the teachers’ point of view, in order to shed light on the matters experienced by the co-ordinators that often happen behind the scenes but require an enormous workload. Another aspect to leading such a Project deals with emotional and mental involvement. Based on the close cooperation and discussions with Mrs. Tuomi throughout the Project until summer 2010, and an essay she wrote in May 2010 after the study visit week, I will now report her experiences.

One of the key factors that encouraged her to participate in the Project was the good rapport she had established with her class and the parents. They had proved trustworthy and reliable in the past and, as a class teacher, she felt she could trust their willingness to take on new challenges as hosts to the partner class. Due to the warm and functional relationship between the school and the families, pupils and parents were involved in the planning and implementation of the study visit week, which was naturally the most important and demanding part of the Project.

Another factor she felt highly positively about was the presence of a student teacher; a combination of researcher, project worker and geography and cultural education teacher. This arrangement allowed for teamwork, shared planning and the integration of the objectives of the Comenius Project and national curriculum into the class curriculum. Mrs. Tuomi was also happy about the research aspect of the Project and eagerly looked forward to the research results.

Despite the motivation and willingness to participate in international cooperation projects, Mrs. Tuomi reported that this Project had been particularly challenging and time-consuming. She referred to ineffectiveness and frustrations in communication between bilateral and multilateral partners, as well as difficulties with IT-usage, such as working with Moodle and e-Twinning web portals. The following quote from her essay gives an account of the roles of the coordinator.
I feel that from my point of view this Project has two separate worlds. One is the reality experienced together with the pupils, which appears as highly positive and educative. The other one is the world of ‘leading’, which comprises technical (IT) problems, numerous sent emails and also the ones still pending and waiting for an answer and inflexibility. Positive and interesting new acquaintances and new perspectives to teaching and learning also exist that provide personal reflection for my own thoughts.

Overall, she expressed her satisfaction of being able to foster professional development through the Project. The reward also comes in the form of seeing the happy faces of the pupils and their evident acquisition of new skills. According to her, it is the desired outcome of positive learning experiences that worked as the main motives for participation in the Comenius Project.

As for my own experiences as the project worker, researcher and student teacher, I share Mrs. Tuomi’s view of the experience being rewarding and educative while, at the same time, requiring hard work. I felt privileged to be part of the international project, which allowed for broader horizons within the educational field. The different elements and aspects contributed to my personal and professional development as a graduating teacher. In other words, I gained both willingness and competence to participate in international educational projects. Involvement in meaningful activities is a major motivating factor in all work- or study-related projects.

It is important to note that only the first part of the entire Comenius Project was carried out by the end of the school year (June 2010). The following 2010 – 2011 school year correspondence between the partner classes continued, as well as language learning and cultural projects. In spring 2011 the Finnish class paid a return visit to the Austrian partner class. Due to the positive experiences during the first part of the Project, pupils and teachers happily looked forward to the Comenius events of the 2010 – 2011 school year.

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<td>1) The teacher must be able to trust his/her pupils to take on an intercultural project</td>
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<td>2) Being responsible for the execution of an intercultural project may be time-consuming and cause frustration, yet also rewarding</td>
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<td>3) Participation in such projects contributes to the teacher’s professional development and motivation</td>
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7 CULTURAL EDUCATION IN ACTION

7.1 Cultural education in the National Curriculum

In addition to geography, I decided to embark upon a challenge of teaching something that is not traditionally taught as a school subject, but which is embedded in the national school curriculum as objectives. These themes in the national curriculum are studied more closely in chapter 3.2.

The class was named cultural education and divided into two parts. I defined the objectives for the cultural education class based on the national and school-wide curricula and the objectives of the Comenius Project. They were as follows:

- Pupil learns to value Finland and his/her nationality
- Pupil’s worldview expands to comprise Europe and the whole world
- Pupil begins to understand themes of equality and globalism in intercultural context
- Pupil’s language skills in English and German increase while he/she recognises the importance of learning languages
- Pupil learns electronic communication with foreigners taking into account the recipient’s foreknowledge

7.2 Who We Are - project

The first part of the cultural education course was a project called Who We Are, which was implemented early in the spring of 2010. The aim of the project was to produce PowerPoint presentations of Finnish culture as well as local attractions, which were then downloaded onto Moodle web portal for the Austrian partner class to view.

In order to get pupils motivated by the project and take ownership and responsibility for their work, much of the planning and choosing of topics was left up to the pupils. They worked in pairs, except for one group of three. This arrangement proved the most suitable, as there were not enough computers for 22 pupils to have their own. Pair work also enabled the pupils to brainstorm their
ideas together, which made them fully responsible for their project and didn’t allow for laziness by relying on others to do all the work. They received instruction on how to make a PowerPoint presentation, the most useful means of finding information, and relevance of information from the foreigners’ point of view. As they worked on the project they received assistance from teachers, especially with structuring and the language, as writing in English was challenging for them. They were required to write headings in German, so the Austrian pupils would find the presentations approachable. It was useful for the Finnish pupils to practise the use of the German language in a real life context.

The project lasted for about eight lessons, with additional time for downloading the completed presentations online. All in all, the project was successful and the pupils were engaged in producing high quality presentations. It was motivating for them to work on something they knew would be displayed online and be a real benefit. Thus, the theory of situated learning (Lave & Wenger 1991) in an authentic context was put into practice, rather than making the pupils do mechanical school exercises.

The learning outcomes of this project, based on my observation and active involvement as a teacher, were diverse. First of all, pupils became aware of what was relevant and interesting information in Finnish culture and local sights for foreigners. They also learned to identify the key facts from specified information. They learned to browse websites in search of useful information and became aware of the necessity of reading websites in English. They also reflected upon what the key elements that comprise the Finnish culture. This has a direct link to issues of national identity and identity building processes.

7.3 Global issues

What made the 5A class ideal for teaching topics requiring profound thinking and even changing one’s attitude was the eagerness of pupils to actively take part in open classroom conversation. The majority of the pupils openly expressed their opinions and experiences, and were capable of reflecting on newly introduced ideas. This trait proved valuable, especially in the second part of Cultural Education, which I named Global Citizenship course.

There was no previously published material available for that class, unlike the established school subjects that have teacher’s books full of material and tips on how to facilitate learning. Therefore, I created my own teaching material with the help of a useful book entitled Global Citizenship for Young Children (Collins 2008). I designed the topics to meet the time limits and objectives, and the contents to meet the pupils’ stage of development. The main methods I used
were stories, open conversation, group discussion and picture illustrations. Some of the worksheets are attached in the appendices of this research paper (see appendices 3 and 4). I constructed the stories myself but used Collins’ book as a source of inspiration. The stories worked as a basis for introduction of new topics and classroom discussion, and the pupils received them with interest.

The topics that were addressed in the second part were 1) basic needs of humans (food, home, education, warmth, clothing etc.) 2) environmental issues (water, recycling, food miles) 3) democracy (free speech, fair trade) and 4) fairness (gender, racism, respect, rules). The objectives of the Global Citizenship course was to help pupils:

- Recognise that we have a multicultural world/society where everyone is equal
- Value other races and cultures and understand the wealth of cultural difference in learning from each other
- Recognise their worth as individuals and as Finnish citizens
- Understand that they have rights and responsibilities
- See the world from other people’s point of view shifting from egocentric worldview into understanding different comprehension of the world

In the following sub-chapters I will report how these objectives were achieved and identify the learning outcomes. Based on teacher’s observations, pupils acquired the new learning contents extremely well despite the brevity of the course - five content packed lessons. In the analysis I use the How Can You Help answer sheets as research data. The answer sheet can be seen in appendix 2. The task in the answer sheet was to write to a best friend and tell what the pupil had learned during the course. They were also asked to come up with ideas of how to help needy people. The task was designed to both examine the learning outcomes and reinforce the learning with a practical application – writing a letter to a friend. This approach again touched the theory of situated learning. Pupils filled in the answer sheet within a few days after the last lesson of Global Citizenship course, and were asked to write down the most important things they had learned during the course. The answers covered all topics that had been addressed but most of them had focused on a few topics, as can be seen from these two answers:

I have learned at school a lot about cultural education. Cultural education means studying other countries’ inhabitants and their different cultures. During the class I have learned, for example, about rules, free speech, people’s living environment and respecting different cultures. Free speech means that everyone can tell their opinion, although beggars aren’t given this right in some countries, for instance. Rules can be of different sorts. Rules are important because it would not be nice if
one could do whatever they please. Rules must be fair to everyone. Do you know what racism means? – Not accepting everyone.

Hi (friend), Now I’m going to tell you what I’ve learned at school in cultural education class. The basic needs of all people are, for example, water, food, clean clothes, hygiene and a home. In several countries women have much fewer rights compared to men. Racism means that someone discriminates or scolds other people because of their appearance. Everybody should have the same rights and rules. Everyone should be respected, for example, by greeting.

The wide range of topics shows that each pupil acquired knowledge that most related to his/her life and points of interest. It also shows that pupils had been attentive in the class, because they had the ability to recall facts and features that were addressed briefly or in passing. In addition to the pupil-written data, my experience as the teacher of the course affirmed that the pupils were truly interested and engaged in studying the Global Citizenship topics. Not only were they involved on a factual level but also on an emotional level. In the open classroom discussions the comments and facial expressions revealed that learning took affective forms, which is crucial to the acquiring of universal topics. An ethos of goodwill emerged containing the notions of valuing humanity as the following answer shows:

I know that it’s impossible to help everyone on earth and keep the earth absolutely clean, but at least we could try! Every person is still a human being. It’s really simple to help people. You can help an older person across the street, or you can give a coin for a beggar, or whatever. IT’S SO EASY! And you’ll get a good feeling for yourself and for the person you helped.

The following chapters will define the most common themes as addressed by the pupils in the How Can You Help – answers contained.

7.3.1 Racism and respect

The issue of racism was given relatively much attention in class. When asked, pupils showed recognition of the term but were not clear about the definition. Once properly explained and discussed, pupils demonstrated thorough comprehension of the topic and sensed the utmost importance of understanding the issue. This quote shows the extent to which the definition was acquired:

Did you know that a racist is the sort of person who mocks others because of their appearance, eye colour, skin colour or nationality? A racist can also be someone who hurts others for non-existent reasons.
Traditionally, the concept of racism in Finland is mostly related with issues concerning black people rather than other ethnic groups. The pupils’ answers reflected the same tendency. In many answers treating black people equally was equated with anti-racist behaviour.

Pupils also proved the ability to apply the concept in practice by demonstrating how racism can be tackled in their own living environment here in Finland. This quote sums up how ethnic minorities should be treated:

*We would not discriminate against refugees or immigrants so that they would be more comfortable here.*

Many of the pupils demonstrated in their answers that they value the concept of respect in relation to different cultures, as well as individual humans.

*Everyone must be respected, even with a small thing or a gesture.*

### 7.3.2 Fairness and rules

Discussions concerning issues of fairness also caused pupils to become particularly engaged. Finland is a constitutional state and is among the 10 least corrupted countries in the world, according to 2009 corruption ranking (Transparency International). Thus, it is a natural occurrence that the pupils are sensitive about fairness issues. In the classroom conversations pupils clearly expressed that they believe in the necessity of rules and laws. They demonstrated a strong sense of justice and demanded that rules should apply to everyone in order to reach fairness and order in society.

*It’s worth following the rules or else nothing will function.*

The concept of fair trade was also presented by introducing a Ghanaian cocoa farmer’s daughter in pictures and story. After the lesson pupils were convinced that the farmers should get the fair price of their cultivated product and were willing to consider buying products with Fairtrade certification rather than its cheaper equivalent.

*This letter is about how we could help people who truly need our help. Firstly, we could buy more Fairtrade products, so that they would get their fair share of the price.*
7.3.3 Democracy and equality

Opinions on democracy and equality reflected the ethos of Finnish society. Finland was the first European country to introduce women’s suffrage in 1905, being the second country in the world after New Zealand. The world’s first female members of parliament were also elected in Finland (New World Encyclopedia 2008.) As for democracy, Finland is ranked the fourth most democratic country in the world in the 2009 OECD World Democracy Ranking (World Audit).

Accordingly, after having lived in Finland for all their lives, the pupils had difficulties comprehending that democracy and equality are not the realities in many other countries. This finding is illustrated in the next quote:

*By the way, did you know that in some countries women don’t have rights and that even children do hard work!*

Democracy seemed to be taken for granted and was not addressed as such in most of the answers. However different forms of democracy, free speech and human rights, appeared in the answers consistently. One pupil understood the consequence of having free speech as follows:

*Free speech is a good thing because everyone could say their opinion about common issues. Then there would perhaps not be so many wars.*

One element of equality is the education of boys and girls. It is often the case in welfare states that education is taken for granted and pupils don’t understand that in the global scale they belong to the minority that has the rare privilege of free education. This matter was addressed in the democracy lesson and pupils seemed to improve their understanding of the global situation. The fact that some children won’t be able to attend school due to their living environment or gender became concrete in Meera’s story (appendix 4), which worked as a study worksheet.

*It would be really good if all children could go to school and no one would be discriminated because of gender.*

Some pupils reported their appreciation of the Finnish welfare society. Their perception was that in Finland many things are better taken care of than in many other countries. This shows that their understanding of Finland, in comparison to other countries in the global world, had improved.

*I have learned in these lessons how well-off we are here in Finland and that many people in other countries need help. In my opinion everyone should have human rights. All who have some problem should be helped and everyone should be treated equally.*
7.3.4 Recycling and charity

In the lesson of environmental issues recycling was the topic of main focus. I used a story of a Chilean girl, whose friends made her a toy hoop out of junk, as basis for discussion. Pupils were also given a task to design their own toy out of recycled material. They took great interest in the topic, becoming aware of the consumption culture they live in, which is very different to the reality in poorer countries. This is what one pupil had learned:

*We here in Finland don’t recycle as much as they do in poor countries. There they make toys and other fun stuff out of old things, that we call junk. Even though their toys are not as nice they still value them.*

This quote demonstrates understanding of real value; people in poorer countries can be as happy with their toys as Finnish children, even though they are not brand new. What matters is that they can still be used for playing and fun. Another pupil connects recycling with conservation of the environment, a topic that was also discussed during the class.

*We would recycle in order to reduce the spreading of pollution.*

The notion of charity as a means of helping people in need emerged in several answers. Organisations and campaigns such as the Red Cross, Unicef and Save the Children were mentioned. Pupils also suggested that they could send their old clothes and toys to countries in Africa.

It is important that pupils take a practical approach to helping the poor. It shows that they are willing to move from words to deeds. They consider how they can use their circumstances and what they could give up in order to help someone who has much less. This is the kind of attitude that the cultural education class desired to promote.

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**Key Findings:**

1) Producing introductory material of one’s own country and culture increases cultural understanding, recognition and unique features and values of Finnishness, and ultimately strengthens the sense of national identity

2) Using ICT as a learning tool motivates learners and develops ICT skills

3) Pupils find global citizenship themes highly engaging and adopt the content eagerly

4) Global issues encourage affective learning and responsibility for our planet and its people
The closing chapter will discuss the research themes and questions in light of the theoretical background presented in the first few chapters and in relation to data analysis. I will attempt to draw conclusions based on findings and their correspondence with the theories. However, due to the nature of phenomenographical research approach, much will be left for the reader to conclude in terms of determining the main outcomes of this research. Every reader interprets and directs their focus based on their unique background and interests. Validity and reliability will also be touched upon to give account of the challenges that phenomenography posed to this study and how well I, as a researcher, was able to respond to the challenge. Lastly, I will recommend ways to improve education for intercultural sensitivity in the elementary school level, and suggest topics for further research in the field of cultural education.

Before studying the conclusion in-depth, a cohesive and comprehensive model of the outcomes of the Comenius Project is presented. The model fuses the diverse theoretical and practical aspects of the study, demonstrating how the desired learning outcome of increased intercultural competence was achieved by adoption of varying skills and mindsets throughout the Project. The funnel signifies situated learning, which worked as a basis for all learning processes in the Project:
FIGURE 1. Elements that encouraged development of intercultural development through situated learning
8.1 Sense of national identity supports intercultural learning

The first research question, How does national identity affect the identity building process in an intercultural encounter in relation to the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity?, addresses identity building, focusing on national identity and its relevance to developing intercultural sensitivity. A key theory of intercultural development, Bennett’s Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity is at the core of the analysis.

Bennett’s model inherently promotes the necessity of knowing and appreciating one’s own culture in order to appreciate and value cultural difference. The same notion of the value of cherishing the local in order to embrace the global is also fundamental in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (2004, 37), and is supported by scholars such as Noddings (2005, 57). In Bennett’s model the importance of this notion becomes evident in the second stage. Defense, where individuals are likely to either emphasise the superiority of their own culture or fall into reversal, is a stage in which one starts to relegate one’s own culture and praise the superiority of another culture. Moving on to higher stages of intercultural development, particularly when crossing the line between ethnocentric and ethnorelative thinking, is a healthy attitude towards one’s own culture in relation to foreign cultures. This also becomes a prerequisite for intercultural sensitivity – in other words one must learn to appreciate one’s own culture in order to value other cultures.

The findings suggest that, first of all, children in the elementary school level are not only capable of absorbing cultural knowledge in theory and practice, but that they are also able to reflect on themes of national identity. Moreover, they learn to adjust those topics into a wider world-view, where intercultural encounters mould their thinking. The results show that pupils allowed the experience to change their perceptions towards the foreign; negative attitudes changed to positive. These findings are applicable to the big majority of the pupils but, as reported in the analysis chapter, the data shows that in the case of one or two pupils the experience was disappointing and failed to fulfil the positive expectations.

The role of national identity was one of the research themes. The fundamentally important result is that pupils grew their appreciation of Finland while they learned to value cultural difference. Thus, it can be concluded that although one’s appreciation of diversity and other cultures increases as intercultural sensitivity develops step by step, a strong sense of belonging to a culture does not interfere with intercultural development. While the pupils’ relative inexperience with cultural difference, which results from their young age and Finnish background, makes them likely to perceive the culture of their fatherland as ‘normal’, as suggested by Segers (2004, 89),
they still demonstrated broad thinking skills. This was evident, as a vast majority of pupils concluded after the Comenius Project that cultures cannot be rated according to their superiority, because every culture is different and should be valued as such.

8.2 Curricular integration: Comenius and National Curriculum in harmony

A purely practical approach to the study of the Comenius Project, integration to curriculum provides a view into the implementation of the objectives of the Project. This section will hopefully be useful for educators interested in adding intercultural themes into the class curriculum and routine schoolwork. The original research question, How can intercultural themes be implemented into school curriculum in the 5th grade?, intends to find out whether the implementation of extracurricular content such as cultural education can be successfully integrated into part of regular school studies and if both lines of teaching could support one another.

As was explained earlier, the National Core Curriculum for Basic Education does not only define objectives for regular school subjects, but it also introduces cross-curricular themes, many of which can be seen as promoting intercultural education. Thus, the implementation of the themes and objectives of the Comenius Project were smooth, as they were in line with the National Curriculum. According to the National Curriculum, content can be addressed within school subjects, as optional school subjects or as separate activities such as projects. The Comenius Project in Finland demonstrated the implementation of each of those three methods successfully. Learning about the culture and geography of the partner countries – Austria, Germany and the UK – took place in regular geography classes, where one of the subject contents in the 5th grade is European geography. Thus, combining the objectives of both the national curriculum and the Comenius Project was both natural and easy.

The second method, teaching cross-curricular content as an optional school subject, was practised in Cultural Education classes, which addressed and discussed global issues. As the research results show, this class was well received by pupils, whose knowledge and understanding of the global world developed. It can be argued that one of the reasons for pupils’ high appreciation of this class was the implementation of the class as an out-of-the-ordinary, separate unit. Due to the unique design of this class, it succeeded in combining objectives of the National Curriculum and Comenius Project but, from the teacher’s perspective, lesson planning took more time and effort when compared to regular teaching. The reward of teaching highly meaningful content to pupils and witnessing a profound learning experience could be considered as worthy of
extra work. However, teachers have to assess their own level of resources before being able to commit to an energy-consuming work.

The third method, project-based teaching, was performed several times during the Comenius Project. The *Who We Are* -project combined national identity, ICT and language learning, whereas the *Own Country* -project applied factual knowledge of geography to the pupil’s country of interest. Moreover, the Comenius Project as a whole is a project. The results suggest that combining intercultural themes with other objectives in the Curriculum – often in the form of projects – can be an easy way to attract the attention and interest of pupils. While pupils are likely to enjoy participating in a unique project, the quality of the learning experience rises as their motivation increases and as important curricular themes are taught simultaneously.

Overworked teachers are a reality in many schools today and, for those facing the dilemma of too little time and demand for good quality teaching, the thought of integration of intercultural themes into the class curriculum may sound like extra work. It is, however, important to acknowledge that the implementation of those themes can indeed be achieved with little or no extra work, when the regular subject teaching is planned in a way that supports intercultural learning. Time-consuming projects and optional subjects in the class curriculum are motivating and fun, but not necessary. The biggest impact is achieved by increasing the intercultural awareness and competence of teachers (see Talib, Löfström & Meri 2004, 148; Banks 2008, 39), not by carrying out exemplary projects.

It is relevant to take a look at the cross-curricular themes defined for basic education levels 1-6 by the National Curriculum (2004, 37-41). Out of the seven themes, those that were most emphasised in the Comenius Project are in italics.

1. *Growth as a person*
2. *Cultural identity and internationalism*
3. *Media skills and communication*
4. *Participatory citizenship and entrepreneurship*
5. *Responsibility for the environment, well-being and a sustainable future*
6. Safety and traffic
7. Technology and the individual

### 8.3 The Comenius impact

It is now time to look back at the starting point of the Comenius Project, namely the objectives, that were formulated to set the theoretical and practical standards for intercultural operations. The third
research question ‘What are the most salient learning outcomes that emerge from the Comenius Project through situated learning?’ attempts to monitor the core aspects of learning during the Project. This sub-chapter will analyse and conclude learning outcomes of the Finnish class, based on the results, in order to assess the success of the Project.

The objectives of the Project resonate with the theory of situated learning (see chapter 3.3), in which a domain of common interests is formed. The partner classes in Finland and Austria identified strongly as a community with a mutual mission: to share information and learn from each other. They developed common resources and adopted new methods of schooling practice that broaden the learning experience beyond the school compound and support lifelong learning within the community of practice.

The seven practical objectives that were established for the Project (see chapter 4.2) will be discussed briefly in the light of the work done, in order to determine whether the set objectives were met and the desired impact on pupils was achieved. As per defined by the project coordinators, the Comenius Project should:

1. Provide a real, authentic context for children to use their language skills and learn more with foreign children

The development in the language skills of pupils was one of the most applauded learning outcomes by pupils and their parents. While improvement in vocabulary and technical skills took place, the most evident result was improvement in readiness to speak a foreign language fluently in an authentic situation. The experience worked as an inspiration to continue developing language skills in the future and aroused interest towards foreign languages in general.

2. Give children a possibility to learn and practise their social skills that are needed in international cooperation

The practice of cordial expression was present from the very beginning of social interaction, as pupils wrote letters to their Austrian partners and introduced Finland in PowerPoint presentations. The culmination of this aspect was the study visit, during which the nervous first encounter between partners developed into more smooth cooperation through a process of learning and adjustment. The experience left pupils with more competence of international cooperation for the future.

3. Increase and deepen cultural awareness and knowledge on a reciprocal basis, both domestic and foreign

This dimension of learning targets both aspects of cultural learning: knowledge of the foreign, as well as one’s own culture. During the process pupils were challenged to reflect on their national
identity in order to detect the unique features of the Finnish culture and thus learn to appreciate their own culture. They also practised introducing Finland to foreigners. During the study visit they were able to pass on cultural knowledge and Finnish traditions. As can be concluded from the hosting experiences, families made an effort to demonstrate the domestic lifestyle of Finland. The knowledge of their own country also developed in the cultural education classes, where pupils realised the high level of well-being in Finland compared to other countries.

Pupils learned about foreign ways, as the contact with the partner class grew more and more intense. The theoretical knowledge that pupils possessed beforehand transformed into first-hand experience, gained through real life situations with the Austrians. This, according to the findings, strengthened tolerance of difference but also intensified the awareness of the existing cultural difference.

4. Diminish stereotypes and prejudices towards foreign people by giving correct and up-to-date information about other nations and people, and thus increase mutual understanding on a European level

The results do not show any sign of negative prejudice towards the Austrian partner class or their culture in the initial enquiries. However, it is evident that a majority of the Finnish students were extremely nervous on the day that the partner class arrived, due to the uncertainty of what was to come. The fact, that afterwards pupils reported profound transformation in their attitudes and perceptions of foreigners for the positive, indicates that prejudice existed but was successfully overcome. In the course of the Project pupils learned about the uniqueness and value of different cultures, to the extent that they declared that no culture can be named superior to other cultures.

5. Give a possibility to put cross-curricular themes into practice

Integration of cross-curricular themes into part of an intercultural learning experience in the classroom was planned carefully. The performed methods of the implementation of cross-curricular material and corresponding projects were successful. This aspect of the Program was explained in more detail in chapter 8.2.

6. Give teachers possibilities to observe and learn different methodologies and school management and adapt them to their own school environment and teaching

One of the three levels of mobility in the Project, teacher mobility, responded to the objective of intercultural development of teachers by means of exchanging learning methods and ideas across
borders. This aspect was an important part of the Project as a whole, but this topic is also an area of research in this paper. It would be most relevant to trace the learning outcomes of teachers in all the partnership countries, which thus makes it a suggested topic for further research (see chapter 8.6).

7. Support the development of ICT-based content and pedagogies

Much of the cooperation between partner classes, as it appeared to pupils, took place online. Pupils exchanged personal information on the Moodle learning environment and e-Twinning, the European school network. PowerPoint presentations were created during the Who We Are -project. Classes involved instructions on how to use PowerPoint. In the Own Country -project in Geography a few tasks were assigned to online research. Cultural education material was also partly in technological format. The ICT methods were partially designed to meet the goal of the Project but also to enhance the quality of teaching.

8. Help children to acquire skills necessary for active European citizenship

This objective crystallises the ultimate goal of the Comenius Project. One skill that is crucial for active European citizenship is intercultural sensitivity, in the core of this study (see 8.1 and 8.3), which is inherently related to a strong sense of national and European identity (see 8.4). The analysis of the results, as contrasted with the theories of intercultural learning and the objectives of the Project, show that the Project succeeded in helping the pupils acquire such skills and develop their intercultural competence.

8.4 Comenius promotes global citizenship

The fundamental changes in lifestyle and the transforming perception of the nation state versus globalism, which postmodernity has brought along, is often regarded as a threat to traditional values cherished among the older generation. The results of this study show that, although young people are faced with different realities than those commonplace a few decades ago, the value of one’s own culture is still recognised. This aspect of the results leads to discussion of the fourth research question, ‘How does the Comenius Project respond to the challenges posed by globalisation in the era of postmodernity?’

The formidable challenges in question (see chapter 2.1) are incompetence of living a transnational lifestyle (Beck 2000, 20) and loss of national identification, a sense of belonging to a
nation. According to Hall (1992, 291), this is an essential part of an individual’s self-perception. What is also seen as worrisome by sociologists such as Bauman (1996, 19-32) is the likely life strategies of postmodern individuals that render disengagement, commitment-avoidance and a fragmentary and discontinuous existence. Hall’s definition of the postmodern individual, a ‘subject’, is in line with Bauman’s depiction, recognising the identity building as being a never-ending process, in which contradictory and multiple identities compete for living space.

The results show that the Finnish pupils had a strong sense of national identity: they demonstrated pride of being Finnish as well as appreciation of the Finnish culture, lifestyle and environment. Their self-perception as citizens of Finland did not, however, appear to diminish their readiness to value other cultures and countries or take to heart issues of global citizenship. Pupils expressed openness to learn from other cultures and build intercultural relationships while still cherishing the uniqueness of their own culture. Pupils were also familiar with notions of the origins and tradition of the Finnish people, a narrative of the nation so to speak (Hall 1992, 292-295), but the Comenius Project clearly strengthened their perceptions and opened their horizons to more holistic understanding. The activities that triggered this change in particular were the *Who We Are*-project, in which pupils learned to present their culture and living environment to foreigners, and the global citizenship lessons, where global issues were addressed. In addition to that, communication with the Austrians taught intercultural skills in action through situated learning.

When it comes to the postmodern trend of discontinuous and fragmentary encounters, it can be said that the Comenius Project aimed to build lasting relationships with the partner classes through intensive cooperation and as being hosts to one another. Friendships developed across the national border, and many of the Finnish pupils reported continuing communication after the school visit. Although this may not be true of all pupils, and some may have lacked the experience of a long-term friendship, the methods of implementation of the Project encourage long-term commitment, as the title, ‘Lifelong Learning Programme’, indicates.

From the various realisations of identity (see chapter 2.1), in addition to personal identity and national identity, the Project contributed significantly to the ‘collective’ (Chen et al. 2004, 91) aspect of identity. This is highly relevant in addressing the need to educate for global citizenship, where pupils take ownership of global issues as part of their transnational identity. The results support the urge of many scholars and educators to educate young children for global citizenship (see Kuscer & Prosen 2005, 10), as they are highly responsive and adaptable to build their identity as functional, responsible world citizens. This is the goal that has been set by educators to respond to the challenges of our time.
8.5 Validity of the study

Qualitative research, due to its unique nature, is perpetually challenged to prove itself a credible method of science. Critics are concerned that the distinction between empirical facts and human interpretations by means of qualitative methodologies are not achieved. In order to gain the respect of the wider academic world, this research paper, like any other qualitative study, has to make a rigorous attempt to meet the critical standards of a quality research. The points at stake are the reliability and validity of the research.

Validity indicates truthfulness. Critical questions of validity surround whether the chosen methods were suitable to answer the research questions, and whether the researcher practised objectivity in the interpretation of data. (Silverman 2010, 275.) I will now give account of the variables that potentially influenced the execution of the study and the findings. The choices of the researcher are an essential factor when assessing the validity of a study.

From the beginning of the research project the wide scale of topics in the Comenius Project posed a challenge of narrowing down the area of research, while also ensuring a holistic inspection of the Project, as it was experienced in Finland. This meant that instead of having focused on and conducted an in-depth analysis of merely one theme, I formulated four research questions. As a result, a thorough study of each topic, in the form of data, left suspicion of the sufficiency of collected material. Triangulating the methods of data collecting, however, diminished the gravity of this flaw. For example, the process of examining the perceptions of pupils on national identity consisted of multiple surveys, interviews and observation. This was not true of all aspects of the study, which rely on a singular method. It could be argued that close observation, as well as hands-on participation in all stages of the research project, gave invaluable insight into the research themes. Approval of this assumption increases the validity of the research.

As the researcher is responsible for the analysis and treatment of data, the danger of fallacious subjectivity and false conclusions exists (Silverman 2010, 278). To overcome this pitfall of anecdotalism I consciously tried to demonstrate the refutability principle, a method in which the researcher seeks to refute their initial assumptions about their data in order to achieve objectivity. In other words, I tried to resist the temptation of jumping into easy conclusions. Because the Project itself was inspiring for me personally, and being able to detect the positive reactions and learning outcomes of pupils at first hand, potential for overly optimistic interpretations was evident. However, triangulation of perceptions occurred, to a small degree, through discussions with Mrs. Tuomi and other country leaders.
A second critical measure of a quality research is reliability. Reliability refers to the degree of consistency in analysing and determining results of the study. Complete reliability is proven, in theory, when multiple independent researchers draw similar conclusions from a singular research composition, or when the same researcher is able to repeat the research outcomes by replicating a study in differing occasions. (Silverman 2010, 290.)

While it is practically impossible to determine the reliability of this study in the manner described above, it must be acknowledged that attempts to prove reliability have been made. All the stages of the research, from both a practical and theoretical viewpoint, have been documented in this paper. Data and relevant points rising from the material have been introduced correspondingly for the reader to judge the decisions and the work done.

8.6 Reflection, suggestions and conclusive remarks

Conducting a case study research is a unique, multi-faceted process. Looking back to decisions made at the beginning, as well as the varied occurrences during the Project – planned or uncontrollable – it is now time to assess the work done and suggest improvements. The chosen framework, topics, findings and themes that have arisen during this process generate ideas for further research.

The practical aspect of carrying out this Project provides useful tips for anyone planning a similar intercultural exchange project. Based on the experience of the teachers, it can be argued that well-working communication between counties is vital for smooth relations and effective planning and execution of common goals and projects. It is also important to agree on working policies between partners in the first stages of cooperation in order to maintain functional relations and avoid frustration.

Another practical point that arose during the Project was the importance of commitment for all participants of the Project. Mrs. Tuomi, the class teacher, was adamant that she would not have even considered taking part in this Project unless she could have complete trust in her pupils. Moreover, the role of host families as caretakers is vital for successful cultural exchange. Had the visiting pupils stayed at hotels during the visit, they would have missed out on experiencing the authenticity of the Finnish culture, as it is experienced in homes. The fact that parents showed deep commitment to the Project and were willing to exceed the hospitality expectations enhanced the quality of the study visit. Although teachers are key figures in the planning stages, as well as during the visit, they cannot control the activities taking place with host families.
This experience also showed that in an ideal case, pupils in partner classes should be the same age. The Finnish pupils were smaller in size and were afraid that the Austrian pupils would be rebellious teenagers. However, the more the pupils got acquainted with each other, the less significant age appeared. It is difficult to determine the total effect of age difference on the results, considering that other factors such as cultural and language barriers caused prejudice and uncertainty at the beginning.

This case study did not follow the whole of the Comenius Project up to the second study visit in Austria during the spring of 2011, where the intercultural development of pupils in both countries continued to develop. At the time of writing this chapter the second visit had been carried out and, according to Mrs. Tuomi, the visit was very successful. Pupils continued to build friendships with the partner class, activities were well received, being both entertaining and educative, and the Finnish pupils experienced authentic Austrian culture in host families. Based on Mrs. Tuomi’s observation, the positive development that had started from the beginning of the Comenius Program continued. It would naturally have been logical to conduct a study of the entire Project to monitor the development of the intercultural sensitivity of the pupils, but this was impossible due to time limits.

There are, however, several interesting strands a new research could follow in order to fill the gaps of this study and cover new areas of intercultural study. The Finnish class that has had the privilege of participating in this unique intercultural Comenius Project is a fruitful ground for further study. First of all, it would be interesting to know if development has occurred in pupils’ thinking regarding national identity after they visited Austria. Another interesting topic would be studying their language skills in both German and English to examine whether their readiness to use a foreign language in practical situations has improved significantly. In regard to language, the Finnish pupils are about to choose optional languages as they start secondary school and it is likely that that their experiences in the Comenius Project will have an impact on their choices.

Comparison is a useful tool in research and, therefore, a relevant method of study would be to compare Mrs. Tuomi’s class with other Finnish classes in order to examine the effect the Project has on those pupils. Areas in which comparison could be conducted are language skills, national identity, tolerance of difference, intercultural skills, worldview, understanding of globalisation, attitude towards unfamiliarity and perceptions on Europe.

This case study did not address teacher’s perspective in much detail, as the experience of pupils was the central point of focus. Yet the importance of developing the professional competence of teachers on intercultural matters has been addressed and acknowledged in the objectives of the Project. The mobility of teachers was the second of three levels of cooperation
between partner countries, and reciprocal learning and exchange of teaching methods by means of school visits was named an objective. The vitality of the intercultural competence of teachers was determined in this paper as part of cross-curricular integration. That being said, an in-depth study of the teacher development, as well as the impact of intercultural cooperation on the policies of individual schools, would be relevant fields of further study.

In the era of postmodernity Europe continues to develop and shift towards the new ways of globalism. The Comenius Project aims to respond to those trends by educating young children for intercultural competence, thus making them adopt a notion of European citizenship. Well-travelled, cosmopolitan staff, understandably, is in demand in governments and companies (Giddens 2007, 221) and correspondingly, young people who make the right educational choices and develop a strong sense of European identity, as well as master a set of intercultural skills, will likely be successful. From the viewpoint of this research, a follow-up study of the participant pupils and their future education and employment would be of great interest. Will the Comenius Project impact the path of their life as they make critical choices that shape their future?
REFERENCES


1. What is it like to be Finnish?

______________________________________________________________

2. What is similar / common in Finns and foreigners?

______________________________________________________________

3. What are the differences between Finns and foreigners?

______________________________________________________________

4. Are Finns better, equally good or inferior to foreigners in your opinion? Explain.

______________________________________________________________

5. What do you know about Austria?

______________________________________________________________

6. What do you think about German language?

______________________________________________________________

7. What is your attitude towards difference? E.g. language, culture, customs, religion, appearance, diet.

______________________________________________________________

8. What is the most important thing you have learned in the Comenius Project so far?

______________________________________________________________
How can you help?  

What could you do? Write a letter to your best friend, telling what you have learned about global issues and how you can help people who need help in another country. You can use topics such as basic needs, environmental issues (recycling), democracy (free speech, fair trade) and fairness (gender, racism, rules, respect). You can write in English or in Finnish.

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Gender

1. Is there a difference in the way girls and boys should be treated?
2. Is more expected from boys than girls or vice versa?
3. Should men and women be paid equal salary for the same job?
4. Should men have different role at home than women?
5. Compare Finland’s situation regarding gender with the situation in other cultures.

Rules

1. What are rules and laws for? Why do we have them?
2. What would happen if there were no rules?
3. How does “rules” link to “fairness”?
4. Come up with a new rule for your community.

Respect

1. Define respect.
2. How can you show respect to other people in every day life situations?
3. Is there a difference in the way you speak to people regarding their age? (For example, how would you ask a friend for tea and how would you ask your grand mother?)
4. Is respect practised in the Finnish culture in the same way than in other cultures?

Racism

1. Define racism.
2. Why do you think some people are racist? What are the reasons for racism?
3. Talk about your experiences with people from different cultures.
4. What kind of advice can you give to people who have racist thoughts? How should Finns behave towards foreigners?
Meera’s story

Meera lives in Rajasthan which is located in the north-west India. In that area half of the people live in the country and also Meera lives in a small village with her mother, her older sister and two younger brothers.

Meera is 10 years old and would love to go to school but her mother won’t let her, saying she has to stay home and take care of her little brothers, feed the animals and carry water from the well. Meera’s cousin who is a boy goes to school. It is a long walk in the hot sun. The class is very big with 50 pupils and only some of them have money to buy school books.

In the morning Meera gets dressed in her shabby dress that she got from her older sister. Then she goes to the well to get water. Her village is fortunate to have a good well with clean water unlike some other villages in Rajasthan. In the afternoon she helps her mother to cook a dinner with rice and lentils in curry. If they don’t have enough money, they eat only rice. Usually Meera is so busy doing her chores that she doesn’t have time to go out to play with her friends but she is happy because she has a family who loves her and takes care of her.

One time she had a chance to travel to a city near her village. There she saw many orphan children in the streets who were begging for food and money. She felt very sorry for them because they didn’t have a home and it’s dangerous to live on the streets.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
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<tr>
<td>shabby</td>
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Appendix 5 (5)

Pupils of Finnish and Austrian partner classes