

THE EFFECTS OF SHORT-TERM SOJOURN EXPERIENCES ON ADOLESCENTS:

Five Narratives of Adolescent Finnish Students in a Comenius Project: EU & I

Master's Thesis

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THE EFFECTS OF SHORT-TERM SOJOURN EXPERIENCES ON ADOLESCENTS

Five narratives of adolescent Finnish students in a Comenius Project: EU & I

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Tutkimuksessani tarkastelen lyhytaikaisen ulkomailla oleskelun vaikutuksia viiteen suomalaiseen alakouluikäiseen oppilaaseen. Oppilaiden kokemukset karttuivat Comenius projektissa EU ja minä. Kaikki viisi haastateltua lasta olivat oppilaina samassa Pohjois-Pohjanmaalla sijaitsevassa koulussa, ja osallistuivat samoille kolmeen eri EU-maahan suuntautuneille opintomatkoille. Kaikki oppilaat matkustivat oppilasparin kanssa, ja kokivat samantyyppisiä tapahtumia. Neljä viidestä tutkimukseen osallistuneesta oppilaasta isännöi perheessään ulkomaalaista oppilasta, ja tutkin myös heidän mahdollisia positiivisia kokemuksiaan isännöinnistä.

Tutkimukseni lähdekirjallisuutena ja vertailuaineistona käytän lyhytaikaista ulkomailla oleskelua, kokemusten kautta oppimista ja muita siihen liittyviä ilmiöitä tarkastelleita akateemisia tutkimuksia. Edellä mainittujen tutkimusten tuntemus on olennaista kasvattajille, jotka vetävät ulkomaille suuntautuvia opintomatkoja. Aikaisempien tutkimuksien avulla oli mahdollista todeta ulkomaille suuntautuvien lyhytaikaisten opintomatkojen osallistujien kohtaamisia useita haasteita, ja niiden tulokset auttoivat käsillä olevan tutkimuksen kyselyn rakenteen muodostamisessa. Tutkimuskirjallisuus kattaa myös tärkeimmät tutkimustani lähellä olevat teoriat, esimerkiksi, että kokemuksen kautta oppiminen tuottaa hyviä tuloksia.

Osallistujia haastateltiin vapaamuotoisesti käsitellen seuraavia teemoja: haastateltavan tausta, kokemukset ennen matkaa, kokemukset matkan aikana, kokemukset matkan jälkeen ja kokonaiskokemuksen arviointi. Kaikki matkat kestivät neljä yötä ja viisi päivää ja tapahtuivat saman Comenius-projektin (EU ja minä) puitteissa. Projektissa oli mukana yhdeksän EU-maata. Oppilaiden kokemukset olivat asumisesta isäntäperheissä Espanjassa, Slovakiassa ja Italiassa. Haastattelut tehtiin suomen kielellä ja käännettiin englanniksi aineiston analysoimista varten. Narratiivien keräämisen jälkeen aineisto jaoteltiin edellä mainittuihin kategorioihin varhaisnuorten kokemusten vertailemiseksi ja vastakohtaistamiseksi.

Analyysissä tutkimustulokset on järjestetty temaattisesti lyhyiksi selityksiksi, joita selventävät taulukot. Tutkimuksen aineisto on järjestetty siten, että se osoittaa jokaisen osallistujan kokemusten saman- tai erikaltaisuuden suhteessa osallistujan taustaan, huoleen, asennoitumiseen englannin kielen puhumiseen, stereotyyppisiin ja uskomuksiin ulkomaalaisten kohtaamisesta, odotuksiin, koti-ikävään, kulttuurisiin eroavaisuuksiin ja positiivisiin muutoksiin suhteessa edellä mainittuihin ulkomailla oleskelun seurauksena.

Tulokset osoittavat, että oppilaiden kokemukset isäntäperheistä eri maissa olivat positiivisia huolimatta siitä, että kommunikoimisessa englannin kielellä oli jonkin verran vaikeuksia. Kaikki tutkimukseen osallistuneet oppilaat kertoivat, että heidän englannin kieli taitonsa oli parantunut opintomatkojen seurauksena ja että kokemus tilanteista, jossa englannin kieltä joutui käyttämään, oli positiivinen. Tutkimuksen tulos antaa tietoa varhaisnuorten ulkomaille suuntautuvien lyhytaikaisten opintomatkojen vaikutuksista oppilaisiin ja antaa työkaluja kasvattajille ja opettajille vastaavanlaisten projektien suunnittelussa.

Avainsanat: pre-sojourn, sojourn, post-sojourn, re-entry, language skills, attitudes about English, reflection, experiential learning, lingua franca, homesickness, study abroad

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1 INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study is to examine the effects of short-term sojourn experiences on adolescents.

The aim of this study is to show that reflection about the sojourn experiences of students reveals important knowledge about studies abroad and that information can be used to improve educational projects. Sojourn, as a term, can be used to mean a long or short trip to another country. In *The Psychology of Culture Shock*, “the term sojourn is used by Ward et al. (2001) to refer to temporary between-society culture contact” (Ward & Furnham: 2001).

The study will ascertain how the experiences of adolescent sojourners abroad affect their lives in regards to attitudes about studying the English language, cultures and the self.

It is important to study the narrative experiences of young sojourners in order to be aware of the effects of sojourning in school exchange, study abroad and Comenius projects. Often, the goals of projects fail to be discussed so that students and teachers can prepare for the journeys. If enough time is taken to discuss the goals of the project and realize the differences between what educators and students are anticipating, a common understanding can lead to enriching the outcomes. One of the issues being addressed in this study, is that during the sojourn, students could benefit from keeping a journal or discussing their experiences with others before they return home. Then, on re-entry to their home country, students need to have an opportunity for reflection – through this, the sojourn will last in memory and more information can be used for knowledge. The types of sojourns that students embark upon – travelling to a foreign country, living in a foreign culture, for a short time – change their futures. The experiences can change their views on language learning, foreign cultures, stereotypes, attitudes, and about themselves in general. Importance needs to be placed on reflecting on the students’ own experiences through their own words in order to bring beneficial information to students of future projects.

Five Finnish students aged twelve to thirteen years old at the time of sojourn had the chance to visit another country in the United Nations of Europe. This was possible because they were participants in the Comenius Project, EU & I. The Comenius Project’s title, EU & I, refers to the European Union and I. The idea of the title describes the sense of a student’s own identification with being a member within the European Union. The project’s goal was to have students from

nine different countries share culture and language with English as the lingua franca. The project lasted from the autumn of 2009 to the spring of 2011.

The students were selected for travelling through teacher conducted interviews. Each of the travelling students during this Comenius Project was accommodated by a host student and family in the country of travel. Six students of a northwestern elementary school in Finland were chosen to travel to three different countries during the project. For each Comenius meeting in another country, it was agreed by the teachers of this particular school that the students chosen to travel should be of the same sex. For the first Comenius Project to Slovakia, the Finnish school chose two girls. For the second sojourn to Spain, the school chose two boys and for the last sojourn to Italy, two girls were chosen to travel. For each of these sojourns, the timetable was similar. The students arrived in the country on a Wednesday afternoon and were introduced to a host student with whom the student went home with. The students spent four nights with the host family and five days in the country. All of the students departed on the following Sunday. The countries of sojourn were Slovakia, Spain and Italy. Four of the five participants also accommodated students from Spain and Slovakia during one of the Comenius meetings in Finland.

The data for the study was collected by semi-structured interviews to gather narratives from the five participants. The interviews were conducted in Finnish as the interviewer translated the questions from English to Finnish for the students. Questions involved student background information, pre-sojourn planning, sojourn events, post-sojourn feelings and reflections about the experiences along with the reverse experience of hosting a student from another country. The narrative accounts were recorded and then translated into English by the interviewer. There was a delay in the interview process, the participants were aged thirteen or fourteen at the time of the interviews, therefore their answers are based on memory. The analysis was qualitative. The data was analyzed by organizing the information into recurring themes throughout the interviews. The narratives were read and the information was then cross-referenced across the participants in relation to each other.

Study abroad has become a common technique to teach students about other cultures and create cross-cultural relationships. As a result, students can learn to see how they relate to the world when comparing their own culture with that of another. Language, tradition and perception of self from the perspective of one culture, to living in another culture gives students a new way to

understand him or herself as well as people in other cultures, broadening understanding about the self and about others. Study abroad and sojourning also provides an opportunity for a student to immerse him or herself into another culture where he or she can use a second language – often the L2 (second language) being used is English. In elementary schools across the United Nations of Europe, it is possible to apply to CIMO, the Centre for International Mobility for a Comenius Project stipend. The purpose of a Comenius Project is to create communication and learning between students in United Nations countries. Comenius Projects have specific goals involved for the participants of the project. Each Comenius Project that is approved has its own agenda and goals that have been established. Students however, have their own expectations and hopes to be fulfilled by these projects. Often, educators forget to ask the students what they expect to gain from the projects, and in this particular case, about the experience of sojourning to another country and living with a host family. It is important to reflect on the experiences of the participants because it can allow educators and future participants to better prepare the project goals and outcomes. The importance of such information is to give value to the experiences of students travelling abroad in the sphere of educational goals. English language skills, attitudes about language, self-perception and possible stereotypical ideals about other countries played large roles in the experiences of these participants.

2 BACKGROUND

Previous research on issues related to student study abroad and sojourns enlightens this study with relevant information which will be used to create the basis of the interview questions and to understand the data in the form of results and discussion. Firstly, the theory about why students' experiences are important to understand as well as issues that should be understood regarding sojourns will be explored. Secondly, previous studies on sojourn experiences will be examined to understand how this study's participants' experiences are similar or different. The background section thus covers important terms and research which will assist the reader to understand the data and analysis of this study. Specifically, this section will uncover the issues that are involved with the reasons for sojourning in relation to the benefit to education, the results of sojourning and items to be aware of during the experience of sojourning in relation to the effects on participants.

2.1 Learning through Reflection

Students need to reflect on their experiences in order to learn from them. Mark Smith reminds readers of John Dewey's ideas about the processes of learning and thinking, learning is a process that includes many steps of thinking (Smith 1999). It is important that people take the time to reflect on their own experiences, to examine how their experiences shape and form themselves in the past, present and future. In his article titled, *Reflection*, Smith argues that emotion is an important aspect to remember in reflections and refers to the work of Boud, Keogh and Walker (1985). The main idea is that the activity of reflection allows people to "recapture their experience, think about it, mull it over and evaluate it" (Smith 1999: 19). Smith lists the three aspects that Boud et al. condensed from an earlier version by Dewey. According to Boud et al, reflection involves:

1. *returning to experience*
2. *attending to (or connecting with) feelings*
3. *evaluating experience*

(Smith 1999: 26-31)

Reflection must be done in order to process experiences. After a sojourn experience, it is essential, according to James Citron and Vija Mendelson (Citron & Mendelson 2006: 65) to

reflect and talk about all the things that happened and what the students have learned, otherwise, students will “shoebox” the journey. *Shoeboxing* is a term used as a metaphor to compare the idea that an experience can just be put away in a box, stored in memory much like putting pictures of a vacation in a shoebox and putting it away into the closet, where the memories just sit. If students process the experiences through returning to and attending to feelings about it and evaluate the results, they can re-live their journeys. The journeys will become a part of their existence and knowledge. According to researchers about sojourning experiences, some kind of change happens to the participants. By actively thinking about the gains of the experiences, students will learn and grow. Citron and Mendelson point out that activities about reflection “allow students to make connections between their study abroad experience and the rest of their lives” (Citron and Mendelson 2006: 66). If students do not gain knowledge and reflect on their journeys, Comenius Projects and student exchanges become vacations. A study abroad project or Comenius project where the educational goals are to encourage learning about languages and cultures, it is imperative that the journeys are reflected upon in order to ensure the most educational benefits of the sojourn experience for each individual.

2.1.1 Experiential Learning

Experiential learning is an important topic for study in relation to education. Experiential education refers to the idea that students’ experiences are the base for their own knowledge. The Comenius Project is built upon the idea that students will learn something through using the English language and of course, the basic belief is that they will also improve their English skills. Essentially, learning through actively doing something and putting skills into action is experiential learning. Kohonen, Kaikkonen, Jaatinen and Lehtovaara (2001) argued that language learning should be called, *Experiential Learning*. The idea of their theory is that ideally, language learning needs to involve “interactive communication which involves negotiation between the participants, the tolerance of ambiguity and respect for diversity” (Kohonen, Kaikkonen, Jaatinen and Lehtovaara 2001: 3). This means that students must take into consideration the differences of English language skills across cultures and be tolerant and understanding of cultural differences in order to appreciate diversity. During active conversation using the L2, students need to be aware that sometimes there might occur some sort of ambiguity – or misunderstanding, and that it is important to understand this so that the outcome of the

negotiation of dialogue is successful. During the EU & I project, students were faced with the task of communicating with others from very different cultures. They communicated through the lingua franca of English and often felt worried about whether what they said would be understood. The students also had to learn to accept each other's accents, cultures and styles of English. By the end of the trip, students readily gave feedback on this fact. Students also found that as a result of meeting students that are the same age from other cultures, they learned more about accepting each other. Tolerance rose and the students learned about respecting other cultures and people. The result of realizing their differences and similarities in using English is directly related to the theory of experiential learning. Without actually participating in the act of speaking to each other, the students would not have learned what they did from the experience. The gains of actively learning through their own experiences are the essence of the sojourn.

Kohonen and his colleagues explore the idea that “we learn life by living it rather than watching it on screen” (Kohonen, Kaikkonen, Jaatinen and Lehtovaara 2001: 23), so students learn by actually speaking the English language in real life situations rather than sitting in a classroom or watching videos. It is believed that students learn “from actual experience through reflection” (Kohonen, Kaikkonen, Jaatinen and Lehtovaara 2001: 24) and that without reflection, students will easily forget the meaning that is associated with those experiences. Again, the importance of thinking about personal experiences is needed to acquire the benefits of learning. The real life experience needs to be processed and related to the student's own understanding of self. Comenius projects and other real life experiences of learning need to provide students with opportunities to reflect so that the knowledge that has been learned is also remembered. By interviewing students and having them reflect on their experiences, they are enforcing their learning about English and about themselves in relation to the world.

According to Jaatinen (2001), experiential learning and reflection about it gives students a chance to learn more about their own learning. This type of reflection about personal experiences gives “an extensive use of students' experiential autobiographical knowledge in language learning classes: the opportunity to reminisce about, narrate, explore oneself and one's life, and to be a subject in the classroom” (Kohonen, Kaikkonen, Jaatinen and Lehtovaara 2001: 6).

Another important aspect in experiential learning is that “personal, emotional and social factors” (Kohonen, Kaikkonen, Jaatinen and Lehtovaara 2001: 29) play a large role in the learning

outcome. In the Comenius project of the present study, the individual experience of each person was different because of his or her own personality. Each of the participant students was hosted by a family in a country far from home for five days and four nights. Being twelve years old, they were put in situations that required them to rely on themselves to succeed. The students had to communicate with the host family, students at the schools, shopkeepers, teachers and any other foreign people wherever they went. Their emotions and social situations were significant in the outcomes of their experiences. In the analysis of this study, the students are interviewed about how they felt about their experiences. They were also asked about how they felt they managed socially using English to communicate. Not only was the ability to speak the English language an asset for these students, but also their *intercultural competence* was crucial. By intercultural competence, it is meant that students were able to adapt to the new cultural setting. Hence, their learning also involved the important ability to adjust to situations and people outside of their own culture. The students were not expected to speak perfect English, but to use the skills they had to succeed in the situations they were in, and to learn about each other. The after effect of adapting and learning to survive in another culture creates change in the sojourner. He or she learns new skills and ways to adjust, thus learns through experience – experiential learning.

2.1.2 Why is Experiential Learning Important?

The qualities of good language learners are discussed by Joan Rubin (1975). She argues that language needs to be used in order for it to become learned, “if second language learning takes place in the classroom with little or no opportunity for practice, the type of strategies used will be more limited and distinct from those used where the learner has an opportunity to and perhaps has an obligation to use his language for real communication purposes” (Rubin 1975: 49). In other words, it is important that students are provided with opportunities to use their language skills. If students are put into a real-life situation in which they must try and use the skills that they have, they will improve. Students need to realize that they are competent in communicating when they are put in a situation where they must actually open their mouths and do it. This kind of learning by doing is not easy for everyone, but the idea is that if we don’t practice using languages we learn, can we learn them at all?

Learning through experience is also important, because it gives students a chance to use their skills. Using the English language on a study abroad provides genuine opportunities to strengthen

their abilities. As students utilize their abilities to communicate in a second language, they will be problem solving as they speak. When a word isn't easily retrieved, often students will use other words from their memory to explain what they are trying to say. Also, while speaking a second language, it is impossible to be perfect all the time. As the students realize that they don't need to have a perfect skill of the language, that they have enough background knowledge to succeed in basic communication, their confidence will build. As the students use the language and find that they are competent, it will build self-confidence and create a venue for more learning - perhaps more interest in active learning.

In addition, the opportunity to travel as younger students provides them with the understanding that learning languages is important in the modern world. English is a language used globally, but other languages are an asset as well. It may be that the students realize, through using English on their travels, that they will also have the chance to learn other languages and cultures.

In sum, it is important to study learners' experiences because they are the source of their own learning. If students can reflect on personal experiences and relate them to their sense of selves, they can build the knowledge about the world. Knowledge does not only come from the experience of sitting in a classroom taking in information from a teacher, but from the reflection of personal experience. If teachers are willing to listen to the voices of the students, they will come to understand their needs in relation to education - specifically in language learning.

For teachers it is important to begin listening to our students, to their stories about their own experiences, to their narratives and dialogues in order to better understand learning for the future.

2.2 Challenges Involved in Sojourn Experiences

In this study, students either identified with or detached themselves from a group of people in a different cultural setting. These groups consisted of the students' own country's sojourners and teachers or of many sojourners from other countries within the same situation or in host family group situations. Many challenges are faced by sojourners on short and long-term journeys and it is important for educators to be aware of them in order to understand how the experience will affect the participants in studies abroad. this part of the background chapter will focus on explaining some of the challenges that sojourners have faced in previous research studies. What the effects of the challenges can be on sojourners – positive and negative. The sojourner will go

through some changes as a result of the experience and they need to be aware of the ways in which that may happen. It is critical for participants and educators to review the challenges or to discuss the possible effects of sojourning before the actual journey abroad. Often, sojourners and educators have different expectations of the experience and it is beneficial to discuss the goals and anticipations involved in the project.

2.2.1 Expectations of Sojourner vs. Educator

Each sojourner's experience is unique; there can never be two that are exactly alike. In study abroad programs, the "pre-departure expectations of the study abroad experience may or may not be realized by the sojourner" (Comp 2008: 66). In other words, students who are embarking upon a study abroad experience may not have clear expectations or ideas of what is ahead. It is important to discuss the project or study abroad goals in order to clarify the reasons for the journey. It is also important to discuss possible challenges that the sojourner will face so that any negative effects are avoided. Students are not always aware of the goals set out for the sojourn by the project organizers or educators. Instead, he or she may have personal goals. The personal goals of students could possibly conflict with the project's or the educator's goals. In Byram and Feng's collection on studies abroad, Gertrude Tarp reminds educators that the school's or program's agenda is not always the same as that of the students (Byram & Feng 2006: 164). Perhaps debriefing about the expectations of the project and of the students is important to do pre-sojourn.

2.2.2 Change as a Result of Sojourn

It is assumed that short study abroad changes the identities of sojourners. David Comp's content analysis approach data shows that "sojourners experience intellectual, psychological social, and/or physical changes as a result of their study abroad experience" (Comp 2008: 84). In Comp's study on identifying changes that take place in sojourners as a result of studying abroad, he refers to a previous study by Stimpfl and Engberg which uses semi-structured interviews to measure the changes of participants. Stimpfl and Engberg (Comp 2008: 73) assume:

1. some change took place during study abroad
2. change continues during a period of readjustment to home environment
3. study abroad students will be able to detect and comment on change themselves

In Comp's article, it is apparent that many of the studies he discusses measured many different challenges that sojourners had to face, and as a result, went through changes. The items that they were able to measure changes in were: homesickness, tolerance, physical, social, intellectual, psychological, career ideas for future, academic improvement, adaptability, and self-perception (Comp 2008: 76-83).

2.2.3 Culture Shock vs. Homesickness

It is imperative that educators be aware of the term, *culture shock*. Culture shock is understood as the idea that when one enters a new environment or culture, it can be confusing and disorientating (Comp 2008: 69). Culture shock is often the product of a longer duration of study abroad wherein a person has had time to realize that he or she is not going home in the near future; the sojourner feels out of place and needs to find coping strategies. Not all sojourners experience culture shock, which has been extensively researched in previous studies. Regardless of previous studies, it is an important challenge that some sojourners do face. In a milder form, students may experience homesickness, as in Comp's study.

In a short sojourn or study abroad, students will more likely feel a sense of homesickness rather than culture shock. Shorter studies abroad can produce feelings of homesickness that can be confused with culture shock. Educators need to be aware of the difference between the two. Often, if students are experiencing homesickness, they will show signs of anxiety, perhaps cry or they will tell someone that they miss home. William Hull (1978: 112) connects homesickness with loneliness. For example, in his study on foreign students in America, he found that an increase in contacts with family or friends caused less loneliness and homesickness. Reversely, when less contact with home was experienced, students were more likely to feel homesick. It is important in all student excursions to allow for the possibility to make contact with parents or caregivers, friends and others experiencing the same feelings.

In an ethnographic study by Brown and Holloway, findings showed that homesickness was at its highest in the beginning of the sojourns (Brown and Holloway 2008: 232). As students adjusted to the new culture, homesickness slowly decreased. The researchers studied the participants' "struggle to cope with the challenges of foreign language use and an unfamiliar academic and sociocultural environment at a time when students were beset with homesickness and loneliness,"

and noted that an “association was made between the passage of time and gradual decrease in acculturative stress” (Brown and Holloway 2008: 232.) One of their main results was that “the adjustment journey,” of students was “as an unpredictable and dynamic process, which is experienced differently among sojourners, and fluctuates throughout the sojourn as a result of a host of individual, cultural and external factors” (Brown and Holloway 2008: 232.) It is important to note that homesickness is often the product of an individual’s own experience which is also connected to his or her own personality and situation.

Culture shock is a complicated issue. It is made up of many different stages in connection with the sojourner’s own sense of adapting to his or her own situation. Ting-Toomey and Chung explain that “both short-term sojourners and long-term immigrants can experience culture shock at different stages of their adaptation. Sojourners, such as cultural exchange students....often play temporary resident roles with a short to medium span of stay” (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2012: 93). Their definition of culture shock is “a stressful transitional period when individuals move from a familiar environment into an unfamiliar one. In this unfamiliar environment, the individual’s identity appears to be stripped of all protection” (Ting-Toomey & Chung 2012: 93). They also explain that if a student expects his or her sojourn to be a certain way, this can affect whether or not he or she experiences culture shock. “Personal expectations have long been viewed as a crucial factor in the culture shock management process. Expectations refer to the anticipatory process and predictive outcome of the upcoming situation” (Ting-Toomey & Chung 2012: 95). If a person has a more positive attitude or expectation of the sojourn, often he or she will be able to adapt to the cultural situation in a more positive way. In conclusion, culture shock is related to sojourn expectations. It follows then, that the sojourn experience has been influenced by the sojourner’s own thoughts before travel abroad even happens. If expectations are discussed pre-sojourn, perhaps culture shock and homesickness can be minimalized during the study abroad, and hence, less negative challenges will occur for the traveler.

2.2.4 Recognizing Cultural Differences

It is a major challenge for young sojourners to adapt to the differences in culture when living in a foreign country.

Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012:164) note that there are many stages involved not only with culture shock, but also with adaptation in regards to culture. Students will, in their process of change during a study abroad be affected by their adaptation to a foreign culture. The main stages include *acceptance of cultural difference*, *adaptation of cultural differences* and *integration of cultural differences*:

Acceptance of cultural difference is the state in which one's own culture is experienced as one of many possible diverse and complex cultural experiences. Individuals at this state are curious and respectful of cultural differences on the cognitive level. *Adaptation of cultural differences* is that state in which the experience of another culture yields perceptual shifting – seeing things from the other cultural angle-and also behavioral adaptation appropriate to that cultural frame of reference (e.g., viewing “lateness” differently and following nonverbal “polychronic” behaviors, based on new culture's norms and practices). *Integration of cultural differences* is the state in which the individual intentionally (on cognitive, behavioral, and affective levels) incorporates diverse cultural worldviews into one's identity and is able to transform polarized value sets into complementary value sets (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2012: 164-5).

Living in a foreign country and adapting to the ways of life in that place, forces one to adapt in order to succeed. A young adolescent who travels to a foreign land and must learn new ways of living in a host family situation will be adapting to a new culture and using a second language to communicate. The recognition of adapting oneself to another culture is an important issue to discuss during and post-sojourn so that students can share their experiences to reinforce the learning involved.

If sojourners realize their differences in culture and become aware of their own changes in behavior and thinking during cultural adaptation, the experience becomes part of their identity. Realizing one's own changes in another culture or environment reinforces his or her knowledge and sense of self. When one's identity is transformed by experiences of learning, it is important to assess the learning and the changes that take place as a result of sojourns.

2.2.5 English as a Lingua Franca

Finnish adolescent students are not all brave about speaking in the English language. For some reason, as an English teacher, I have experienced a sense of low self-confidence when students are asked to speak English. This timidness that is seen in some students creates a challenge for these students when they are abroad and in the situation of having to use the L2 they have been studying in school. On top of travelling to a foreign country where they will have to adapt to a

new culture, students are facing the difficulty of overcoming their feelings of hesitancy to speak in English with strangers that they have to live with.

The English language is taught so that students will be able to communicate with other people around the world. Without a common language, students would not be able to learn more about each other as members of other countries within the United Nations. Jennifer Jenkins explains that “English is frequently the mutual language of choice in settings such as conferences, business meetings, and political gatherings” (Jenkins 1996: 2). She refers to Firth who explains that English is:

A ‘contact language’ between persons who share neither a common native tongue nor a common (national) culture, and for whom English is the chosen *foreign* language of communication (Jenkins 1996: 2).

Yet, there may be a problem of misconception. It may be that one person speaking English may mean one thing and the interlocutor will not understand. The intent or meaning can change between people when their skill levels differ. Mentioned earlier, was the importance for students to be tolerant and to respect diversity in experiential learning. If students are taught to be aware of the possibilities that others speak just as much or little as they do, and that being from foreign cultures may influence what some people try to say in English, perhaps they will be more tolerant with their own performance and the performance of others in speaking English. The key then, to solve the issue of misconceptions and fear of speaking in English, is to accept and tolerate the differences in language skills and culture. The ability to be aware of possible misconceptions or differences between meanings allows for correction. For example, Jenkins explains, that “it is possible to promote international intelligibility and show respect for diversity across Englishes at one and the same time” (Jenkins 1996: 20). Students speak with different accents, and because they learn English in different educational systems, they may have a variety of patterns of speech. As a result of embracing our differences and learning tolerance, sojourners will face less negativity and difficulties during their studies abroad.

Globalization is a part of the contemporary world, and as a result, national cultural identity is perhaps changing. Jenkins defines the relationship of the English language and globalization with “its rapidly-growing dominance as the world’s main lingua franca,” which is “leading both to an

increasing diversity in the way the language is spoken, and to corresponding attempts to limit this diversity by the continued ‘distribution’ of NS norms to an ever-larger number of English speakers” (Jenkins 1996: 198). The term *NS* refers to native speakers of a language. English, then, is changing in its dynamics of use throughout the world. The diversity with which English is spoken around the world at the moment, will be noticed by sojourners as well. Not only will sojourners experience hearing the language spoken in different accents, but they will also be adjusting to the differences in regards to their own abilities and understandings. It is again, a manner of learning to tolerate and accept the world in relation to themselves.

There is also the possibility that students will create their own identity or reconstruct it as a result of using English as a lingua franca to represent themselves. This is called an interactional approach by Jenkins (Jenkins 1996: 200). Some researchers, for example, focus on seeing identities as “fluid and locally-constructed in interactions” (Jenkins 1996: 200). This means that identities are changing and are constructed in the place that interaction takes place in. In the case of sojourners, language is then a major influence on creating their own identities as they interact in another language. Jenkins refers to Le Page and Tabouret-Keller (1985) who show that a person who is trying to portray him or herself to another person in another culture, “may perform ‘acts of identity’ as he creates for himself the patterns of his linguistic behavior so as to resemble those of the group or groups with which from time to time he wishes to be identified, or so as to be unlike those from whom he wishes to be distinguished” (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller 1985: 181, as cited in Jenkins 1996: 200). Students may find themselves accommodating their own speech to suit the traits of others in groups, perhaps picking up accents or tones. It is also possible that with differing skill levels of English competence, students will slow down their own pace of speaking to accommodate lower level speakers, out of courtesy. This relates again, to tolerance and acceptance of differing abilities of English speakers. The act of adjusting to each other in interactive situations shows a desire to be included and to include others in situations of communication. This in turn, creates a sense of belonging to a group which uses the common L2 – creating a group identity. In a host family situation, it is optimal to communicate in a positive and accepting manner for both parties: sojourner and host.

The main point in regards to the challenges of using English as a lingua franca for sojourners is that with enough tolerance and acceptance by the self and by others, parties that are interacting

will succeed in the experience. As a result, the opportunity to travel as a younger student provides the understanding that learning languages is important in the modern world. English is a common language used globally, but other languages are an asset as well. If sojourners and hosts are tolerant and accepting during their interactions, the sojourn experience becomes positive. Another positive learning experience from sojourning could perhaps be that students will find that they will also have the chance to learn other languages and cultures.

2.2.6 Re-entry into Home Country

Coming home from a sojourn experience can be difficult for students because they may have undergone dramatic changes in understanding their own culture and place in the world. Home may look different upon re-entry and the student may feel different about him or herself as well. One danger for sojourners who return home is to put away the experience like it never happened at all to assimilate back into his or her culture. If this happens, students can be in the danger of losing validation of the importance of the cultural experience. Also, if family and/or friends are not sensitive enough to give attention to the events that the sojourner has experienced, the end result is that the experience is tucked away as merely an experience instead of usurping it for the learning qualities that it provided.

Citron and Mendelson (2006: 64-65) explain that students who return from an exchange or sojourn are often misunderstood by their friends and/or family. Sometimes when they come back to tell others about their stories, sojourners may find that their audience is not as interested in hearing all of the details as they had expected. Citron and Mendelson (2006: 65) believe that it is important to share the experiences with other sojourners and have a chance to process all of the events that took place. Sharing the memories and reflecting on the experience of a sojourn can be done in educational group settings so that others with like experiences or interests can be involved.

Citron and Mendelson share good exercises for sojourners and educators about reflection on study abroad experiences. One, in particular titled, *Saying No to Shoeboxing* (Citron & Mendelson 2006: 65) includes the idea that students should not put their experiences away into memory; the shoebox is a metaphor for storing it away and not revisiting the experience. Students learn that they need to link their experiences to past and future, making it a part of their growing

reality of self. Shoeboxing, again, refers to “the tendency to treat the study abroad experience as a unique yet isolated event, worthy of being stored away with like memories and only taken out and appreciated on special occasions” (Citron & Mendelson 2006: 65). On re-entry, it is extremely important that students participate in reflection exercises and share their experiences. Students can connect their study abroad event with the future – the rest of their lives.

In sum, it is essential that educators and sojourners be aware of potential challenges and effects that sojourning can present to participants. Most importantly, pre-sojourn preparations must be carefully organized so that educators and sojourners have common expectations and goals, and that the students who are travelling are prepared to speak in English and to take advantage of the sojourn experience as much as possible. Also, students must be prepared for the possibility of having difficulty adjusting to a foreign culture and maybe experiencing feelings of homesickness or even culture shock. If sojourners are informed about these possible difficulties, he or she can prepare mentally pre-sojourn and perhaps be more open-minded to differences of culture.

2.3 Previous Studies on Sojourn Experiences

The aim of this section of the study is to review previous research studies on sojourn experiences in order to draw on methods which are successful in measuring and exploring them. Concurrently, examining previous studies exposes valuable elements to consider for the present study. Drawing on results and conclusions from previous studies gives affirmation to the present study’s structure. Consequently, previous studies on sojourning also show the differences between long-term and short-term sojourns, presenting another realm of study. There is not a lot of previous research done on very short-term sojourning of adolescents, therefore, drawing from other research is a way to define how to continue in the outlining of the present study.

2.3.1 Formation of a Third Culture for Comfort during a Sojourn

In some studies, it is apparent that sojourners come together as a group within a foreign culture to search for commonality. As a result, there is a phenomenon known as *third culture*. The third culture group forms as a result of students not being able to adjust to the foreign culture of sojourn – instead they seek comfort from others that are experiencing the same difficulties and form a support group from which they function for the remainder of their sojourns.

In Grunzweig and Reinheart's collection of articles, a study by Citron, *U.S. Students Abroad: Host Culture Integration or Third Culture Formation* (2002), explores the experiences of participants on study abroad in Madrid. He observed undergraduate students who studied in study abroad programs. The students were expected to adjust to the host culture of Madrid. Their experiences were studied before the sojourn, during and afterward. Observations included interviews and student journals. The sixteen participants were interviewed once before, four times during and two to three times after their studies abroad. The interview questions were open-ended and "designed to elicit data about students' reactions to host culture, their cultural observations" (Citron 2002: 42). The data was "compared collectively and analyzed for each and across others to reach a holistic understanding of ways their cultural adjustment was experienced abroad and on re-entry" (Citron 2002: 43). Citron's findings indicated that the students tended to find commonalities with other U.S. participants and did not completely immerse themselves in the host culture, instead, they found a third culture in which they found others going through the same experience in order to get through the sojourn. Citron calls this the "safety net" (Citron 2002: 46). Citron's study indicated that students needed encouragement to be more culturally adjusted to the host culture. The encouragement would come from the educators involved in the study abroad programs. If students do not feel comfortable enough in the foreign culture, there is a danger of groups of sojourners banding together to create their own new group. This type of in group and out group phenomena can also create a sense of exclusion for the sojourners and cause a negative or less productive experience on their study abroad.

2.3.2 Motivation and Anxiety about the Sojourn

Researchers have been interested in studying the reasons that students wish to embark upon studies abroad. While motivation is interesting to researchers, it is not only the motivation to travel, but to also speak another language in a foreign culture. If the motivation is low, perhaps it is related to a high level of anxiety on the part of the sojourner. Success of a study abroad is directly related, by some researchers, to levels of motivation and anxiety.

In the study, *Language Learners in Study Abroad Contexts*, DuFon and Churchill relate the success of student sojourns to the level of motivation to communicate while with a host family.

In their view, it is important to address the agency of the student who is travelling on the sojourn

(DuFon and Churchill 2006: 14). If a student is not motivated to speak the L2, the quality of the sojourn experience diminishes. If communication is minimal or nonexistent, students will not be able to learn from the host culture as much as they could if they were motivated to speak more. DuFon and Churchill refer to Yashima et al. who

found that students who scored higher on a measure of willingness to communicate prior to their departure did in fact spend more time communicating with host families during their early weeks abroad. Interestingly, learner willingness to communicate was not affected by differences in proficiency, but rather by differences in their perceived communicative competence. In other words, many students reporting that they wanted to take the initiative did not do so because they perceived their L2 English competence to be too low. In this way, it may not be the previous language learning experiences and the resulting proficiency levels in themselves that interact with motivation, but rather the learner's perception of their abilities once they find themselves in the host culture (DuFon and Churchill 2006: 15).

From this quotation, it is clear that Yashima et al. found that students who have lower self-confidence about their abilities to speak are in fact affected by it when in the host culture. Even though students were willing to speak in L2 pre-sojourn, their own perceptions about competence did deter their success when they actually found themselves on the sojourn experience. This is interesting because it confirms that sojourners may expect or believe that their sojourn will turn out a certain way, but personal issues can get in the way. So motivation can be affected by anxiety.

Not only is the agency important but the type of study abroad program. If the study abroad program relies on communication between participants in L2, it is important that students are selected upon the basis that they will desire to speak the language. It is important that students realize that the sojourn experience is one where one can better his or her speaking skills and that it is not important to be a "perfect" speaker of the language.

It is important to note the level of anxiety a student sojourner feels about communicating in L2. DuFon and Churchill (2006: 16-17) find "that some time is needed initially to adjust to communicating in the target language. This adjustment, and the resulting consequences for motivation and anxiety, can be susceptible to both the learner's strategies for socially integrating into the host culture and to the ways in which the learner is received." Host families and students will more likely have a successful time together when there is willingness from both sides to communicate in a common language. In the Comenius Project, it was desired that students would want to communicate in English and this was one of the goals of the program. Unfortunately, sometimes host families do not speak as well or competently as the student sojourners

themselves. One of the issues then, in the present study, is to reveal how much or little L2 was used between host families and sojourners, and how the experience relates to the sojourner's thoughts.

2.3.3 Program Organization and Sojourner Selection

It is apparent that choosing students for studies abroad is another issue to study. Educators and organizers of studies abroad have restrictions or methods to accept applicants who wish to travel on studies abroad. The following research study by Lilli and John Engle delves into items that play a role in organizing sojourn programs as well as affect the selection of sojourners.

Lilli and John Engle (2003) studied differing types of study abroad programs in the article, *Study Abroad Levels: Toward a Classification of Program Types*. Through their sample of programs, they found that there are seven very important factors to consider in study abroad programs. These important factors can help educators understand how to choose students for sojourn travels as well as provide helpful things to think about for students who are choosing study abroad programs. A list of questions must be formed, according to Lilli and John Engle (2003: 8), to interview students who potentially will be embarking upon study abroad. The following factors affect the process of selection of students for study abroad programs as well as program success. These “variables constitute an essential starting point for any form of level-based program classification” (Engle and Engle 2003: 8):

1. Length of student sojourn
2. Entry target-language competence
3. Language used in course work
4. Context of academic work
5. Types of student housing
6. Provisions for guided/structured cultural interaction and experiential learning
7. Guided reflection on cultural experience (Engle and Engle 2003: 8)

This list of important factors that Engle and Engle found to be the most important in considering how to go about planning to select sojourners and how to organize study abroad programs was

compiled to create a basic starting point for planning sojourns. It is important for study abroad programs, and sojourn that these items are considered in order for the student to fully acquire the benefits of a study abroad. Lilli and John Engle explain that through “the interaction of its varied components, study abroad helps students recognize and respect cultural difference and develop skills and a willingness to adapt to that difference” (Engle and Engle 2003: 19). It is important for educators of students who study abroad, as well as for program coordinators that they be aware of the impacts of study abroad and items to be considered for the program and/or student in question.

It is also interesting that Engle and Engle include the guided reflection on the sojourn, that one of the factors in a successful sojourn is the reflection afterward.

2.3.4 Experiences in another Culture and Identity Change

It is believed by some researcher that the act of embarking on a study abroad will cause identity change. In the case study, *Language, Identity and Study Abroad: Social Cultural Perspectives*, by Jane Jackson (2008), four participants were studied who travelled abroad in an English speaking country. A major factor in this study is that the participants are all young women of Asian background. The traditions, food, social practices and language in the host culture were different from their home country. Two of the women had positive experiences and two had negative ones. Jane Jackson gives many reasons for the differences of experiences. Out of these, the most causal factors were personal investment and attitude.

Jackson interviewed the four women before their sojourns, giving a personal history and background for each in her case study. She also interviewed them during their sojourns, studied the participants’ journal entries and also conducted post-sojourn interviews.

Jackson used the ideas of identity change in her study, and to this end, she referred to Bakhtin:

Bakhtin argued that the study of language and culture should address dialogic relations between cultures, between people, and between an individual and his/her culture(s) in particular social contexts (Holquist, 2002; Vitanova 2005). He maintained that these relations, as well as language and cultural development, must be linked to the concepts of identity and difference between Self and Other. (Jackson 2008:17)

The idea that Jackson underlines is that, through experiencing another culture, one finds a reference for learning more about the self. Through dialogue and social interactions, people are forced to communicate and compare and contrast themselves in relation to others, and this is where learning happens. This is similar to the concept of experiential learning by Kohonen et al. (2001), that people learn more about themselves by living life and experiencing otherness to find out more about the self.

Jackson explains that language is the important dominating factor for the study abroad. Students on study abroad may experience exclusion or difficulty in communicating. If there is a problem with communicating in the L2, sojourners may experience a feeling of not belonging. Jackson says that “language can be a powerful and visible symbol of a group’s identity or an individual’s affiliation with a group” (Jackson 2008: 37). The fact that English is used as a global language gives EFL learners and sojourners a sense of identity in relation to the world. Jackson reinforces this idea as follows:

The unique status of English, a global language, further impacts on how foreign language speakers of the language may view themselves in non-English speaking contexts. Arnett (2002), Kanno and Norton (2003), and Kramsch (1999), for example, have argued that the language can provide young ‘EFL’ learners with a sense of affiliation with a ‘constantly evolving imagined community’ of world citizens [...] their ‘global self’ may even become an integral part of their local identity (Ryan, 2006). This may then deepen their investment in mastering English, the language which functions as an emblem of their international persona (Jackson 2008: 39).

With the globalization of the world, students must identify not only with themselves as merely a member of one country and speaker of one language, but as a member of the world. Debate about the lingua franca has erupted in the European Union, whether or not English should be the one language across the EU countries. English is the language of choice for the Comenius project and is the most common second language which is taught in all of the EU countries (as well as other non-English speaking countries). Jackson refers to the importance of “the role that the process of globalization is now playing in the reconstruction of identities. Arnett, for example, has argued that young people today may develop both local and global identities that afford them a ‘sense of belonging to a worldwide culture’ (Arnett, 2002:32)” (Jackson 2008: 33).

The effect of the host family makes a difference to the sojourner's experience as well. It is important to note the social context that the participants perceive themselves to be part of or not a part of. During the sojourn interviews, Jackson found that the participants who had helpful, accepting host families were more ready to invest in the experience. The participants who "perceive their hosts to be receptive and supportive may find their stays fulfilling and, subsequently, be more open to personal/linguistic expansion and identity reconstruction" (Jackson 2008: 47.) The key word here, is *perceive*, because humans construct a reality based on their perceptions of what is around them. If an individual from a collectivist culture or with an Asian background perceives it rude that an English individualistic culture trait is to constantly question or interfere in her personal space, the perception could be that this is rude or non-supportive. In Jackson's study (2008), the participants were all of Asian ethnicity living with English host families. Half of the participants in her study reported feeling unappreciated or as outsiders because of their differences in tolerance levels. Host culture traditions or social politeness was perceived to be the opposite of polite by two of the participants because of their own difficulty to understand the other culture. This directly affected the success of their experiences. Jackson explained that the participants could be observing behavior to be rude when the host family was really trying to be quite accommodating without any intention of causing discomfort. It could also be true that the host family had no idea how to tolerate or adapt their own behaviors to adjust to the culture of the sojourner. This is caused by the differences within understanding behaviors in collectivist vs. individualistic communities.

It has been argued that there are many dimensions of issues that need to be understood about differing types of cultures, and that tolerance is something that needs to be learned and gained through experience (Gudykunst 2003). For example, in a collectivist culture (Asian countries along with others), behavior is based on a collective goal while in an individualistic culture (U.S.A., Canada, U.K), individuals behave toward an individual goal. Misunderstandings are common across cultures as people view behaviors from a framework of their own values, beliefs and norms that they have come to learn from their own cultures. Cultures are different in the way that reality is constructed within communities. For example, collectivists can view individuals to be too intimate in behavior and language, and individualists can perceive collectivists to be too distant (Gudykunst 2003).

What is important is how the individual sees him or herself within a group to identify him or herself through cultural boundaries. Jackson refers to Ting-Toomey and Chung who “observed that social identity accounts for ‘how different groups perceive their own and others’ group membership identity issues” (Jackson 2008: 33). Perhaps participants in Jackson’s study felt themselves so excluded in another type of culture that it was too difficult to assimilate.

In the present study, students are interviewed on these issues about whether the host culture presented any difficulties with the sojourner’s experience. It is important that students invest in their experience by trying to accept and tolerate their differences in order to create a positive experience. In relation to the amount of energy sojourner’s put into their experience, the place or the culture that they are in will directly relate to what kind of a sojourn it is. It is also important how much the host culture tries in the situation.

Jackson’s study focuses on the way that these participants communicated with their new social context in a foreign country. These participants had differing perceptions of their host families as well as the culture of England. Depending on how they perceived themselves in the country and how others perceived them within their perceptions defined the amount of involvement with others. The *process of engagement* has been termed by theorists as communities of practice (Jackson 2008: 41) . The CoP or community of practice is the social context in which the participant communicates with others and it provides the basis for that particular experience.

While visitors need to be aware of cultural differences and respect them, Ting-Toomey (2005: 221) believes that the host cultures or families also need to be “gracious, respectful hosts,” and the newcomers also need to be “‘willing-to-learn guests’ who are ‘open to constructive identity change’” (Jackson 2008: 53). If the student does not invest in the experience, perhaps the result on the participant will be negative.

Jackson describes the experience of a student who makes a short-term sojourn to another culture:

L2 sojourners, for example, may be separated from their parents and closest friends to travel to a foreign land, where they live with people (‘strangers’) from the host culture (e.g., in a homestay). During their stay abroad, the students may gain exposure to new linguistic and cultural practices (to varying degrees) and enter a ‘liminal state’ (transitional phase). Short-term sojourners may experience ‘temporary liminality’ as they participate in activities which allow them to transform from one social state to another without permanent change. During this phase, they may initially be treated as ‘guests’ or ‘peripheral members’ of the host culture and not be expected to perform the full range of tasks that are required of ‘core’ members in the homestay (Jackson 2008: 54) .

In shorter sojourns, participants will not normally feel the pressure of having to adjust or assimilate into the ways of the foreign culture. In the present study, students only sojourned for four days and five nights, and did not feel the need to become Spanish, Slovakian or Italian during their stay. They were asked in the interviews if they thought that they had changed as a result of the experience. Some did feel that the cultural experience changed them and others did not.

The success of living with a host family relies heavily on the attitude of the visitor as well as the readiness of the hosts to accept him or her. If either partner does not enter the situation with agency to succeed, it will most likely be a failure. Jackson defines agency as “the ability to understand and control one’s own action” and explains that it is a major factor in how a sojourner’s experience will *unfold* (Jackson 2008: 211). Jackson found that two of the four sojourners experienced welcoming host families and had positive experiences that allowed them to experience “identity expansion and developed a deeper understanding and appreciation of both Chinese and English cultures. By contrast, Ada and Cori sensed a ‘lack of mutuality’ in the host environment; they were more resistant to cultural differences, language learning and identity reconstruction.” (Jackson 2008: 69) The sojourns in Jackson’s study consisted of a longer time frame of five weeks, and therefore the identity change was more profound than can be expected from the short sojourns of the present study.

Directly related to the present study, is the impact of the relationship between sojourner and host family in the country of sojourn. The dynamics of the situation are of interest to the present study – and how the culture, host family and sojourner’s own investment in the sojourn affected the experience.

In sum, Jackson’s study (2008) presents research on the factors that led to the negative experiences of two participants who did not learn to tolerate or invest in their own sojourns as well as the factors which led to the positive experiences of two other participants who were able to see the positive things in their differences of culture. Not only was it important in her study for the participants to want to learn from the culture but to be aware of how the host family behaved, and for what reasons. In the present study, students travelled to Spain, Slovakia and Italy where social customs may differ from their Finnish culture. In the interviews for the present study, students were asked how well they communicated and fared in their host cultures.

2.3.5 Ethnographic Pedagogical Evaluation

In the case study, *Ethnographic Pedagogy and Evaluation in Short-Term Study Abroad* by Jane Jackson, (2006: 134-156) an ethnographic approach is used to monitor the changes of sojourners. In ethnographic research, the observer or researcher is present throughout the sojourn to conduct the study. As in her earlier case study with the four Asian participants who travelled to England, Jackson used the experiences and views of the sojourners as her data. She explained that:

Ethnography can identify the individual, contextual and cultural factors that influence language and cultural learning by capturing the sojourners' views about their goals and experiences (e.g. their intercultural contact, attitudes towards members of the target culture). An ethnographic approach can monitor changes in the sojourners (e.g. their intercultural adjustment, the development of their intercultural communicative competence) and ascertain how the various elements of the study and residence abroad have or have not influenced their thinking and/or behavior. (Jackson 2006: 137)

Ethnography involves collecting data and analyzing it over time. It involves “describing and monitoring the process of change. It is also an approach that is useful in studying natural phenomena” (Jackson 2006: 137). In the present study, the short time of the sojourn would have caused problems in collecting ethnographic data, but for future Comenius Projects, it could be beneficial to study the effects of the sojourn during the actual event rather than only interview and reflect afterwards. In the present study, as leader of the group from Finland, I was able to observe the students during their sojourns.

It is not uncommon for students to experience an initial culture shock or some homesickness on their sojourns. Jackson found that “most of the students had not been away from home before, not surprisingly, most were homesick and doubted their ability to cope early in the sojourn” (Jackson 2006: 142). She also reported the fact that the students had avoided contact with their hosts, because they had difficulty living with strangers and felt anxiety. This issue will also be addressed in the present study's interview questions.

From Jackson's study (2006), the present study draws on the factors which affected sojourner's levels of homesickness and/or adjustment to the host culture in regards to the success of the experience. In connection with the emic or insider's view, as Jackson has in her study, my own experience with the sojourners of the present study is one of an observer. Unfortunately, the

present study does not benefit from my presence because there was no data collected from the sojourn other than mere observation.

2.3.6 Results and Effects of Sojourns

Michael J. Flack (1976) writes about the difficulty of measuring the *Results and Effects of Study Abroad*. He relates sojourn experiences to the action of learning. He notes that “the emphasis on the evaluation of results may in time lead to a more deliberate and comprehensive articulation, research, and thus knowledge of the many interacting and parallel factors that enter into and affect the dynamics of intercultural learning, encounters, and transfers of experience, and of their role in the all-important area of ‘knowledge-in-action’”(Flack 1976: 108). It is difficult to measure effects and results of studies abroad. The difficulty with trying to measure or analyze results and effects of sojourns and studies abroad is that they are based on assumptions and also that researchers often use “inadequate differentiation and articulation of the concept of results itself: Results of what? on who? on what? due to which whats? in what sequence, combination and “sensitive areas”? as of when? over what duration?” (Flack 1976: 108) In Flack’s study, he deals with the results of study abroad in four sections, the “Effects on (1) the individual, (2) the host institution and society, (3) the home society, and (4) intersocietal and international relations” (Flack 1976: 109).

In the first section of studying effects on individuals, Flack lists eight subsections of findings. He notes the following effects on individuals:

1. Improvement in the competent use of the English language
2. The achievement of a United States academic degree
3. The specialized competence acquired in the field of major study
4. The experience and awareness of alternate or additional models of social institutions, roles, behaviors, and values
5. The establishment during the sojourn of acquaintances and relationships with host-country persons (faculty, fellow students, community persons, friends)
6. Familiarization during the sojourn with a wide range of sources of professional and general information
7. In the psycho-social realm, the sojourn and educational experience tends to engender a more sophisticated, differentiated, personalized and concretized knowledge and perception of the host society
8. A heightened, varyingly continuing interest in events, developments, publications about, and general news from or about the society of former residence and study, thus an effort to keep informed (Flack 1976: 110-111).

Flack finds that attitude changes have been studied in relation to sojourn and shows that as a result of foreign studies abroad, students do change (Flack 1976: 116). He mentions that previous research also points to the fact that participants usually “perceive themselves to have changed “for the better” in knowledge, personal and professional competence, self-assuredness, and in a sense of enhanced resourcefulness, effectiveness, and ambition” (Flack 1976: 116).

The main benefit of Flack’s study in relation to the present study is that students who sojourn will be affected by the experience. Attitude changes and improvement in the competency of English as a language are of the most interest.

2.3.7 Grounded Theory Approach to Study Abroad

Gertrud Tarp’s (Tarp 2006: 157-185) illustrates another approach to studying sojourners in her grounded theory study on student perspectives in short-term studies abroad. Instead of beginning with a theory about the experiences of students, her goal is to build a theory as a result of the student accounts. Tarp’s (Tarp 2006: 157) “findings focus on student outcome seen from a student perspective, and recommendations are made on the basis of the findings. The method applied is grounded theory, which is empirically agency focused. It offers specific tools to collect and analyze data and to generate a theory grounded in the data” (Tarp 2006: 157). Tarp places emphasis on the goals and motivational reasons for the sojourns. In Tarp’s study, the students’ goals are defined:

- to learn a foreign language, i.e. communication in the host country language or in English as a lingua franca
- to experience otherness, i.e. all kinds of experiences related to the foreign culture at all levels from sightseeing to experiencing everyday life.
- to experience class solidarity, i.e. socialization with other students in the sojourn experience from their own country
- to develop oneself, i.e. the students’ wish to develop, apart from linguistic skills, their own awareness, knowledge and skills, which are included in language learning (Tarp 2006: 161).

Tarp collects information about the students’ experiences through asking them questions related to where they spent their time; the places they went to, who they were with and what happened during the sojourn. What was also seen as important, was the social experience: living with a host family, educational situations (schools, classrooms and projects), and entertainment (pubs,

shopping and bars) (Tarp 2006). Tarp collected her data by asking the students to tell their own experiences (Tarp 2006). The present study uses semi-structured interviews to collect the data of the sojourners' experiences so that they can share their stories through narratives.

Some students in Tarp's study realized that they needed to adapt and that they needed to change in order to "fulfill their expectations," through actions such as: "adapt, compare, cooperate, learn, go sightseeing and socialize" (Tarp 2006: 162-3).

In connection to the present study, the students are interviewed about how they spent their time during the sojourns and what kinds of changes the students needed to make in order to reach their goals during the experience.

Tarp (Tarp 2006: 164) notes that when comparing student agendas with EU and local school requirements, it appears that for the school it was important to learn a foreign language and to experience "otherness in terms of a foreign culture". For students, the focus was on "experiencing class solidarity," and "developing oneself" (Tarp 2006: 164). So there was a difference in the expectations of students and educators involved in the study. Again, this is an important concept to consider in study abroad projects and in the present study it is a question that needs to be discovered in relation to the young sojourners' experiences.

It is said that for these EU sojourns to be effective, "a greater degree of student involvement is necessary" (Tarp 2006: 167). Furthermore, "important aspects when dealing with student exchanges are therefore: student agenda, student access to foreign culture, and student interaction with foreign culture" (Tarp 2006: 167). Also, the students need a task, they need to be included in the exchange and have "focus on what to investigate about the foreign culture, how to investigate it, and how to evaluate the exchange." (Tarp 2006: 167) They need to engage in the learning during their sojourns, not just to travel and go from one place to another. Students need debriefing before and after the sojourns – to understand the purpose(s) of the experience.

In Tarp's (Tarp 2006) view, students need to be engaged in tasks which cause them to communicate and involve themselves with the people in the foreign culture. The important methods of conduct for student sojourns includes "improving teacher access to students to learn about student exchange agendas, increasing students' awareness of the exchange process, and

increasing the involvement of students in the exchange planning” (Tarp 2006: 167). Involving the students in the planning of their own sojourn experiences can only benefit the experience.

In sum, if future projects work on fulfilling these issues, Tarp believes that the sojourns will be successful in relation to school expectations. In relation to the present study, it is important to address the need to compare the expectations of the project organizers and the sojourners themselves to find compatibility and to review whether the experiences were successful or not.

2.4 Relation of Previous Research and Theories of Sojourns to the Present Study

Previous research shows that individuals who embark upon studies abroad or travel on sojourns to foreign countries have several issues to contend with before, during and after their experiences. What those issues are and how they affect the lives of the students is important. It is important to learn from previous studies that these items need to be considered when asking individuals about their sojourns so that their reflections show whether they have had similar or different experiences. Future researchers can also find new ways to study sojourn experiences through using past research to do future research. The present study is formulated upon the interest of myself, a teacher who travelled with the participating students to three foreign countries. As an observer and organizer of the short sojourns, I wanted to investigate how the project affected the students who experienced it. Through prior research, I was able to think about what was important to ask the participating students and learned that short-term sojourns involve important factors pre-sojourn, sojourn and post-sojourn in regards to experience.

The students in this Comenius Project were put in to a situation in which they needed to assess their own situation within a host family and a host culture. They had to adapt to a different culture with a second language. The previous research and studies discussed above give insight into the types of experiences this study wants to analyze. The previous studies provide background information that is used to understand those experiences and draw on the results of the sojourns. The results of the experiences assessed in the present study will point to show educators and future sojourners what types of relevant changes should be made to short sojourns like this present study’s Comenius project in question. The results also show what types of positive changes occur for the students involved in these types of sojourns.

Tarp's and Jackson's approaches to doing semi-open questionnaires, journals and interviews in semi-structured fashions gave a basis for this study to begin finding data. Although, the present study cannot be ethnographic in nature because the data is collected after the fact, the interviews that created narratives produce information that is related to these previous studies. Through reading the previous research, as an interviewer, I was able to formulate the questions I wanted to ask about the experiences of the participants in the present study.

3 SET UP OF THE PRESENT STUDY

The present study is based on the analysis of the interviews conducted on five students who participated in short-term sojourns to foreign countries. The five Finnish students were 12-13 years of age during the sojourn. Some of them were older during their time hosting foreign students. The interviews were conducted from six months to a year and nine months after the sojourns. The interview questions were constructed as a result of studying previous studies in regards to issues including pre-sojourn, sojourn, post-sojourn/re-entry, and reflection. Along with these issues that affect the experiences of the sojourners, hosting a foreign student also played a role in the project being studied. How do the sojourners view the alternate experience of being a host to a foreign student in connection with their own understanding of the phenomenon of living in a host country? The student interviews were based upon memory. In the case of the present study, recalling the experience and its effects is a time for reflection. The reflection upon the past experience allowed for the sojourners as well as the educator to gather important gains about the experiences. The gain is the knowledge that the sojourn experience had in general. Specifically, the present study is a reflection upon the short-term sojourns and what the positive and negative issues are so that future projects can benefit.

3.1 Aims and Research Questions

Sojourn experiences interest me as a researcher, because an educator, I am interested in the effects of experiential education upon students. As a result, I became concerned with the after-effects of the Comenius Project I was involved in, in which I observed five of the participants during their sojourns that are the basis of the data for this study. The main research question that this study is trying to address:

q) What effects do short-term sojourns have on the attitudes, lives and education of young Finnish adolescents?

Also, the study attempts to compare and contrast the experiences of students who hosted foreign students in their own home country after their sojourn with that of a student who hosted pre-sojourn. This empirical research seeks to produce results that show how the short-term sojourn experiences of adolescent-aged children in a Comenius Project include a variety of affects. The study is conducted by analyzing the narrative interviews of the participants in question. The five

students are interviewed using semi-structured interviews to cue the interviewees to answer thematic questions which in turn provide a basis for expanding on the issues with real-life experiences. The results will show what kinds of positive results educators can expect for the students involved, while also warning educators what factors and issues to be aware of that can affect the success of future sojourns.

3.1.1 Description of the Short-term Sojourn

The Comenius Project titled EU & I, involved 9 countries in the United Nations. The countries involved were Finland, Holland, Turkey, Italy, Spain, Slovenia, Slovakia, Romania and Portugal. The schools that were involved in the project were required to apply to CIMO for the Comenius Project stipend. The stipend funds were used for travel and other supplies needed to successfully execute the project. The aim of the project was to foster the learning of students in respect to their own personal idea of how he or she fits into the European Union as a member of his or her particular country. EU & I therefore refers to an individual's identity within the European Union.

The first meeting for the project took place in Portugal where teachers from all the participating countries were invited to present information about their school, the students and some more information about their country. At this meeting, teachers decided on how to facilitate communication between the students, deadlines for the project's final product and the schedule for future meetings. The project was divided into two parts:

In the first school year, students will answer the question: 'What should tourists know about your country?' They will post the answers on a common blog and comment the work from other partners. At the end of the school year, they will create a quiz about the countries in the project.

In the second school year, schools will find the words and phrases that tourists should know when they visit their country. They will illustrate and record them and make short videos. Then they will write the English translations, Together with the other schools, they will compile and organize a multimedia dictionary (comenius_euandi_blogspot).

The Comenius Project's aim was to immerse students in another culture in order to learn languages and learn about other student's cultures. In the present study, the goals were to increase cultural awareness, language use and recognition of the self in relation to the United Nations of Europe.

Part one involved students creating a blog for their own country in which they would write short explanations about nine topics. The nine topics were Sports, Food & Drink, Tourist Information, Physical Geography, Music, Art, Tourist Attractions, Folklore & Traditions, and Festivals.

Part two involved creating word lists, sentences and dialogues by the students. These texts were formed to create a language dictionary from which students could read, listen and try to speak each other's languages with the lingua franca of English. The words and phrases were audio-recorded and the dialogues were video-recorded. These were all placed on the blog and later all of the information on the blogs were collected and placed on DVDs that could be shared at each of the schools in the future.

The second meeting took place in Slovakia where 2 students from 8 of the countries (except Italy) travelled to stay with host families of the Slovakian students. At this meeting, students were required to share information about how they spend Easter in their own country, including religious beliefs, traditions and crafts. At the school, students were exposed to cultural dances and songs as well as had the opportunity to attend a school dance for fun. The students visited castles, museums, restaurants, shops and a swimming pool while also spending time with their own host families.

At the third meeting in Spain, 2 students from each of the 8 other participating countries stayed with host families again and prepared to participate in a quiz about the cultural information on the blogs. Students had studied the information of two other countries, so that they were not overwhelmed with work before their travels. The quiz was performed in the school in Spain. Students and teachers had the opportunity to see Spanish dancing and culture. The students visited museums, a national park and spent a lot of time at the school and with host families.

At the fourth meeting in Finland, the students from the school in Finland hosted students from the other countries (except Italy). Three students from previous sojourns on the Comenius Project from the Finnish school had moved on to junior secondary school but wanted to participate as hosts for the meeting. At this meeting, students had a chance to practice speaking each other's languages in a drama exercise at the Finnish school. The Comenius Project participants travelled to see Santa Claus, bowled, swam and tried skiing, snowshoeing and tobogganing.

The fifth and final meeting in Italy involved the playing of games that students and teachers had organized to conclude the project in a fun way. Students and teachers visited castles, beaches and restaurants. Students spent a lot of free time with host families and other students.

The final product was the DVD which included all of the information that had been posted on the blogs. The DVD was gifted to each school so that the work could be shared with students in the entire school.

After the project, all of the countries involved were required to send a final report to their own country's CIMO head office.

3.2 Collection of Data

Semi-structured interviews were the best option for collecting the data for this study, because it is specifically the experiences of the students who participated on the short sojourns that I was interested in. I wanted to have the students reflect on their own experiences while being able to share them with me in a narrative form. In addition, I wanted the students to feel free to tell their stories in a way that did not constrict them. By using semi-structured questions (refer to Appendix 1 - the interview question form) in themes of background, pre-sojourn, sojourn, post-sojourn/re-entry, reflection and questions about hosting a foreign student, participants were prodded to answer by giving narrative explanations about each theme. Through the use of narrative discourse, the students remembered more events and recalled more information through telling. As they answered the interview questions, which were used as cues to trigger their narratives, the students expanded in their answers. However, to ensure that the students provided enough material, I created a semi-structured interview questionnaire from which I could steer the students in the right direction. When given prompts, cues and specific guidelines to start from, many of the participants were able to remember more from their experience by focusing on a specific aspect rather than the whole of the sojourn. Some students did not talk as much as the others, and therefore some of the interview questions were repeated in different sections of the interview in the hopes of gathering more information. For example, in the present study, one of the areas of focus was to uncover the participants' goals, expectations, and anxieties before the journey. Also, the present study asked students what the most difficult parts or stressful situations

were during the sojourn along with post-sojourn questions regarding what the students learned about themselves as a result of the sojourn in the format of reflection.

Each participant agreed to participate voluntarily in the study. Five of the six that were asked agreed. The parents signed permission forms which allowed me to interview their children as well as to use the information in the data analysis of this study (refer to Appendix 2 – permission form). The interviews were approximately forty minutes in length and occurred in a casual setting. The participant was asked whether he or she would prefer to do the interview in the researcher's home or theirs. Two participants were male and three were female. Each interview was done by recording the conversation with a MP3 and a video camera. The video camera was not used to video the participant but to record the conversation, therefore it was turned to face the wall. As a result, the participants felt less anxiety about the interview.

The interviews were audio recorded, and the audios were then transcribed into a Finnish text. The Finnish text of each participant's own interview was translated into English. This was done by playing the audio recordings back and translating them sentence by sentence from Finnish into English. Using the theory that meaning cannot be translated word for word (Hatim and Mason 1990), as a native speaker of English, I translated the texts as close as possible in regards to meaning. The narratives of each of the participants were read and the data was organized into the common themes of narrative. The data analysis is organized by topic or theme and the narratives are compared and contrasted to find important information about young adolescents' short sojourn experiences. All student names have been changed from their originals to protect their identities. The names of foreign students have also been changed to protect them as well.

The data was then placed into a section of reference: background, pre-sojourn, sojourn and post-sojourn. In each of the sections of analysis, the information was placed in a graph form to allow the researcher to cross reference the experiences, to compare and contrast them. The sections of analysis contain explanations of each section of comparison. The results are discussed across themes and sections to explore what differences these short-term sojourns have with previous studies and what types of results occurred in the experiences of the participants in question. The discussion attempts to make sense of all of the data and come to a conclusion about what the effects of short-term sojourns like the one in the present study have on young students. It also

attempts to come to summarize how this information can be useful in future studies and sojourn projects.

3.2.1 The Translation of the Narratives

The interview questions were originally composed in English, because my mother tongue is English. As a result, if the interview questions were written in Finnish, it would be more difficult for me to ask the questions in a semi-structured way. It was closer to the original intent of the present study to formulate the questions in the same language that this study is written. When asking the questions, however, I used Finnish to make sure that the Finnish participants understood what I was asking. Fortunately, my ability in the two languages made it possible for me to translate the texts from Finnish into English well enough to give reliability to the data collected. I grew up learning how to speak Finnish in Canada, but all of my background teacher education has been conducted in the English language. Because of my bilingual abilities being weak in the form of Finnish writing, I wanted to conduct my interviews in the most neutral yet effective way to get the most reliable data. If I had tried to write the interview questions in Finnish, I would have made significant errors that would have made my interviewing process difficult. I am able, however, to explain the question in the Finnish language so that the students can clearly understand what I am asking. The best choice for collecting the data was to translate directly from English to Finnish and back to English. The students were happy to receive the interview questions in English prior to the interview, to get an idea of what I would ask. They were informed that I would ask the same questions, but in Finnish. After the semi-structured interviews were recorded in the Finnish language, I moved the audio recordings to my computer from where I listened to each student's narratives and typed them out in Finnish. After typing the interviews in Finnish, I proceeded to translate the text into English on a Microsoft word document.

Translation is a complicated method which can cause some problems with the reliability of data. For example, according to Hatim and Mason (1990):

translators are inevitably acting under the pressure of their own social conditioning while at the same time trying to assist in the negotiation of meaning between the producer of the source-language text (ST) and the reader of the target-language text (TT), both of whom exist within their own, different social frameworks. In studying this complex process at work, we are in effect

seeking insights which take us beyond translation itself towards the whole relationship between language activity and the social context in which it takes place (Hatim & Mason 1990: 1).

The translation of the narratives was also very difficult because there were some instances of having to reform the sentence into something structurally manageable. Words cannot always be translated verbatim because the meaning of the text would be misconstrued. For example, Hatim and Mason argue, “in translating metaphor, for example, there is little point in seeking to match target-language words with those in the ST in isolation from a consideration of the writer’s whole world-view” (Hatim & Mason 1990: 4) and the writer must work in “distinguishing **formal equivalence** (closest possible match of form and content between ST and TT) and **dynamic equivalence** (principle of equivalence of effect on reader of TT)” (Hatim & Mason 1990: 7). The most common form of translation is the dynamic equivalence because of the fact that languages vary so much in structure and form. Therefore, it is more important to focus on the semantic meanings in translations, and try to find a way to keep true to the original text while giving the reader the correct intended meaning. Hatim and Mason believe that this is the most common strategy used in translations, to attempt to provide a text which gives more of the same meaning than an exact translation which can render the text’s original intention into something different. Hatim and Mason share the four most important things that a translation should be:

1. making sense;
 2. conveying the spirit and manner of the original;
 3. having a natural and easy form of expression;
 4. producing a similar response
- (Nida 1964: 164 as cited in Hatim and Mason 1990: 16).

Translation, then, is a negotiation of words and texts to attempt to address and share the information in a sensible manner that evokes as much of the true meaning as possible from the original language. If these narratives had been translated word for word by a formal equivalence style, the meaning of the interviews would have been lost. Therefore, as a native English speaker who learned Finnish as a first language in Canada, I have taken the liberty of translating the Finnish interviews into a meaningful text for the reader, which encompasses as much of the meaning and intention of the original speakers as possible.

In the work of Asad, it is explained that the “process of translating always involves discrimination, interpretation, appraisal, and selection. It calls for a constant awareness of the limits and possibilities of translating adequately from one language to another” (Asad 1995: 326).

In other words, any form of translation will be changing a text within the frame of knowledge that the translator him/herself deems adequate. Most importantly, in the translation of the present study, an awareness was necessary on my behalf to use wording in English that conveyed meaning as close to the Finnish text as possible.

The work of Hatim and Mason (1990) gave me, as a researcher, the courage to translate the Finnish narratives of these five participants into a meaningful English text that is reliable and as close to meaning as possible. The data that was collected for the present study gained more validity and reliability as a result of coming to a confident understanding that the text could be translated while trying to stay as close to the wording as possible without changing the meaning.

3.3 Method of Analysis

This study uses a qualitative research style in which empirical data is found through the use of semi-structured interviews. Qualitative interviewing can be defined as “intended to refer to in-depth semi-structured or loosely structured forms of interviewing, [...] ‘conversations with a purpose’ (Burgess 1984: 102 as cited in Mason 1996: 38). The reason for choosing the interview method is my own ontological position in the belief that there are true facts in the knowledge or the sharing of one’s own experience through conversation. I believe that for educators, it is important to be listeners of their students and to pay attention to what their experiences around education are. An ontological position “suggests that peoples’ knowledge, views, understandings, interpretations, experiences, and interactions are meaningful properties of the social reality which [the] research questions are designed to explore” (Mason 1996: 39). This interview method is useful to the present study because the data is collected on the basis that the narratives of the participants in question contain the relevant information to answer the research question. The data must be shared with the reader in a form which addresses the content in a way that the information is passed as close to original intent as possible.

It was important for me as a researcher to practice the interview. After doing a practice interview with a volunteer male aged thirteen, the questions in the interview were organized into themes within a time frame of sections: pre-sojourn, sojourn, post-sojourn. The reliability of the interview process was strengthened by the practice interview (reliability through pre-testing the interview method is important). Before interviewing the participants for the present study, the

researcher pre-tested the questions and interview method. It is argued “that narrative analysis works through examining the nature and sources of the ‘frame of explanation’ used by the interviewee” (Silverman 1993: 100).

Many times, during the interviews, students provided answers that connected with other questions, therefore the data had to be analyzed in topic categories rather than question by question. I found that it was useful “to identify interpretive themes in [my] data upon which to construct [my] analysis and [my] argument” (Mason 1996: 41). The method for organizing the data was to handle each participant’s narrative as a case study, but they were then placed into thematic data where the narratives could be cross-referenced to each other. The data had to be organized into smaller tables so that the reader can readily see the similarities and differences of the data. This is shown in the analysis by providing graphs that show the information gathered per participant. The sequence of questions was based on the actual progression of the experience itself, as a timeline.

After placing the information in order of time-related events, the student narratives were cross-referenced for similarities and differences. The results of the present study are gathered by discussing the narrative experiences of the participants. By realizing that there were themes of information gathered, and the themes run through all of the students’ experiences, conclusions could be drawn about the effects of the sojourns on these students. The results were discussed by section of interview and combine the results found throughout the thematic organization.

The analysis of the data is set up in sections to cover the background information for each participant, their pre-sojourn experiences, sojourn experiences, and post-sojourn experiences (including reflection, re-entry and hosting a foreign student). Each section contains a series of graphs for each theme to show the reader the data for that section of analysis. Themes of answers from the interviews were constructed in relation to whether the data reflected information about background, pre-sojourn, sojourn, or post-sojourn. Within each of these four sections of information, the present study shows the narrative text given by each participant. The results are cross-referenced between the participant’s experiences to draw references about their experiences. The method of analyzing the data ascertained from the interviews was done by placing the narrative texts in similar themes, cross-referencing the texts and finding similarities and differences in the sojourn experiences.

4 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The analysis section covers the data collected from the semi-structured interviews. This section is organized into thematic sections including background information, pre-sojourn, sojourn, and post-sojourn topics. Within each thematic section, the information is organized into several small tables in order to handle the data more efficiently. The data is then commented upon in connection to the research question: What effects do short-term sojourns have on the attitudes, lives and education of young Finnish adolescents?

The data is organized into sections that cover wide ranges of themes. To make the data accessible, each section commences with a short explanation and a graph containing important data in the themes. The sections are Background Information of the Participants, Pre-sojourn, Sojourn, and Post-Sojourn Reflection.

4.1 Background Information of the Participants

The ages of the students ranged between 13 and 14 during the interviews and the personal situations of sojourn and hosting were different for each participant. Table 1 describes the key differences and similarities between these students. It is important to be aware of each participant's background in order to compare and contrast their experiences for the analysis of the data in this study.

The participants consisted of three girls and two boys. Important to note is that one of the students hosted a foreign student before her own sojourn and this related to her own experience later. Also, one of the other participants did not host a foreign student at all during the Comenius Project, and his experience is compared with the other students' experiences who did host a foreign student.

Table 1 also shows the country and time of sojourn for each participant.

Table 1. The participants

| Participants | Age at Sojourn | Age at Interview | Gender | Place of Sojourn | Time of Sojourn | Hosted Foreign Student after Sojourn | Hosted Foreign Student Prior to Sojourn | Time of Hosting |
|--------------|----------------|------------------|--------|------------------|-----------------|--|---|-----------------|
| Mari | 12 | 14 | Female | Slovakia | February 2010 | Hosted the same student from sojourn | no | January 2011 |
| Anna-Kaisa | 12 | 14 | Female | Slovakia | February 2010 | Hosted the same student from sojourn | no | January 2011 |
| Pekka | 13 | 14 | Male | Spain | May 2010 | no | no | none |
| Jussi | 12 | 14 | Male | Spain | May 2010 | Hosted a different boy from country of sojourn | no | January 2011 |
| Iiris | 12 | 13 | Female | Italy | May 2011 | no | Hosted a student from Spain | January 2011 |

The family dynamics, ages, hometown, hobbies, and language(s) spoken at home are important background factors so that the data can be compared and contrasted. The background of the students can determine or be a cause for similarities or differences in the analysis of the data because it can affect the answers given during the interviews. The students were from the same town in Northwestern Finland, and attended the same school. Their L1 is Finnish, and they have all studied English in school since grade three. At the time of the sojourn, the students were in grade six and were of 12 or 13 years of age. The interviews were conducted during the months of November and December of 2011. The result is that some of the participants had a longer lapse of time between the sojourn and the interview period than others. It is unclear if this affected the study, except that the sojourn memory was fresher for some students than others. Next, the backgrounds of each individual participant will be described in more detail.

Jussi, fourteen, has always lived in the same city with his family. He has a younger sister and his mother is a police officer and his father is a laborer. His hobbies include playing volleyball and

sometimes floorball. He travelled to Spain when he was twelve years old, and stayed with a Spanish boy there. He hosted another Spanish male student in Finland. Jussi, then, had the experience of living with two different boys from Spain. He still keeps in contact with the boy whom he hosted. According to Jussi, he believes that the success of hosting a foreign student relied heavily upon his own experiences of sojourning earlier. He had learned and felt what it was like to live in a strange place with strangers, and therefore, he was able to adapt in the situation of hosting better.

Iiris, thirteen, has always lived in the same mid-western Finnish city. At home, her family has always spoken only Finnish. She has a little brother who goes to the same school. Iiris's hobbies are volleyball and baseball. She reports, "I spend my free time more with my friends, it always depends what kind of weather it is, do I want to go anywhere or do I have a lot of homework or something. But I am usually with my friends." Her parents are both working middle class people. Her mother is a health nurse, and father is an electrician. Iiris first accommodated a student from Spain in her home and she then travelled to Italy where she lived with an Italian female student. Iiris was the only student who hadn't stayed with a host family earlier, so she didn't have experience in understanding the feelings of her foreign visitor. She did, however, have the advantage of being a host before her sojourn, so that she had some experience in the type of situation she would be in.

Mari is a fourteen year old girl who enjoys horse-back riding and Zumba. She is from a middle class working family. Her mother, a salesperson for a steel factory and father, unemployed are both from Finland and they have always lived in the same town. Mari sometimes speaks English at home with her mother, and practices a little Swedish as well. She has an older brother who is also a very conscientious student and skilled in English. Mari travelled to Slovakia and lived with the same female student whom she also hosted in Finland. Mari had the privilege of spending sojourn and hosting time with the same individual from Slovakia and was able to build a strong relationship. She also knew more about the visiting student who was coming to stay with her and was able to prepare more than other students were able to.

Anna-Kaisa reported that her L1 is Finnish. Her family has always lived in the same town and she is single child. Her mother is a daycare teacher and father is a technology engineer and teaches at the adult education center. She was fourteen at the time of the interview. When asked

about what she does with her free time, Anna-Kaisa shared, “horse-back riding and then Zumba and then I draw and listen to music and sometimes hang out with my friends.” When asked if she prefers to be alone or with friends, Anna-Kaisa answered, “Maybe alone or with a smaller group of friends.” She was twelve during the Comenius project and travelled to Slovakia. She lived with the same female student whom she also hosted in Finland. Anna-Kaisa had the same experience as Mari in that they were both hosted by and hosted the same person.

Pekka, fourteen, has always lived in the same city. His L1 is Finnish. He has two older brothers. His mother works for a cleaning company and father for a factory. Pekka plays hockey and trains “three to four times a week.” They have always spoken Finnish at home. He was thirteen when he travelled to Spain and lived with a Spanish male host student, but did not host anyone in Finland because of his hockey schedule.

In sum, all of the participants attended the same school, spoke Finnish at home, have hobbies and are social with friends. This information gives the participants a common situation from which the data was received. The differences between them include the places of sojourn and the time of hosting a foreign student. In addition, one participant, Pekka, did not host a foreign student, so his interview does not contain any information about the experience of hosting in his own home country. Iris, in turn, was the only student who hosted a student from a different country of her own sojourn, as well as hosting before her sojourn, therefore, her experience was different. She experienced being a host in her own country to a foreign girl from Spain, which of course, prepared her in a different way to experience her own sojourn in Italy later. It is also possible that the countries of sojourn affected the experiences of the students. The two boys for example, travelled to Spain and experienced living in the Spanish culture. The females travelled to Slovakia and experienced living in the Slovakian culture. One student travelled to Italy and this was the basis for her experience. The time of the year of the sojourns is also important to note because the weather influenced the students’ activities and experiences. In Slovakia, for example, the girls travelled in February, and there was still snow along with cold rain. The topic for their activities in the project meeting at that time was Easter and involved sharing crafts and information about their own countries’ celebrations. In Spain, the time of visit was May and the boys had expected the weather to be warmer, which played a role in the way they experienced their sojourn. The topic for activity at that project meeting was to participate in a quiz on the

cultural information of other countries in the project. In Italy, the final meeting of the project, the time was also May, but it was very warm. The activities engaged in by the students included playing games to compare languages as well as culture.

4.2 Pre-sojourn Experiences

In the pre-sojourn questions, the focus was on what the students felt or thought about before the sojourn. Common themes in the answers included these topics: anxieties/fears, preparations, expectations/goals, stereotypes/beliefs and pre-contact with the host family. For each of the topics, this section is separated by a heading and a table to illustrate the data collected across the five participants. Following each table, more information is provided and the data is discussed in comparison and contrast between the participants. Tables 2 – 5 show the similarities and differences between each sojourner’s situation in pre-sojourn issues. Bold face text is not participant wording, but that of the interviewer.

4.2.1 Anxieties and Fears

Anxiety and fear about the sojourn was a running theme in the interviews. The following table shows what the participants were thinking and feeling before their experiences.

Table 2. Anxieties and fears pre-sojourn

| Pre-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iris |
|---------------------|--|--|---|---|--|
| Anxieties and Fears | I wasn't scared but I was anxious and the closer it got, the more anxious I was. My biggest worry was how the communication would go and how the people would receive me. The travelling to another country and the culture were not scary to me but the language barrier caused the most nervousness. | I wasn't really nervous, but of course, you think, how am I going to do there? And, how will I succeed in a new environment? | Maybe I was a little scared because I'd never travelled out of country before and wondered what kind of people they would be. | I am not usually nervous about anything. When they came to get us at the airport that's when I started to get a little anxious. | I was a little scared because I was afraid they wouldn't know any English. |

From the interviews, it can be noted that language was one of the instigating factors of anxiety before the sojourns. Iris and Mari both mention that they were anxious about how communication would go in the country of sojourn because they were either anxious that others would not speak much English, or they themselves could possibly have problems.

Mari explained:

I wasn't scared but I was anxious and the closer it got, the more anxious I was. Then, when I arrived, I didn't feel anxious anymore. My biggest worry was how the communication would go and how the people would receive me. The travelling to another country and the culture were not scary to me but the language barrier caused the most nervousness.

I was nervous about how the conversations would go in English. In Finland, we study more of the theory and we don't practice the situations. In Slovakia, I realized that everything I say does not have to be grammatically correct, that people understand what I am trying to say anyway.

Iris explained:

Well, I was a little scared because I was afraid they wouldn't know any English, but the girl I stayed with knew English well, I was probably one of the only ones with someone who knew English so it was easier that way. At the beginning I was really nervous before they came to pick me up.

Both participants confirm that the language and the socializing with people was what they felt most anxious about.

Anna-Kaisa also mentions that she was nervous about how she would do in another country where she would have to speak English, "I wasn't really nervous, but of course, you think, how am I going to do there? And, how will I succeed in a new environment?" Anna-Kaisa did not have a chance to connect with the host student or family before her sojourn as Mari had had, but when asked about what relieved her tensions she answered that "because Mari was coming too, and I knew her well and the teachers were with us. They could speak Finnish and English so if I couldn't say something, I knew that they could help me." Anna-Kaisa was reassured and relieved that she had a friend coming with her to Slovakia who was going through the same experience, she knew that she could speak to her about any possible problems, as well as the three teachers who were chaperoning the sojourn. The teachers were accommodated in a hotel not far from the school, and were available by phone.

The two male participants differed in that Pekka was very confident that he never gets nervous and felt no fear or anxiety about the trip, until he arrived. He was a little anxious about meeting

the host family with whom he would be living with. Jussi, on the other hand, said that he was mostly anxious because he would be travelling to a new country, and that it was his first time. Anxiety and fear were created about meeting the people, speaking with them and simply about travelling to another country.

The situation of going to live with a strange family in another country created many anxieties about language and how students would get along with the people.

4.2.2 Preparations and Pre-contact

It was also asked of the participants whether they had prepared for their sojourn journeys in any way and if they had had the chance to communicate with the host family beforehand.

Table 3. Preparations and pre-contact

| Pre-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|------------------------------|---|--|---|--|---|
| Preparations and Pre-contact | I got acquainted with the family with whom I would be staying through email. I had some conversations over email with the family's child. Kate contacted me first and told me about herself, her family, and what it is like in her country and then asked about mine. I told her about me and my family, the messages were quite long. Pre-contact via email. | I knew very little about (Slovakia) and I tried to find out a little bit and I don't think I had any stereotypes about it. That it is a very central European like it's more of an older architecture culture. No pre-contact. | Yes, I practiced English and I think I had a dictionary with me. No pre-contact. | I just read what was on the net, on the blog, before we went to Spain. We had Portugal and Romania, for the quiz. No pre-contact. | I went to look at the net at Italy and at the Comenius blog. No pre-contact. |

The participants had all done some preparations for the sojourn. Anna-Kaisa and Iris had both tried to contact their host families without success. Mari was fortunate to have contact via email with her host partner, with whom, she mentions she had many email conversations that were quite long. Pekka had practiced his English before travelling and brought along a dictionary. Jussi and Iris both studied the Comenius Project Blog. Anna-Kaisa and Iris studied the internet to get acquainted with the countries of sojourn. The preparations by the participants were voluntary other than in the case of Jussi and Pekka, because they had been asked to study the cultural topics of Romania and Portugal for the quiz activity in Spain.

Iris was asked what she did to prepare for the journey:

Well, I went to look at the net at Italy and at the Comenius blog and then I didn't get to know the person I was staying with because they didn't answer my email. But I learned a little about Italy.

Preparations included getting to know more information about the country of sojourn and attempts to contact host partners. In one case, the participant, Jussi mentions that he had practiced speaking English.

Mari was the only student who managed to have any contact with her host student before her sojourn. In her interview, she expressed that it was easier to travel to the country because she had some idea of whom she would be staying with. In other attempts by participants in the project, their efforts to contact through email or Facebook were not successful. The participants did not always know the name of the person they would stay with either. From the experiences in the data collected, it is not seem clear whether this is a detrimental factor for the successful sojourns of these participants, but to Mari, it was positive. In her interview, she states:

I got acquainted with the family with whom I would be staying through email. I had some conversations over email with the family's child. Kate contacted me first and told me about herself, her family, and what it is like in her country and then asked about mine. I told her about me and my family, the messages were quite long. She was older than me, one or two years... It didn't feel bad at all, they were very welcoming right away and made me feel very welcome.

She does not clearly address that this information made it more comfortable for her to stay with the family, but knowledge of the people must be beneficial to the participants. For example, Jussi, had never travelled before and said the following about his anxieties and fears:

Maybe I was a little scared, because I'd never traveled out of country before and wondered what kind of people they would be. I had no idea what they would be like.

Perhaps his anxieties and fears would have been less great, had he had pre-contact with his host student of sojourn.

In sum, all of the participants reported doing some kind of preparation for the sojourn. Because only one student was able to follow through with the pre-contact of her host students, her anxieties lessened. The results show that preparing by having some sort of contact with the coming host student or family where students will be sojourning is beneficial to these short-term studies abroad.

4.2.3 Expectations and Goals

One of the important issues that needed to be discussed was whether the students' had realized their own expectations of the sojourns. The following table shows what the students had hoped would be the outcomes of their sojourn experiences.

Table 4. Expectations and goals

| Pre-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|------------------------|--|---|---|---|--|
| Expectations and Goals | I hoped that my language skills would improve on the trip. | I hoped that I would learn to speak better English and meet new people and learn about the Slovakian culture. | I don't really know. That maybe we would be at the school, and then in the city sometimes and do stuff at the school. It was quite a bit like I imagined. | I wanted an experience, and I wanted it to help me with my English. | To see what the Italian country is like and to know how they live there and getting to know people and making new friends. |

When interviewing the students, I asked them about what they had expected from the trip, and why they had wanted to go. Common answers included that they wanted to meet new people, gain new friends practice using English, and to travel. Often, these types of things do teach about culture, but I don't think that the students realized that they might be learning the language of the new country as well as using English. For some students, their expectations coincided with their ideas of what the place and the people would be like. Some of these answers related to their

beliefs or stereotypes about the country of sojourn. For example, Jussi expected Spain to be warm and that the people would be interested in sports.

Jussi didn't really know if he had any expectations, but about the school and the trip he explained:

It was quite a bit like I imagined. I thought it would be hot and they would play football.

Another participant, expected to learn about the way people live in Italy. Iris shared:

probably that I would get to see what the Italian country is like and to know how they live there and getting to know people and making new friends.

She expected to experience the country, culture and to meet people. She explained that the result was that she learned:

a lot about their language and...other languages and on the bus trip we went to Calabria, we just tried to think of some stupid phrases from our own languages and taught them to each other.

Iris explained that she learned phrases from Italian, as well as languages of other countries during the project. In other sojourn cases, individuals may not have the chance to communicate with more than one other language. In Comenius projects, like this one, often more than two countries are involved and the result is that the students experience more than one cultural experience. They see and learn from each other while in a foreign host country.

The students also wanted to improve their English skills. This shows in, for example, the comments made by Mari, Pekka and Anna-Kaisa:

Mari:

I hoped that my language skills would improve on the trip. My number in English has been a nine and even a ten. I also gained many other friends from other countries and that is what I was hoping for. When students came to Finland, I met many new friends, and in Slovakia, and on Facebook I have gotten more.

Pekka:

I wanted an experience, and I wanted it to help me with my English. Now, I am the best in my class.

Anna-Kaisa:

I hoped that I would learn to speak better English and meet new people and learn about the Slovakian culture. These things did happen.

The students expected to speak better English as a result of the sojourn and felt that their expectations were fulfilled. They also knew that they would have an experience that would teach them something and at the same time, were excited to meet people from other places. It is interesting that the students learned about other cultures rather than just of the country of sojourn. Below, it will become clear that the students also realized that there are some differences and similarities between the different people from the nine participating countries.

4.2.4 Stereotypes and Beliefs

The beliefs of the students about the country they were sojourning to were examined because any changes in beliefs could then be measured. The question here is whether the experience of the sojourn had then changed preconceived ideas about foreign cultures or not.

Table 5. Stereotypes and beliefs

| Pre-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Stereotypes and Beliefs | I thought that they are probably a lot like Finnish people because it's not so far away. | I had this understanding that in the south of Europe, they are more loud and show their feelings clearly. | I had no idea what they would be like. I thought it would be hot and they would play football. | They probably really like a lot of sports. | I knew that pizza comes from Italy and they eat spaghetti and maybe that not a lot of people know English there very well. |

The students had some beliefs or preconceived ideas about what the countries they visited and the people they encountered there would be like. Stereotypes can be defined as “exaggerated pictures we create about a group of people on the basis of our inflexible beliefs and expectations about the characteristics or behaviors of the group (Lippman 1936; Stephan and Stephan 1992, 1996)” (Ting-Toomey and Chung 2012: 165). Through their experiences, it became clear that they noticed how some of their views about people were changed as a result of their experiences. Some of their ideas, however, remained the same throughout the experience. The participants

also noted which students they related with and what they learned from the other Comenius participants.

The two females, for example, who travelled to Slovakia had some preconceptions about what Slovaks might be like. Mari described her views as follows:

I thought that they are probably a lot like Finnish people because it's not so far away. I don't know in the end if they are so similar or different. The people are much more open in Slovakia, they like to ask people and Finns are more cautious.

About her preconceived notions, Anna-Kaisa noted that:

I had this understanding that in Southern Europe, they are louder and show their feelings clearly, and it turned out that they really were like that. But they weren't too temperamental or dramatic or like that. And then, the Turks - we have a boy who is from Turkey in our class and is like a bad guy. But the Turkish girls were really nice, and kind, and shy, so it was like: Hey, all Turkish people are not, like, so aggressive. I knew very little about Slovakia and I tried to find out a little bit and I don't think I had any stereotypical views about it...it is a very central European like it's more of an older architecture culture.

Here we can see that some of the students' preconceptions were strengthened. For example, Anna-Kaisa said, "and they really were like that." The students also learned something new and different, Mari noted the differences between cautious Finnish people to the more open Slovakian people. Anna-Kaisa also pointed out that southern European people weren't overly loud even though she believed they would "show their feelings clearly." Furthermore, Anna-Kaisa learned that her ideas of Turkish people had changed as a result of her experience. This was because, she had known a boy with Turkish roots in Finland, she had an idea of what all Turkish people were like. By the end of the trip, she realized that "Turkish people are not, like, so aggressive," like this boy she knew.

The beliefs of the two male students who travelled to Spain were quite similar to each other. They both thought that it would be warm and that the people would like sports. They shared the common view that football is very popular in Spain.

For example, Pekka thought that Spanish people:

...probably really like a lot of sports.

And Jussi said that he thought that in Spain:

...it would be hot and they would play football

Neither of the male students could think of any other stereotypes or beliefs that they had had about people in Spain or who they might meet on the sojourn.

Iiris, who travelled to Italy had the idea that:

... pizza comes from Italy and they eat spaghetti and maybe that not a lot of people know English there very well

Later in her interview, Iiris said that she believed that people did not speak much English in Italy because of her pre-sojourn experience of hosting a student from Spain. During the hosting experience, Iiris had learned from other visiting students (from the other participating countries) that the Italian students in the last project meeting had not had very good English skills. This is very interesting because it shows that the student had learned something from the other participating students from the other countries. The beliefs of these students transcended to Iiris. The students who had met Italian students in a previous meeting had formed opinions about another country. In the interview, Iiris mentioned, however, that she was lucky because her host partner had spoken very good English. She also noted the difference between her host partner and the partners of some of the other participants at the meeting in Italy. She disclosed the realization through comparing the experiences of others with her own. This is one of the interesting differences between Iiris's experience and the experiences of the other four interviewees. Iiris had the reverse experience of hosting pre-sojourn and as a result, she went into her own sojourn experience with knowledge that had been built upon the communication she had had with foreign students who had already had some previous knowledge about the project and its participants.

The students' beliefs about other people, countries and cultures were formed by the realizations of other people they had spoken to and by what they might have read or seen. When in the host countries, the students were able to draw on what they thought and what they actually learned about foreign cultures. The building of new knowledge about other people and their cultures will be further illustrated by the students' narratives discussed in section 4.4., in which the students make revelations about their observations as a result of their sojourn experiences.

4.3 Sojourn Experiences of the Participants

Concerning the sojourn, several recurring themes emerged in the interviews. These include: communication, highlights of host family experiences, self and group identity using English as the lingua franca, cultural differences and perceptions of English language skills across different cultures, and homesickness. The following tables illustrate the experiences of the participants during their sojourns. For each theme and table, an explanation follows.

4.3.1 Communication during the Sojourn

It is mentioned in previous research, for example, by Jackson (2008), that communication plays a large role in the success of a sojourn. In the present study, communication was of particular interest because the research question is based upon how the experience of sojourning and as a result having to speak L2 in a foreign country affected these particular students. Table 6 shows what the students remember about what communicating in L2 was like during their sojourns.

Table 6. Communication

| Sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iris |
|---------------|---|---|--|---|---|
| Communication | I understood what they said to me, maybe one or two words sometimes I didn't know. During the trip, it was easier to understand and to speak. | If I don't remember some word at the moment, another word can be used to explain so in the situation you will get by. | When they asked me something difficult and then I thought what is going to come of this, I sure don't know how to say anything, but I was able to throw something that way, and they understood. | I think that here in Finland, we have really good English teachers and I didn't have any problems | Sometimes I felt that I said all words completely wrong and that no one understands at all what I am trying to say, but of course, everybody understood me. |

The students were expected to communicate with people from other countries using English. When asked how they felt about speaking English during the sojourns, students reported that it was easier to speak than they had anticipated. They managed to use hand signals, nods, dictionaries and computer translations when it was difficult to explain something. Often the reason for difficulty in speaking was because someone from the host family or country could not speak English.

For example, Mari said, “I understood what they said to me, but sometimes there were one or two words sometimes I didn’t know. Something about our schedule was confusing and I didn’t know one of the words, but I decided that it wasn’t important.” She was able to let communication problems or difficulties go and make the decision that it wasn’t important to understand everything about every detail. Mari also tried to speak some Slovakian and had a lot of difficulty. When a Slovakian girl came to visit her in Finland, she pronounced Finnish from a reading of text with no problem. Mari commented on her experiences as follows:

During the trip, it was easier to understand and to speak. There were a couple of words like ananas and auto, autobus, but I didn’t learn any bigger words. They gave me a book and said to read it out loud. They just laughed at me when I read the writing like a Finn. Hey, but when they came to us, she read almost perfectly in Finnish, like she didn’t understand what she read, but she pronounced it right, which was pretty special.

Mari had felt that her communication abilities improved during the sojourn. It is interesting that the girls had challenged each other to read their own home languages during the sojourns and that the Slovakian girl was able to pronounce Finnish text without any aid. Mari had noticed similarities in their languages, with “ananas”, which means pineapple and with “auto,” for automobile. These words were easy for her to remember, because they are so similar to her own language.

Jussi felt that he would not be able to answer in English in a way that the hosts would understand, but after he actually attempted to do it, he realized that he could succeed:

When they asked me something difficult and then I thought what is going to come of this, I sure don’t know how to say anything, but I was able to throw something that way, and they understood.

Regarding any improvements in his ability to speak English, he answered, “I don’t think it improved, maybe it was difficult because I was nervous if I was saying it right to them, but sure it went just fine. At the end it was easier.” Perhaps, in the answer we can see that his English did improve because communication was easier in the end for Jussi. Perhaps, when the students were answering interview questions, they may have answered in the negative and after reflection, realized the opposite. When asked if there was any stress created by having to speak English, Jussi answered in the affirmative:

Yes, I knew quite well how to say things that I needed to, but I had problems speaking with the father. He didn’t really know English. He always asked the boy and used his hands, waved them around to try and say something.

Jussi confirmed that there were some difficulties in speaking with the host family because of a difference in English skills, but that communication continued with the help of the son translating and using hand signals.

Iris shared her feelings about speaking as follows:

Sometimes I felt that I said all words completely wrong and that no one understands at all what I am trying to say, but of course, everybody like understood me. Sometimes Saija and I spoke in Finnish, 'How can I say this word?' and that helped.

Saija was the other girl from Finland who chose not to participate in the study. Because Iris had a friend going through the sojourn with her, she was able to use her partner to figure out ways to explain things in English. This shows that it is important that the students have support persons during their sojourns, upon whom they can rely on to help in times of difficulty – for example, in this instance, two heads are sometimes better than one. Iris was asked whether she needed to use any outside help to speak (other than asking her partner in Finnish), and she confirmed that she used an Italian-Finnish dictionary:

They asked me what my religion was and I didn't know how to explain that and then I tried to search in it (dictionary) and in those types of situations I used it.

Iris had the same experience as Jussi, in that she felt that what she said was incomprehensible to others, but in fact, she was understood and had succeeded. She also had the support of another Finnish student who travelled with her to Italy, and together they discussed ways to present things in English. It was interesting that both of these students had brought dictionaries with them. Jussi did not mention using it, but earlier in the pre-sojourn section, he disclosed that he had brought one with him.

I asked Iris if speaking became easier during the trip and if it improved, and she answered in the following way:

Yes, it changed. I became better and learned a lot of new words. I think the speaking style changed. The words are easier to remember when you are in the situation somehow.

Pekka was more confident about his skills and experience than many participants. His beliefs about how good his education and teachers are in Finland gave him the confidence that his communication skills in English were very good. He did however mention:

Their son, Kevin, was the only one who really knew English. There was one little brother. He was so little that he did not learn any English in school yet. Well, we used Kevin as a translator with the family.

Pekka's experience with the communication in Spain involved his own confidence and the cooperation of his host student who acted as a translator between him and the host family. It is clear that in Pekka's host family, the only person who could speak English was his host partner. As a result, the two of them worked together to communicate with the rest of the family. The fact that the two boys took care of the communication part of the host family situation shows that English is indeed a very important skill to have for young adolescents. The youngest and oldest in Kevin's family did not speak the global language, but the two teen boys were able to depend on their abilities for successful interaction.

Anna-Kaisa explained that, as a result of speaking English on her sojourn:

I gained self-confidence, and I know that I know how to do something and I will get through difficult situations and I got this confidence...I got this, that if I don't remember some word at the moment, another word can be used to explain so in the situation you will get by.

Anna-Kaisa reflected on the communication during her sojourn and had an important realization. Her narrative explanations of what it was like to communicate with others during her sojourn show that she had processed the learning of the experience. She explained that she acquired confidence in her abilities as she was speaking, and realized that she could use many words to mean the same thing. She was able to remember and utilize her skills to communicate when she couldn't remember one word.

For example, Anna-Kaisa shared a moment of difficulty in communicating with her host:

How will I explain this thing, nothing will come from this. Shannon looked at me like what is she trying to say and then all of a sudden she got it and understood what I meant, and I thought, 'Yes, I can do it, I did it!'

So English became

...easier and I trusted that even though I couldn't speak English perfectly, I am understood and the situations will work out. It was good that I got the self-confidence to speak

When asked whether her social skills had improved as a result, she reported, "Yes, for sure, they have and I can communicate with Finnish people more easily, too." When asked whether there were any misunderstandings or difficulties in communicating, Anna-Kaisa shared a story:

Well, with Shannon, she asked me if I wanted to learn more about her family and I said yes. She became really quiet and she probably thought that I don't want to know anything, so we were just quiet for a while and then she asked me if I could tell about my family. I told her and then I asked her like again to tell me about hers. I thought, "Help, she thinks I am not interested about anything." I was terrified...but it helped that she asked more then. It was a small misunderstanding.

Anna-Kaisa had also realized that sometimes there are misunderstandings. None of the other participants reported any misunderstandings, but it is possible that they were not aware of them. Perhaps something that they said was misunderstood by their hosts or host families or other participants from the ranging foreign countries. Aside from this possibility, the narratives of these particular students showed that their views on communication included some negative aspects regarding their own performances, but they each showed a strong confidence in their abilities. Pekka believed that he had a lot of confidence going into the sojourn because he believes that Finnish teachers in Finland are so good that he, as a student, was very capable. He noticed that speaking with his host student was easier than with the rest of the family who did not know as much English. His ability to communicate in English during the sojourn, thus strengthened. Sometimes, students also learned a little of other foreign languages, but this will be further discussed in the following sections.

4.3.2 Highlights of Host Family Experiences

For the present study, the host family experiences were of particular interest as well because it is there that the students had to live and survive on their own using L2. Table 7 shares their experiences living with strangers in a foreign country.

Table 7. Highlights of host family experiences

| Sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iris |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|--|--|--|
| Highlights of Host Family Experiences | It didn't feel bad at all, they were very welcoming right away and made me feel very welcome - they were good hosts. I had a really good experience. | They had a very cozy home and it was really nice to go there and meet the family. The mother was really nice and kind. Even though she didn't really speak English, she would pack me food. | I was pretty hungry after the trip, the food wasn't very tasty. It was completely different to compare it to Finnish food. It was really good when I was in Spain, to have a private place to be completely alone sometimes. | They were exactly what I pictured them to be, fun and laughed a lot. | They were really nice and I felt right away, that they were really friendly. |

In the present study, the sojourns were so short that the host families and students had prepared for some anxiety, but knew, at the same time, that the sojourn would end within five days. Therefore, I suspect that frustration was minimal. In one participant's case, who did not want to participate in the present study, the host family did not speak any English and the hosting student was of the opposite sex. For this student, this created more anxiety than for the others and perhaps this was also the reason why she refused to participate in the interviews.

In table 7, student responses are based on their overall thoughts or feelings about the host family. They were asked about what they think about them, and what it was like to live with other people.

For Pekka, the experience began with meeting the family in the airport; he described it as follows:

When they came to get us at the airport, that's when I started to get a little anxious. They were exactly what I pictured them to be, fun and laughed a lot.

Kevin gave me his bed and he slept on the floor. We spoke a little about what we will do tomorrow and stuff. With Kevin, we spoke about Finland and what the differences are, that it is colder and sometimes even -40 degrees and lots of snow in the winter.

Well, their house on the outside looked kind of like the slums and windows had bars over them. And then, on the inside it was really nice in the apartment building.

We went to bed around 11pm and woke up around 7 or 8. We ate toast with jam on it. At night, we had paollo. When there was nothing else to do, we watched football. They were really nice and brought food to Kevin's room.

Pekka's experience was pleasant, he disclosed that the apartment building was quite poor looking but the inside was much nicer. His experience with the host family is shown to be a positive one.

Jussi's experience in Spain:

The mom made us some food, but I don't remember what it was...well, I was pretty hungry after the trip, the food wasn't very tasty. It was completely different to compare it to Finnish food.
 It was really good when I was in Spain, to have a private place to be completely alone sometimes.
 I always wondered what would happen next or where we would go next.
 I was pretty tired at the end of the day, and went to bed hungry a lot.
 It was not hot. It rained and I didn't even have a jacket. I thought it would be so hot that I wouldn't need one, but they lent me one.
 It was a really fun trip and family. And we went somewhere to an old town...and the food was not very good....the weather was surprisingly cold.

Jussi repeats himself a few times about how he did not enjoy the food, he also explained that he hadn't brought a jacket with him because he had expected it to be warm. His own beliefs of how warm it would be in Spain, transcend directly to his experience because he hadn't packed a jacket as a result. Even though he complained about the food, being tired and the weather being poor, Jussi reinforced the idea that the family was nice and still had a good time. He also appreciated having his own privacy considered by the host family. This reflects on his own experience of hosting a foreign student later in section 4.4 post-sojourn – hosting a foreign student.

Mari and Anna-Kaisa shared their experiences with the host families in Slovakia. For example, this is how Mari described her relationship with her host family:

It didn't feel bad at all, they were very welcoming right away and made me feel very welcome. I slept there probably four nights. I can fall asleep anywhere, so it was easy. I'm that type of a person that I don't get nervous that way, I can fall asleep even on a rock if that's what I need to do. I had my own bed. It was a big room and I shared it with Anna. Her younger sister had to move out and I got her sister's bed.
 It was wonderful, the breakfast, everything was so good. The mother baked the bread and it was so fresh. Hard on the outside, but soft on the inside. The mother gave us some really healthy juice, I can't remember from what berry it was, beet, that was it. I said sure I can taste it and it wasn't bad.
 The people probably perceived me as more shy than I am. The mother and daughter spoke very good English, the mother was an English teacher, and so they understood me quite well. The father and the other two children did not speak English really at all. I got to know them quite well and they were good hosts. I had a really good experience. The father had some company right next door where he worked. Kate had one younger brother and one younger sister.

Here, Mari compares Slovakian food to Finnish food, as Jussi had done. Her opinion of the food was different than Jussi's views of Spanish food. She had enjoyed the differences and found positive things to say about them. Her experience was also positive as a result of having a friendly host family who spoke very good English.

Anna-Kaisa was nervous about meeting the host family and said:

I remember looking out the bus window and wondering, “Where are we going?” and then we came to a school and we were there and pretty quickly the girls came up to me and Mari. Mari and Kate recognized each other and Shannon and I realized, “Ahaa,” we must be like this then, a pair. I asked, “Are you Shannon?” She answered, “Yes, I am. Are you Anna-Kaisa?” “Yes, I am.” They had a very cozy home and it was really nice to go there and meet the family. The mother was really nice and kind. Even though she didn’t really speak English, she would pack me food.

Because Mari had had pre-contact with her host partner and knew what she looked like, Anna-Kaisa had been able to easily pick out her host partner who was following Kate. After meeting Shannon, Anna-Kaisa reported that the home was cozy and even though the mother did not speak much English, she had been very friendly.

About communicating with the host family, Anna-Kaisa explained that they could communicate without language and there was not too much interest in learning about her life in Finland:

Yes, if she had packed my lunch, I would point at myself like, “For me?” and she would be like “yes” by nodding.
I felt like they did not know anything much about Finland. And they didn’t really ask me anything.
I think that I was a lot quieter when I was there than I usually am, but I think that I was myself the whole time anyway.

Anna-Kaisa seemed to think that she portrayed herself as a quieter person than she normally is with her host family. She did not however, feel that she couldn’t be herself in the host family, it follows that she felt comfortable and accepted.

In Italy, Iris started her narrative by explaining that her first impression of the host family was that they were nice and friendly. She explained that the daughter of the family was one year older but it did not affect her time with the host family. The host family lived “maybe ten minutes” from the hotel where she was picked up. Iris elaborates:

I slept, in the house there was a guest room, and I slept in there. They had a really nice house. Whenever I went to bed, I usually went to bed earlier than they did, and they spoke their own things, and I heard them speaking and wondering what they were saying. The girl always explained what they were saying though.
The mom and dad asked a little, “Do you have cold weather,” and this type of thing.
Not a lot different from my family, but they seemed to stay up a lot later than someone like me when I have to get up early. But at Saija’s, when she wanted to go to sleep, they left to go bowling like around 9pm. I spent time with the family, and the Portuguese students were staying with Jessica’s best friend, and she didn’t know any English so we were with them a lot and went to the beach and the castle. We went shopping a few times and went for pizza and it was really good food.
One night I was going to bed and I always read this book, Risto Rappajä, and Jessica’s little brother who was probably 4 years old, always came to sit by me and laugh at the pictures because they were so funny.

Iiris pointed out some differences she noticed about daily rhythms, for example, the family went to sleep later than she was used to doing. She also reported that she was not excluded from conversations because the host partner translated what was being said to her. Iiris also disclosed that the other Finnish student had left to go bowling with the Italian host partner that she had had at a very late hour. According to Iiris, Saija had wanted to go to sleep when they were just leaving for evening events. Iiris experienced being a big sister to Jessica's little brother when she shared her book with him in the evening. This is interesting, that the Finnish student was able to experience sitting with a four year old Italian boy and look at the pictures from her Finnish book.

These accounts by the interviewees are very personal and tell of the intimate details of living in a host family. Each of the five students' accounts mentions about the home and the members of the family. It is interesting that each of these students reports feeling that they had a good sojourn experience, that the families were welcoming and that they felt included while they were there. Students felt that the host students and members of the family tried to communicate with them either through translating or using gestures. In sum, the most important observation of this section is that the host family experiences were positive ones. The students had lived in families that were friendly and accepting, which played a role in their sojourn experiences being good ones.

4.3.3 Self and Group Identity Using English as the Lingua Franca

In relation to Table 6, creating an identity as a result of communicating was also investigated. Previous research mentions that some sojourners in similar situations create groups or even form third cultures (Citron 2002). In the present study, students were asked whether they felt themselves becoming part of a group or if they changed in identity using English. This is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Self and group identity using English

| Sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|--|--|--|---|--|--|
| Self and Group Identity Using English as a Lingua Franca | It did seem sometimes that the other kids were more social between themselves and Anna-Kaisa and I were on the outside. I don't know if it is because Finns are like that, not participating right away, but as the trip went on, more and more of the socializing happened. | There was like, a pretty tight group and I was like or like most in voice type of people, but we didn't feel left out, we were asked things even if we were quiet and it felt quite balanced. Everyone was included in the Slovakian experience. | Did not experience exclusion and had no comments. | You just had to ask somebody that can I play and they would show us which side to go on. and you always got to play - the friends were always aware of me and asked me things and with the family we watched football on tv. | We were always taken in, like in a conversation, they always explained what they were talking about and included us. |

In this section, students' views about whether using English caused new group identities to form or whether they experienced exclusion as a result of being a foreigner in another country are further explained.

In the present study, the students used English as a lingua franca to communicate with their host families and with the other visiting students from other countries. All of the participating students came from non-English speaking countries and had the commonality of having the chance to communicate with others using English. All of the visiting students as well as host students were part of a group for the Comenius Project. All of the students were using L2 in communication and experiencing a formation of their own community of practice from which they could associate themselves as part of an in-group. In the interviews, the participants were asked whether they felt included or excluded from certain events, groups, and/or host families during their sojourns. Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012) explain that "admission to the ingroup and acceptance by the ingroup, on the basis of shared norms and values, are interrelated: the more an individual associates with the ingroup, the greater the conformity that is expected and reinforced" (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012: 169). In the present study, on the basis of the interviews, it seems that the students felt that they were part of a group, as there were others in the same situation

from different countries – living with host families in a foreign country. They also felt that the host students did their best to include all of the participants in social gatherings, as well as, in the host families themselves.

Anna-Kaisa was asked what it was like to be in social situations with the other students and she answered that:

They are looking for togetherness and fun, play with each other or joke around.

When asked if she felt excluded:

Well, there was a pretty tight group, but we didn't feel left out. We were asked things even if we were quiet and it felt quite balanced.

Even in a situation where Anna-Kaisa felt that she wasn't quite as talkative or belonging to a tighter group of individuals, she felt that the students were able to include her as well as others who were quiet. This shows that the participants in the Comenius project were aware of each other and aware of the need to include people in conversations rather than form completely separate groups from each other.

Yet, Mari mentioned that:

...it did seem, sometimes, that the other kids were more social between themselves and Anna-Kaisa and I were on the outside. I don't know if it is because Finns are like that, not participating right away, but as the trip went on, more and more of the socializing happened. I think that they did a lot of the same things that we did. We went to the shopping mall and went shopping. They don't bike a lot and when they came here, to Finland, they were amazed that we ride our bikes even in the winter. When we were in the city hanging out, it felt like all the other kids were out at the same time, and then, when we found each other, we went with them. We hung out with the kids from Turkey, Spain, Portugal and Romania. There were no students from Italy. The Turkish students had the most difficulty with the language. One boy came behind me and poked me on the shoulder and said, 'Who are you? Where are you from?*' and he wanted my phone number. He was Slovakian and I had to say, I am not going to give it. It became really quiet and it was a weird situation. No one in Finland would come and ask that. That he exchanged only a few words and then said, "Give me your phone number!"

Mari's report shows that time was needed for the group identity to form, but that being involved in the same activities and being in the same situation caused the students to become more social with each other. She also commented on the differences between cultural patterns or norms – the boy who asked for her phone number surprised her with his forwardness and she felt that she could not interact as openly with him.

Anna-Kaisa continued with her comments:

Well, there were two Slovakian girls who were really fun and one said we hope to see you again sometime and well not really strong with other people, but we were friends and in big groups and went for pizza and everyone got to talk to each other. I was asked what grade I am in and I was like, I didn't understand what they asked or what it means, well they said, "you could be in the sixth like me, or...?"! And I answered, "yes, I am in the sixth, too!" On their free time, "some nights we were just at home after late days at school and played board games and went to friends' places and went to the coffee shop. They asked us to go drink cocoa, and I thought that it was something made from powder like we have in Finland and it was actually melted chocolate and cold and Mari and I were just drinking it like our stomachs got sore and it was pretty funny. It was that they wore inside shoes. Finnish people think that we are quite quiet but the Slovaks were pretty quiet except when they were with their friends. There were a few sports fans and they listened to some radio program, and when there was a goal, they just screamed there.

In regards to Anna-Kaisa's reports, it is clear that she has memories about the time she spent socializing with the other visiting students as well as with the host culture students. Her narrative takes a story-like context in which she can relate the differences of culture with the learning about other people.

When asked whether the host family and student asked much about the Finnish student's cultures, Mari answered:

The mom asked me a lot of questions about Finland, and so did Kate, but the other students from Slovakia didn't really seem to ask a lot about Finland. There was more interest when they came here (to Finland). They all seemed to be the same, all were so social and tried to be very fun, I didn't notice a lot of differences." It seems that from the social experiences between the students, that regardless of country or culture, the same age range was more interested in each other as people together getting to know one another.

Perhaps the host mother was more interested in cultural differences than the students involved in the project. Mari's statements show an understanding that although there are cultural differences, the main result of conversation was to notice their similarities as people near the same age and a curiosity to get to know each other on a level of friendship rather than at a level of difference as a result of being from another country.

The interviews of Anna-Kaisa and Mari, show that they had a sense that everyone was included in the Slovakian sojourn experience. The sojourning students from the different countries were in the same kind of situation and bonded together with their host partners in different settings (on group trips, at restaurants, at the school, at the host family homes). Students shared languages, jokes and things about their cultures and personalities through English. Using L2 was not a hindrance in getting to know new people from different countries and became a venue for

similarity between the participants. By having the same lingua franca, the students had to communicate with their skills of English and were able to do so in a positive manner, creating a group identity of English speakers in a Comenius Project.

For the two boys in Spain, the sense of exclusion was not strong, but that they felt included especially in the group of football players.

Pekka explained that was important included:

Social things, they asked if we were hungry and we went to a pizzeria. There was a big park and we ate there and played football.

Kevin was playing football, and he asked me to come to their practice, and it was really fun. I noticed how much better they were at playing than Finns. It was fun because I had a challenge, and in Finland not that many really know how to play. I was a little under the nail, but I got by pretty well. I have played soccer for six years. Yes, and the football we played during the breaks at school, they laughed a lot and weren't as serious. You just had to ask somebody that can I play and they would show us which side to go on, and you always got to play.

The friends were always aware of me and asked me things and with the family we watched football on TV.

Pekka's comments show that there was a sense of inclusion in the school yard, outside of school during their free time with the host partners and in the host family.

I asked Jussi if he ever felt excluded and he answered no. In his view, his new friends in Spain were accepting. When asked what they did together, he said that they went out to eat like many of the other participants mentioned. Jussi also said that they "went to see the football stadium" in Madrid, where he observed that "it was so big compared to a small Finnish field." When asked whether during the trip the others were interested in Finland or if they had ideas about what Finns are like, he answered:

I don't think so, maybe they asked about what the temperatures there are and if there is a lot of snow, but they didn't really ask anything more.

I also asked him if he thought that the other students saw him as an outsider, his answer was to the following:

Sure, they did look at me a little as different and the friends at school asked me more about Finland, but I don't remember what they asked.

Jussi felt that the students at school asked him more questions about his life in Finland than the host family did. This is different from the girls who went to Slovakia, who mentioned that the families asked a lot about their home cultures. Jussi also mentioned that he felt that he is an

outsider and was perceived to be different because he is from another place. Pekka had also mentioned an awareness of being different:

Yes, we all come from different countries with different cultures and traditions so everyone has to be different. For example, I think some of the students from other countries were much quieter than me and Jussi.

Both boys knew that they were different, as all the other students were, but they did not feel that they were excluded from a group. The narratives show an awareness to a difference in culture and persona, but that these things did not cause exclusion. The boys both felt that they were included in social settings and that there was a sense of comradery.

Finally, in the interview with Iris, when asked whether she felt excluded, she mentioned that in Italy she felt that:

We were always taken in, like in a conversation, they always explained what they were talking about and included us.

Iris also felt included in groups situations as well as with her host family. The social dynamics could have been different between other visiting students and when asked about the other students from other countries she said that:

They were really nice and we talked with a lot of other students. The most with Slovenians and Slovaks...From Slovakia, there was this Jennifer and Samantha, they were really nice. We talked about everything fun and stupid. Samantha fell in love with some music she listened to from my phone and then she fell in love with this song and moved it to her phone and listened to it all the time. Johanna Kurkela's song.

What is interesting about Iris's narrative is that she shares a story about how other foreign students during the project meeting had made conversations and shared interests. For example, Iris had shared her music with a girl from Slovakia who was also sojourning with a host family in Italy. The Slovakian girl loved the Finnish song so much that she recorded it onto her own phone, and according to Iris, "listened to it all the time." It is interesting that this Slovakian girl took that song to her own country and thus later returned to her moments had shared with Iris. It is interesting that the students were able to share bits of music as well as other interests that were then shared later in one's own country. The transcendence of these experiences is valuable in that through the meeting of new people from foreign cultures, the students are sharing bits of their own cultures. Not only did the students socialize with each other, but they learned from each

other – things that are different as well as similar about each other and cultures. The students had talked about things “fun and stupid” as if they were visiting with students in Finland...they had been able to share similar types of things that they would have shared with Finnish friends, but in English with Slovakian girls. It’s really beautiful.

In regards to Third Culture Formation, the students did not provide any evidence of having formed safety nets or groups in order to get through the experiences. Because they had had positive experiences communicating in L2 with other participating students and with the host families, negative types of groups did not form.

In conclusion, the most important findings in this section include the realizations made by the students about how easily they could get to know each other using the lingua franca, English. They were able to identify with each other in a group that used English to communicate. The participants from Finland were in the same situation as the visiting students from other countries and found themselves communicating at similar levels and meeting new people in a foreign country. Relationships were made and knowledge was gained about themselves and others during these situations where students had to communicate using L2.

4.3.4 Cultural Differences

Students were asked whether they could recognize big differences in their own culture and the culture of the country of sojourn. Table 9 shows the main points touched on by the participants in regards to the question of cultural differences.

Table 9. Cultural differences

| Sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|----------------------|---|--|--|---|--|
| Cultural Differences | They all seemed to be the same, all were so social and tried to be very fun, I didn't notice a lot of differences. The buildings did not seem to be as good as the schools we have in Finland. I didn't learn anything about the differences in teaching because the classes were in Slovakian. | There was a feeling that religion is more important than at my house. It was like the neighborhoods were gloomy. I don't know if it was because I was there for the first time and it was dark or if it was the culture. | Maybe that they were not so uptight about everything, their shoes were on when they walked inside, and if there was an olive jar on the table, everybody just grabbed them with their fingers. The food was so late. I went to bed pretty early, I don't know how late they went to bed. | Yes, we all come from different countries with different cultures and traditions, so everyone has to be different. Their lessons at school seemed a lot freer, they could leave from the lesson whenever they wanted. | Not a lot different from my family, but they seemed to stay up a lot later than someone like me when I have to get up early - having chocolate for breakfast. It seemed like they didn't really study there, that they just screamed and squirmed there. They just laughed at something there. It was pretty different there, it wasn't to the minute (schedules). |

The aim of this section is to uncover what the students learned about their cultural differences and did they notice any at all? Some of the answers are lengthy narratives which explain a story of what the students experienced during their sojourns in relation to culture.

Study abroad does not necessarily just give students a place to practice their English language skills, but hopefully awards them a chance to learn about another culture. From table 9, it is shown that students noticed some differences in culture and in further examination of their narratives in this section, it is clear that some of the students gained understandings about what life is like in another culture while comparing it to their own.

The students were asked to comment on the differences they noticed in the country they visited.

Mari's narrative of what she perceived to be differences in culture included the following:

They wore slippers in the house because there is not such a good heating system, and they didn't have a shower or sauna of course, but they had a bath tub with a shower, so they showered in the tub. They had a bigger refrigerator.

We went swimming a lot. It was an outdoor pool, even though it was really cold, like -3 or -5 degrees centigrade, the water was very warm and it was an exciting experience. There was one big

room but there were little changing rooms. We were not naked in front of each other. Some boys followed us, we swam competition circles around the pool.

The food was much more filling. I noticed when they put it on the plate, it's not so different from Finnish but the food is more filling somehow. They served a lot of pasta. When Kate came to us, she ate so little and I was worried if she is really hungry all the time or? We even researched what is eaten a lot in Slovakia, and they eat a lot of fish, so we made fish stew, and she liked it.

The school was ugly looking and there were two buildings with a hallway. It was really cold in between. The buildings did not seem to be as good as the schools we have in Finland. I didn't learn anything about the differences in teaching, because the classes were in Slovakian.

Mari's comments include notes about what the host family's house was like, the differences that she noted compared to the way her house is. She also noticed that in Slovakia, it is uncommon to be nude in the change rooms compared to Finland, where it is a requirement to shower and sauna in the nude before going in the pool. Mari's reflections on her experiences show that she noticed differences, but also thought of the impact that Kate, the daughter of her host family, would have when she came to Finland. She researched the food that Slovaks eat and tried to think about how she could make Kate's experience in another culture a pleasant one. She noticed general differences in the way in which things looked and in the style of the host family's home.

It is clear that Mari realized she did not learn a lot about the differences in education between Slovakian culture and Finnish because she could not understand the lessons in another language. If they had been in English, perhaps she would have learned more about the ways Slovakian students learn in the classroom. This is interesting for the reason that the Comenius Project's goal was to have students teach each other about their cultures and languages. Instead, Mari was only able to draw on physical differences between Slovakian school buildings and the ones she is used to in Finland.

When I asked her what she liked about Slovakia, she replied as follows:

I like it a lot, they bought me a lot of things. I didn't like it just because they bought me a lot of things but because they adjust to things so kindly, they probably don't have a lot of stereotypes about other people. They are probably quite accepting I think.

The above text shows that Mari realized that the Slovakian host family and other people there were accepting and kind. She believes as a result of her experience that the people do not have a lot of stereotypes to classify other people. She found them to be accepting. This feeling of being accepted by another culture is positive for Mari.

Anna-Kaisa, who also travelled to Slovakia, pointed out the following interesting differences:

Well, the food was pretty good. There was this dough cooked in oil and then covered with a syrup, and rice and chicken, pretty normal food that I could eat at home, too.

Well, I don't know, maybe it's the religion, it is closer to the daily routine and idols on the wall, saints were there. There was a feeling that religion is more important than at my house.

Well, it was kind of like a little like the neighborhoods were gloomy. I don't know if it was because I was there for the first time and it was dark or was it the culture.

I learned to appreciate the Finnish culture. I thought before that this is just clear, but it is actually quite different for someone who comes from another country. I started to think about what someone else from another country would think of Finland.

I appreciate other cultures, I understand that people are people, not just citizens of a certain country and you can learn to understand them more. I became interested in them after the trip.

Anna-Kaisa shows that as a result of being in another culture, she began to compare it to her own and then to reflect on the ways that she regards people from other cultures. Her narrative also shows a newly found understanding about the other culture. She explained that she learned to appreciate and compare her own ideas about others in other countries as well as imagined what others might think when placed in the same situation in her own country.

The two boys who travelled to Spain explained the differences that they noticed as well. Pekka begins with the differences between Spanish and Finnish people and then points out the differences between people in a big city and his small town:

Yes, we all come from different countries with different cultures and traditions, so everyone has to be different. For example, I think some of the students from other countries were much quieter than me and Jussi. Maybe they were afraid to speak in case they made a mistake.

At the school, there was this kiosk where you could buy all kinds of goodies, and there, he asked me if I wanted anything and I said go ahead, then he came back with this waffle covered in chocolate. Their lessons at school seemed a lot freer, they could leave from the lesson whenever they wanted. When we visited the school, the students were really excited, climbing up to the windows and they were really loud.

There, when we went to the city with Kevin, there were a lot of different types of places where people could dance or do play-fighting. It was a fighting technique that added dance. It was really cool looking. The streets, like where Kevin lived were really dirty.

Pekka's remarks show that he noticed a lot of general differences. It is interesting that Pekka felt that the people were quieter than he was, because a lot of Finnish people, for example might think that Finns are very quiet people. His reasoning for this was that perhaps using L2 caused his

observation regarding this issue. Other general notes from Pekka about the school could also be caused by the fact that the students were so excited to have visitors from eight other countries at their school, and perhaps normally they wouldn't be jumping up to the windows or be able to leave the class whenever they choose.

When asked about his favourite memory or what he liked most about the culture, Pekka mentioned food and leisure activities:

Probably that we went to get the pizzas, the park and football. It was kind of weird, one pizza had nothing on it, like it had no toppings but double cheese, but it was really good.

For Pekka, the best part about Spanish culture then, was the pizza and playing football. Perhaps these things are quite similar to the things he enjoys in Finland as well, and therefore they are not so different.

Jussi's accounts of the differences in culture also began with the people. He also noted differences in the routine of daily life as well as the differences between the city compared to his small home town:

Maybe that they were not so uptight about everything, their shoes were on when they walked inside, and if there was an olive jar on the table, everybody just grabbed them with their fingers. The food was so late. I think we had to go to school before 8. I went to bed pretty early, I don't know how late they went to bed. The house was pretty tall, a tall apartment building and there were metal bars on the windows. Madrid is a really big place, a big difference to my town.

Again, there are general differences between Jussi's home and daily routine compared to the way the host family lived. He wasn't used to wearing his shoes in the house or grabbing olives with fingers. Perhaps these things that Jussi noticed were so different to his way of life at home, that he made some realizations about cultural differences. He felt like a small town boy living in a big city was quite different to what he was used to.

When comparing schools, Jussi pointed out some differences:

There were computers, they were these terribly old things. When they played football and took it really seriously. Yes, they asked me to play.

According to Jussi, our schools have better technology than the students at this specific school in Madrid. He didn't mention other things about the classrooms, but mentioned here that the students took football (during the recess) really seriously. This contradicts what Pekka had said

about his views about the leisure activity. He was of the opinion that football wasn't so serious at school compared to that of the practice game, in which he had participated.

When asked again about what he learned about people in Madrid, Jussi answered, "At least that they talk a lot and fast, especially when they are angry." It could also be that Jussi felt that the people were angry when it is really merely their style of speaking. In a longer sojourn, this would become more clear for Jussi – perhaps when Finnish people from different areas are speaking, they might sound like they speak a lot and fast, and they might come across angry as well.

On the trip to Italy, Iris pointed out the following differences in relation to culture:

Maybe, the food was different, like having chocolate for breakfast.

The school didn't have a playground, while we have all kinds of playground equipment and they didn't have a proper cafeteria, they ate in the gymnasium. The classrooms were really small and I didn't know where to sit. They just had a pencil case and a few pieces of paper. It seemed like they didn't really study there, that they just screamed and squirmed there. They just laughed at something there. It was pretty different there, it wasn't to the minute. Like, when we were on the trip, we stopped for a break that was to be a few minutes break and it was something like twenty minutes. They didn't care much about schedules. Well, there are these beautiful places, we went to this castle, cool narrow roads and they looked wonderful. The houses were ugly from the outside, but when you went inside, they were really nice and decorated.

Iris noticed big differences between Finnish and Italian schools, time scheduling and other buildings. Iris's narrative exposes major differences in school supplies and how she feels that the classroom atmosphere compares. She felt that routines, time schedules, classroom supplies, buildings and playground equipment were things that Italians didn't care about as much as she believes Finns do.

In sum, all of the participants made observations about the housing, the food and the schools. Some of the participants noted differences in the way people carried themselves, for example, in Slovakia, Mari and Anna-Kaisa observed that the people were very accepting and nice and in Italy, people were not so worried about schedules. Perhaps, it could even be said, that according to Iris people in Italy put their priorities in different places than Finns do, and as a result perhaps they are more carefree. Jussi was also of the opinion that Spanish people were more carefree about how and when they ate their food, and what time they went to bed. All of the students noticed differences, but only Anna-Kaisa made the realization verbally that she has learned to appreciate different cultures as a result of her sojourn experience. She also learned to see her own

culture from another perspective – from that of a foreigner. This is valuable information because even the very short-term sojourn experience as in the present study, can affect how students perceive foreign cultures in comparison to their own.

4.3.5 Perceptions of English Language Skills across Cultures

The aim in this section is to unveil whether the participants believed that differences in skills of L2 affected their sojourn experiences. Table 10 provides insight into whether the students believed there were differences between their English skills across cultures.

Table 10. Perceptions of English languages skills across cultures.

| Sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|
| Perceptions of English Language Skills Across Cultures | We hung out with the kids from Turkey, Spain, Portugal and Romania. There were no students from Italy. The Turkish students had the most difficulty with the language. | I think that there was at least this one girl there that knew a lot more words. I think they learn more words and in Finland we learn more pronunciation and grammar. | Somebody cried a lot there and didn't have as good English skills. It was a Portuguese boy at least on the first day. Then, English was probably best for us. | I think that they spoke English pretty much the same as we speak here in Finland. Pekka noticed good English skills particularly with the Slovaks, we spent a lot of time together and they spoke English really well and the Slovenian boys, they knew a lot about ice hockey and it was fun to speak with them. | At least when the students came from Turkey to Finland, they didn't speak much English. A lot of the students that came to Italy spoke a lot. |

The nine participating countries teach English in the classroom in different ways, the experiences of the participants in question could enlighten educators to how these differences play a role in projects like the one in the present study.

In all project meetings, the students had the opportunity to communicate with the students from other countries in some kind of social situations. It was interesting that all of the students noticed differences in the English language skills across cultures.

At the meeting in Spain, there was a quiz for the students from the nine countries on the cultures of two other countries. When asked whether this quiz caused him any stress, Jussi answered:

It wasn't scary or anything...somebody cried a lot there and didn't have good English skills. It was a Portuguese boy ...English was probably best for us.

Here, the Finnish student notes how the students' L2 skills varied a great deal among the different countries and individuals. He believed that Finnish students had an easier time speaking English than some of the other students had. There could be a number of reasons why the Portuguese boy had been upset, but Jussi's explanation was that it was because he was afraid to speak English. It is possible that the boy was merely stressed or anxious about the sojourn, his host family or the quiz.

Iiris was also asked whether she found differences in English skills between the other sojourners from the other 8 countries. She thought that when students came to Finland:

At least when the students came from Turkey to Finland, they didn't speak much English. A lot of the students that came to Italy spoke a lot.

Iiris had noticed a difference in the students who sojourned to Finland, that the Turkish participants did not speak much English. Iiris had hosted a Spanish girl, so her observation is based on what she heard from others or what she saw at social situations at the meeting in Finland. In Italy, the other foreign students, in her view spoke more English. This is interesting because a stereotype had been formed about other students' L2 skills before she had left for her own sojourn. She did, however, realize that on her own journey to Italy, the other visiting students were very skilled in English.

From his sojourn to Spain, Pekka is asked to reflect on the differences of English speaking skills between the other students. Pekka remembers that:

To my ear, I think that they spoke English pretty much the same way as we speak it here in Finland. Yes, particularly the Slovaks, we spent a lot of time together and they spoke English really well and the Slovenian boys, they knew a lot about ice hockey and it was fun to talk with them. We talked about NHL and about our favorite teams. The one boy liked Ottawa Senators and the other Pittsburgh Penguins. I support the Washington Capitals. They have really skilled players from Russia.

Pekka did not see a lot of differences between the English language skills of people from differing countries. He was able to have conversations with the Slovakian girls and Slovenian

boys who were also sojourning. It is interesting that he felt that the students from these two countries, in particular, spoke English with similar skill levels.

In comparing the skills of other students on the sojourn to those of herself and Finnish students in general, Anna-Kaisa shared:

I think that there was at least this one girl there that knew a lot more words. I think they learn more words and in Finland we learn more pronunciation and grammar.

Anna-Kaisa was able to reflect on the way students might possibly learn English in their own countries. She believed that in Finland, students are subjected to more grammar and pronunciation in English classes whereas someone else from another country might be learning more vocabulary. It is interesting that this information is conveyed through her narrative because the ways in which English is taught in schools is being revised all of the time. Perhaps this could be useful for teachers of English in schools all over the world – that in some countries more grammar and pronunciation is the focus over teaching a larger amount of vocabulary. It is a matter of opinion, however, which ways of teaching languages are more important. For future projects, a useful area of focus could be to study how the different schools teach and learn English – what are the differences, and what is good practice?

When asked what the differences are between speakers of English from Finland compared to the other students involved in the project, Mari replied:

We hung out with the kids from Turkey, Spain, Portugal and Romania. There were no students from Italy. The Turkish students had the most difficulty with the language.

Mari noticed the same thing that Iris did earlier that the Turkish students had lower levels of English speaking skills than the other students they had had conversations with. I spoke with the teachers of the Turkish schools and the possible reason for this is that the teachers sometimes have classrooms with fifty to eighty students at one time. In Finnish classrooms, the number of students being taught at one time probably never exceeds thirty.

When students were asked to evaluate what the English skills of the students from different cultures were, they talked about specific members of specific cultures or countries. For example, Iris mentioned that she noticed the difficulties in English that Turkish and Italian people had. Mari thought that the Turkish students had problems with their English as well. Jussi noticed that

the Portuguese student probably had difficulty with English. He believed that his and Pekka's English skills were probably better. On the other hand, Pekka mentioned that he didn't notice a lot of differences between the students. Pekka did, however, mention that he was able to have a conversation with Slovakian and Slovenian people. This does not mean that he thought all Slovaks or Slovenians had better English skills than students from the other countries, but this Finnish boy had entered into conversations with these specific students at some point during the sojourn. Anna-Kaisa did not note a lot of differences, but believed that other foreign students had a better range of vocabulary because in Finland, she is accustomed to learning more pronunciation and grammar. One interesting thing to note is that Iris was able to compare her thoughts about the English skills of students before and after her sojourn. She had formed an opinion about the language skills of people from other countries when she hosted a Spanish student in her home pre-sojourn. She had also formulated ideas about how Italians would speak English before she travelled there. To her surprise, she was hosted by a student who had excellent English language skills.

The most important result for this section about whether the Finnish students noticed differences in English language abilities is that the students reflected on their own skills as speakers of English. At the same time, the students had a chance to compare and contrast their own opinions about themselves as users of English as an L2 with the people that they met from other cultures in the Comenius Project. The results show that there are some differences between students from other cultures. The testimonies of these participants are subjective in nature due to the fact that they travelled to different countries for their sojourns, met different people at different times. Perhaps a Slovakian student who met a Finnish student in Spain did not meet one of the participants on another sojourn to Italy. The students were not always the same at every meeting of the project, therefore the results are the basis of opinion. There was however, strong evidence from Mari and Iris that the students from Turkey had difficulty and this could be linked to the large class sizes in Turkey.

4.3.6 Homesickness during the Short-term Sojourns

Of great concern to educators who are organizing sojourns, is the possibility that students will have feelings of homesickness and even culture shock. In the present study, students were on

such short sojourns that culture shock was not experienced, but they were asked about how much they missed home during their sojourns.

Table 11. Homesickness

| Sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|--------------|---|---|--|---|--|
| Homesickness | In the beginning, I thought a little where is mom and how are they, but I got to mail them on the computer and my mom called me. And it didn't feel so weird towards the end. | It was strong, but it was only for a moment and then it got easier. I didn't feel too anxious. I thought about that I really want to be in my own school and with my own friends and with my parents. At one time, I emailed and we called every night. | Yes, I did a little in the beginning but at the end it wasn't bad. | Well, a little at the end, and I was thinking that I still have to go straight from Helsinki to Jyväskylä and to camp school, and couldn't go home right away. I got a chance to use Kevin's computer and talk with my brother on Facebook. | No, not really, the time went really well and I didn't think about it. |

Because the Comenius Project trips were so short, students did not have time to experience *culture shock* in a strong form. They did however, as twelve year olds could be expected, experience some feelings of being *homesick*. Not everyone reported it to be bothersome, but considered it a natural part of the sojourn.

For example, Pekka was a little homesick:

...at the end, and I was thinking that I still have to go straight from Helsinki to Jyväskylä and to camp school, and couldn't go home right away. I got a chance to use Kevin's computer and talk with my brother on Facebook.

It was important that students were able to communicate with their family and friends while on the journey. Pekka was already thinking about the next place he would have to go after his sojourn in Madrid. He had to go to a week-long camp in Jyväskylä in Finland and be without seeing his family for seven more days after his experience in Spain.

At the host family's home, Anna-Kaisa admitted that she had feelings of homesickness:

it was strong, but it was only for a moment and then it got easier. I didn't feel too anguished. I thought about that I really want to be in my school and with my own friends and with my parents. At one time, I emailed and we called every night.

It is clear that Anna-Kaisa experienced homesickness in the beginning of her sojourn, but by communicating with her family and with time, it lessened. In contrast, Pekka had felt homesickness at the end of his sojourn, this is partly due to the fact that he had to go on another trip immediately after getting back to his own country.

Anna-Kaisa felt some homesickness with her host family, but the fact that she was able to speak with her parents every night helped her get over it. Perhaps this allowed her to feel less homesickness as the sojourn went on, because she mentioned that it became easier to be there as time went on.

In relating to the school environment, Anna-Kaisa felt some anxiety and pointed out that:

there was a moment in the first day of school, in the class, and students were all speaking Slovakian and I thought, "Now I want to go home." But then, during the break, Shannon took us with them and then we were with the group. It was ok again.

Anna-Kaisa felt somewhat excluded in the classroom, which made her feel like she missed home, but as soon as she was included again, she felt better. There seems to be some connection between exclusion and homesickness. The less exclusion a student feels, the more it can possibly affect how much s/he experiences the effects of homesickness.

Anna-Kaisa also reflected about the timing of the trip in regards to homesickness:

We couldn't see and do everything but if it was longer, I would have gotten more homesick. We got to see all kinds of things though.

She confirms that the trip was long enough to experience the culture, language and meet people, but that it was short enough to avoid feeling more homesick than would be desired.

Mari felt it more in the beginning as well, compared to Pekka who felt it in the end of the journey. Mari told me that:

In the beginning, I thought a little where my mom is and how all of them are, but I got to mail them on the computer and my mom called me. And it didn't feel so weird towards the end.

Here, we can see that Anna-Kaisa, Pekka and Mari all had chances to communicate with home and all three had mentioned this in association to homesickness.

Mari also noted that because the duration of the trip was so short, she felt that homesickness was not that strong:

We were only gone 5 days, there was not enough time to miss home too much.

Jussi felt a little homesickness in the beginning as well. He could not reach his mother for the first day, "I couldn't get a phone connection to Finland." One of the teachers relayed information to the mother and to Jussi, so that both knew everything was alright. By the second day, he was able to speak with his mother on the phone, so although there was homesickness "a little in the beginning, at the end it wasn't bad."

Again, it can be seen from the interviews that homesickness was connected to having contact with home as well as the duration of the sojourn itself. Other possibilities that affected how homesick the students felt could be how well they got along with their host families. In the previous results, it was confirmed that all of the students had experienced positive experiences with their hosts.

Iiris didn't feel that she experienced any homesickness:

No, not really, the time went really well and I didn't think about it.

Perhaps a good way to prevent homesickness would be to talk about it before and during the sojourn and to remind students that they are very short times away from home. For example, Iiris chose not to think about it and focused on the time that she spent in Italy instead of focusing on thoughts about missing home.

All of the students excluding Iiris reported having felt some homesickness, but that each of them was glad to be able to connect with home through telephone or by computer. It is also interesting that one student, Pekka, realized that he was feeling more homesickness toward the end of his sojourn, because he knew he had another week of travelling before he would see his family or hometown. Another interesting observation is that Iiris, being the only one who felt she did not feel homesickness, was also the only student to experience hosting a student in her home country before sojourning herself. It could be asked if it is possible that her experience of hosting prepared her mentally for the sojourn in order to lessen the possibility of being homesick.

4.4 Post-sojourn and Reflection

The participants were asked in the interviews about their own reflections about the experience of the short sojourns. In particular, they were asked to imagine what they could have done differently, how the project could have been improved, how the project affected them as individuals and what advice they could give future Comenius Project participants. Common themes that came clear through the interviews included changes in English language skills, advice for future Comenius Projects and participants, positive changes, observations as a result of the sojourn, attitudes about English, hosting a foreign student, and re-entry.

4.4.1 Changes in English Language Skills

As a result of the sojourn, the students were asked to reflect on any changes in their own skills in English. All of the students, except for Jussi, mentioned that they believe that their skills improved.

Table 12. Changes in English language skills

| Post-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|------------------------------------|---|---|---|--|---|
| Changes in English Language Skills | I trust myself more. My grade has always been an 8 or 9, but last Christmas, it was a 10. Yes, I started to study French, it is really difficult. | I gained self-confidence, and I know that I know how to do something and I will get through difficult situations and I got this confidence. | I don't think my English improved, maybe it was difficult because I was nervous if I was saying it right to them, but sure it went just fine. At the end it was easier. | I think my English was even better afterwards, because I learned to speak, pronounce and use the language. | Yes, my English changed. I became better and learned a lot of new words. I think my speaking style changed. The words are easier to remember when you are in the situation somehow. |

Anna-Kaisa mentioned that she gained more confidence. Importantly for her, she now has the confidence to speak and use the language to get by in communication with foreigners:

Yes, English was easier and I trusted in the fact that even though I couldn't speak it perfectly, I am still understood and the situations will work out. It was good that I got the self-confidence to speak.

From what Anna-Kaisa said about her abilities in English, it is clear that she perceives language skills to be related to her confidence and ability to speak in a way that is not perfect so that other understand her. It is interesting that she didn't mention her school grade, but that her feeling about her own skills held more precedence.

Maria measured her English language skills by her grade. She explained that her grade rose to a ten. In the Finnish education system, a ten is the top grade a student can receive in elementary school (grades 1-9). She also pointed out that she had begun studying French, which is something that a student can do voluntarily in grades 7-9. Perhaps this interest in learning more languages could be a direct result of being involved in studies abroad at a young age.

Pekka's answer in regards to improving in English revolves around his understanding that he learned to speak and use the language by going on the sojourn. He had a place to use the language and practice his pronunciation.

Iiris also confirms the result of the sojourn was a positive one in regards to improving her skills in English. She refers to the fact that because she was in the situation of using English, she learned more vocabulary and her style of speaking changed.

Jussi didn't think that his skills improved, but that speaking English became easier in the end of the sojourn. Perhaps this could be considered an improvement – that speaking became easier at the end of the journey, but perhaps his answer also reflects the fact that he shared: "I haven't had to try too hard to get good grades in English."

In sum, four of the five students confirmed that the sojourn had improved their English language skills. Jussi was the only participant who believed his skills did not improve but the act of using L2 became easier over time during the sojourn. Not only is it interesting that some of the participants mentioned the ease with which they spoke towards the end of the sojourn, but that personal feelings of confidence rose, interest in other languages rose and an awareness of just being better was shared.

4.4.2 Attitudes about Language Learning

Change in English language skills is one thing, but attitude is another. The aim of this section is to explore whether the thoughts or feelings of the participants changed about the importance of

learning English and/or other languages is important in education. The section's goal is to answer the question whether the sojourn experience caused attitudes about learning English to strengthen or change and how?

Table 13. Attitudes about English language learning

| Post-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|--|--|--|
| Attitudes about Language learning | <p>My attitude changed because I learned that I don't have to speak so perfectly in English, that I am understood even with a little less explanation.</p> <p>One of my friends doesn't like languages much, I've always said to him that it's not a waste, if you know some other language, you can try. It's very important and French can be spoken in many countries as well.</p> | <p>I was able to notice or accept the differences and similarities of the place.</p> <p>Somehow it was like I understood even though they spoke English in a different way than we did in Finland, I understood them, their accent.</p> | <p>I can more bravely use the language, like if I am somewhere and I don't need to use the Google translator right away. I believe that I know I am right more often.</p> <p>English is an important subject. I haven't had to try too hard to get good grades in English.</p> | <p>I realized that it is fun to learn and that I now know it better.</p> | <p>It is very important to me.</p> <p>I try to keep good grades in school and learn more. I want to learn English more now and I like to learn Swedish. It's almost the same to learn Swedish as it is to learn English. They are different, but to read, they are very similar.</p> |

Most of the students reported not only having better skills as in the previous section, but that keeping a good grade in languages is important to them. In Finland, students begin learning English in the third grade, Swedish in the seventh and then have the option to learn French from seventh to ninth grade. It is interesting that Mari is studying French and that she sees that it is an important language in many countries; she has an understanding that it is not just spoken in France. Also, Iiris has begun studying Swedish in the seventh grade and explains that she has made connections between her learning abilities between English and Swedish. It is also interesting that Mari mentioned that she used to feel that speaking and learning languages, a student had to be perfect – through her experience, her attitude changed in that she realized that being perfect is not necessary. One can still succeed with even basic skills. Pekka did not have more to say about attitude towards languages but that it was fun to learn because he is good at it.

If students find that they can succeed at speaking languages, perhaps this will inspire them to enjoy the learning as well. It is possible that experience using the languages in real-life situations can create venues from which students begin to enjoy learning languages and begin to believe that it is important.

Anna-Kaisa explains that after the Comenius Project during a trip to Spain with her family:

I was able to notice or accept the differences and similarities of the place. Somehow it was like, like, I understood even though they spoke English in a different way than we did in Finland, I understood them, their accent. In Slovakia too, they spoke with a different accent but I always understood them.

As a result of her learning to use English and listen to English in different places, Anna-Kaisa's attitude towards languages was that it differs from place to place, but that it is important in order to get by. As a result of her experiences, Anna-Kaisa had learned to appreciate and tolerate different accents and cultures when comparing her sojourn journey and a following vacation with her family to Spain. She also said that "I have started to think English is easy, and I have used it, and I like the language. Sometimes, when I learn something new, then I notice it and can say I did that when I was speaking English!" Her attitude is positive.

Jussi shares:

I can more bravely use the language like if I am somewhere and I don't need to Google translator right away. I believe that I know it right. English is an important subject. I haven't had to try too hard to get good grades in English.

It is clear from Jussi that English is important and his attitude shows a confidence in it. As a result of the sojourn, his attitude is also positive.

Pekka noticed his English skills improved, "I think it was even better after because I learned to speak, pronounce and use the language." Regarding his attitude, he mentioned that it is more fun than it used to be.

Iiris's reply to being asked about her attitude regarding English shows that she is aware its importance and that she can relate it to other language learning.

In conclusion towards students' attitudes towards English and languages in general, is that they see the importance to learn. Many of the participants also revealed a revelation about the

importance to speak a second language without so much anxiety. A realization was made that speaking and learning to speak is not as difficult as they originally feared.

4.4.3 Positive Changes as a result of the sojourn

It was of major concern to the present study that the interviews provided data regarding the positive changes that occurred in the lives of the participants as a result of their sojourn experiences. Table 14 shows what the students believed to be positive changes as a result of their sojourns.

Table 14. Positive changes

| Post-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Positive Changes | Well, I also learned to think about the feelings of others, and make others feel welcome when they came here. I talk with them and try to be very kind. Before the trip, I was very shy and didn't talk much to adults either, but now I am brave enough to socialize with everyone. I also gained many other friends from other countries and that is what I was hoping for. | Well, I want to go to as many countries as I can and maybe have a job where I can use English or other languages. I think the experience is very useful, and it's amazing and like if you don't know English that well, you still have to use it and you learn to use it and learn it almost by force and it's nice to see all the sights. And of course, there you become aware of the culture and you meet more people and make friends and friends that are long term. | It was really fun, that I got to go and meet new people. The food could have been better and the weather was cold, but otherwise it was a really good trip. | It was really wonderful that I got to go and get to know people in another country. And when you find out that they are really nice and fun, I still talk to them on Facebook, with Kevin and the Slovenian guys. It would be nice to see them again. | Yes, I keep in touch with the Slovakian and Slovenian people, on Facebook. I am brave enough to go and talk to people, I became a lot braver. |

The participants were asked whether they observed positive changes or things about the experience. Many of their responses emphasized the fact that the sojourn raised their awareness of the importance of English speaking skills, lowered their anxiety in speaking, made them learn about the culture and helped them build new long-term relationships. The students also

commented on the new relationships that have grown as a result of the project. Many of them keep in contact with their host students with whom they lived or who stayed with them. This means that even after the sojourn, these students still communicate in English with the students from the other countries and continue building a network of their own. The project has thus resulted in the cross-cultural relationships that will continue developing. However, Jussi said that he did not keep in contact with the boy with whom he stayed in Spain as much as the one who stayed with him in Finland. Jussi communicates with the Spanish boy whom he hosted in Finland through Facebook on a regular basis. As a result of their friendship, he was invited by the Spanish friend he hosted to visit Spain with his entire family.

I asked Iris if she still keeps in touch with people from her journey and what the positive results of the trip were for her. Iris answered as follows:

Yes, I keep in touch with the Slovakian and Slovenian people, on Facebook. I am brave enough to go and talk to people, I became a lot braver.

Also, Mari said that she became braver as well. She mentioned other positive changes as well:

I am braver now after this trip, and I dare to do more things. I trust myself more.

My number has always been an 8 or 9, but last Christmas, it was a 10. Yes, I started to study French, it is really difficult.

Well, I also learned to think about the feelings of others, and make others feel welcome when they came here. I talk with them and try to be very kind.

Before the trip I was very shy and didn't talk much to adults either, but now I am brave enough to socialize with everyone. I was really happy the whole time I was there and I never regretted going. I appreciated the fact that I got to go because a lot of others would have wanted to go.

On Facebook, we chat. Sometimes it's fast and sometimes a little slower, sometimes I just quickly write something.

Not only did Mari become more social and ready to try new things, but she also learned to appreciate language learning by studying French. Her skills in English in the classroom have also improved. In Mari's case, many different positive changes were noted.

In Anna-Kaisa's view:

The experience is very useful, and it's amazing and like if you don't know English that well, you still have to use it and you learn to use it and learn it almost by force and it's nice to see all the sights and of course there, you become aware of the culture and you meet more people and make friends and friends that are long term. I send Shannon emails.

This realization by Anna-Kaisa reinforces the importance of reflecting on experiential learning. She is able to reflect in words about the importance of having to use the L2 in the situation she was in. Not only did she learn to use L2 more freely, but she learned a lot about cultures and made long-lasting relationships.

Iiris included in her story that “I think that it was nice to go to the country and see the culture and meet all the people, they were so nice. I learned a lot of new things...” The entire experience of travelling to another country during the school year is considered positive because the student was able to see new things, learn new things and meet new people.

Pekka’s answer to the question about what kinds of positive changes the sojourn had on him was as follows:

It was really wonderful that I got to go and get to know people in another country. And when you find out that they are really nice and fun, I still talk to them on Facebook, with Kevin and the Slovenian guys. It would be nice to see them again.

Pekka explained that the students he met from different countries were very fun and interesting. He was happy to have had the chance to travel and meet people. This is also considered a positive result of the sojourn – that students made new friends from other cultures using L2.

The students were also asked about their future plans that may have been affected by the sojourn. To this, Anna-Kaisa answered:

Well, I want to go to as many countries as I can and maybe have a job where I can use English or other languages.

The interest in other languages is also apparent in the narratives by Iiris and Mari. Perhaps short sojourns are another way to increase awareness and interest in learning languages alongside of English. In sum, the interviews provided an understanding that students became interested in learning about other cultures and languages. They also created many new relationships with the students from other European Union countries.

4.4.4 Participants’ Realizations about the Sojourn Experiences

Each of the participants had some observations about the place and people of the sojourn. The realizations that the students had concerning their experiences are shown in following table.

Table 15. The realizations of the participants' sojourn experiences

| Post-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|---|--|---|---|--|---|
| The Realizations of the Participants' Sojourn Experiences | They probably don't have a lot of stereotypes about other people. They are probably quite accepting I think. | I learned to appreciate the Finnish culture. Before, I took things for granted in Finland, but it is actually quite different for someone who comes from another country. I appreciate other cultures, I understand that people are people, not just citizens of a certain country and you can learn to understand them more. I became interested in them after the trip. | At least that they talk a lot and fast. Especially when they are angry. | Well, there it was, when we went to the city with Kevin, it was a lot of different types of places where people could dance or do play fighting, it was a fighting technique that added dance. It was really cool looking. | Probably a lot about their language and other languages and on the bus trip we went to Calabria, we just tried to think of some stupid phrases from our own languages and taught them to each other. Probably that they did not care much about schedules |

The observations are cultural ones in that students realized new things about another culture. For example, Anna-Kaisa explains that, as a result of the sojourn, she now had a newly found respect for her own culture in Finland:

I learned to appreciate the Finnish culture. Before, I thought I took things for granted in Finland, but it is actually quite different for someone who comes from another country. I appreciate other cultures, I understand that people are people, not just citizens of a certain country and you can learn to understand them more. I became interested in them after the trip.

While reflecting on what she has learned and observed from the sojourn, Anna-Kaisa's understanding of the world expanded. She gained a new way of looking at others in other cultures as well as herself.

The other realizations made by the students are repetitive of the things they noticed during the sojourn, but are also important in examining the post-sojourn results of their experiences. These realizations about the way people carry themselves in other cultures, how the daily routines differ from their own in Finland and the different languages spoken other than L2 created

understandings for these participants – understandings about cultural differences and how they relate to the other United European Nations.

All of these observations only touch the surface of the experiences by these participants. They point out differences between the way people speak and behave. Anna-Kaisa, was an exception, however, for she explained that people are people everywhere. Her observation underlines the idea that people are similar around the world, and that it is interesting to note the differences in order to understand each other. Understanding our differences can lead to coming closer. In the case of these participants, finding that L2 can bring them together and that their similarities in age and perhaps interests show that regardless of their cultural differences, they are all adolescents growing up in a United European setting. Furthermore, the hope of this study is to convey that these students can identify themselves with other young adolescents of foreign cultures. The result of sojourns like the one involved in this present study, show that young students can benefit from meeting foreigners and adapting to other cultures in a globalizing world. This interest in understanding others leads to the importance of learning each other's cultures and languages. This learning lends itself to Anna-Kaisa as a venue to see herself and her own country in light of her new observations – to appreciate herself and others in relation to each other.

4.4.5 Advice for Future Projects and Sojourners

Importantly, the present study provides information for future sojourn projects, educators and students who will become involved in similar short-term sojourns. Table 16 provides the advice given by the participants in this study.

Table 16. Advice for future projects and sojourners

| Post-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|---|---|--|--|--|--|
| Advice for future projects and sojourners | If someone gets a chance to do something like this, even if you doubt it a little, it's worth proceeding, you learn a lot and with the language, even though I thought I don't know how, but I did! Even if someone else thinks he or she can't speak, they should try and go because you learn there, learn about other cultures. If you are brave enough to open your mouth and ask, it takes some initiative. If I went back now, I would be more talkative. | Maybe more sharing of cultural traditions. I think that it was good when we had to explain about Finnish Easter traditions in small groups. I think it was nice, and it could be more like that, not everyone at once because some are not as social, but in small groups we have a better ability to talk and have conversations, they are easier. At least I can relax more with just a few people. What would you do differently now? Well, I would be more ready to go with the others and ask more things, try to get to know all the people | Well, I don't really know, well maybe there could be more time to talk with the other Finns on the trip. We didn't really get to see each other that much. We could have told each other what we were doing. | Well, be yourself and give a good image of Finland. Try to get to know as many people as you can and give a good example. Don't dishonor Finland's reputation. How could the project be better? Well, nothing, except arrange more social events. I don't remember if we ever had an event where everyone was together – except the quiz. | Probably that you shouldn't be too shy because it won't be a very long time so you should try to get as much as you can from the trip, it's not worth it to be shy. You should be brave and speak to get more from the experience. |

Because all of these participants experienced sojourns in foreign countries, they now had knowledge about what helped them succeed and what didn't. This information can be useful for educators, to ensure that they can improve their project goals and outcomes.

When Iiris was asked about what tips she could give to another student going on a similar journey, she explained that it was important to be brave. She stressed the need for young people to not be too shy and that if they are, they will not receive as much from the experience.

The idea that students should not fear speaking during the sojourn was very important. All the other participants agreed on this point. Mari said, for example that:

If someone gets a chance to do something like this, even if you doubt it a little, it's worth proceeding, you learn a lot and with the language, even though I thought I don't know how, but I did! Even if someone else thinks he or she can't speak, they should try and go because you learn there, learn about other cultures. If you are brave enough to open your mouth and ask, it takes some initiative.

Mari explained that students need initiative to succeed in their sojourns and also believes that doubting oneself can be overcome by trying. Advice, then, for future sojourners is to make more of an effort to start conversations, and to avoid self-doubt.

Pekka's advice for future sojourners from Finland as well as how projects could be improved was the following:

Well, be yourself and give a good image of Finland. Try to get to know as many people as you can and give a good example. Don't dishonor Finland's reputation.
Arrange more social events. I don't remember if we ever had an event where everyone was together – except the quiz.

It is important to Pekka, as well as to many citizens of Finland, to project a good image of his home. To him, it is extremely important to show other cultures and foreigners a good picture of people here. At the same time, it could be asked, what does this good image entail? Perhaps this is something that educators and students can discuss in relation to their own philosophies.

The project could have been improved according to Jussi. He felt that his experience in Spain did not allow for enough contact time with his partner students and teachers from Finland. He hoped for more events with the students and teachers rather than as much time away with the host families. This insinuates a need for more support or communication with the teachers and students that travelled together from Finland. To Jussi, it was important that the students who travel have more time to share their difficulties, thoughts and experiences with the people that they journey with. This would create more support and reflective moments during the visit. It

may well be that if sojourners are allowed more reflection time with their partners from their own country, they will have more support for succeeding in their own journeys.

Pondering what she would have done differently to improve the sojourn experience, Anna-Kaisa explained that she would have wanted to have more conversations and put more effort into getting to know more people.

In her opinion, the project could be improved:

Maybe more sharing of cultural traditions. I think that it was good when we had to explain about Finnish Easter traditions in small groups. I think it was nice, and it could be more like that, not everyone at once because some are not as social, but in small groups we have a better ability to talk and have conversations, they are easier. At least I can relax more with just a few people. They liked our arts and crafts and asked how we should put the feathers on the branches...it was really fun and different, and it was really fun to be there for a week rather than at school here. It was like a vacation, but it wasn't like we had to try a lot, but that it was easy and fun.

According to Anna-Kaisa, more group events and smaller groups for conversations would be useful in future Comenius Projects. Smaller groups, to Anna-Kaisa, would have formed a better atmosphere from which she would have been able to speak more with others. She shared the thought that she felt that she would have gained more from the experience had she gotten to know more people.

Mari shares similar sentiments about speaking with people. She believes that:

Even if someone else thinks he or she can't speak, they should try and go because you learn there, learn about other cultures. If you are brave enough to open your mouth and ask, it takes some initiative. If I went back now, I would be more talkative.

Mari's advice is that trying is the most important thing that future sojourners can do and that one needs to be brave and initiate conversations with people. Thinking about her own experience, she now thought that it would have benefited her more if she had spoken more.

All of the participants had important advice for students and educators who are involved in similar projects in the future. What they emphasized was that students need initiative, courage, support and that more communication between travelers from their own country as well as situations to communicate with foreigners would be useful in future projects. The most important finding in relation to this study is that communication and the openness to do so in L2 is essential to benefit sojourners.

4.4.6 Hosting a Foreign Student

When hosting a student from another country in Finland, the students felt that their own experiences abroad helped them to provide better experiences for their visitors. Iris hosted a student from Spain before her own sojourn to Italy which also allowed her to imagine what it might be like for her when she travelled. The benefits of having done both travel on a sojourn and to host a student on a sojourn thus allowed four of these five students to compare and contrast the experiences.

Table 17. Hosting a foreign student

| Post-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iris |
|---------------------------|--|--|---|--------------------------------|--|
| Hosting a Foreign Student | It was hardest that my dad was always asking Kate things, he can ask very personal things. He liked to hear her speak in Slovakian,...he was always asking all these things with terrible English... my brother and I protected her at home. We translated for them. | I was the one in a comfortable place and leading the other in another culture and she was the one a little lost. | I had no idea who was coming, what he would look like. It was a pretty anxious situation, he was a little afraid and didn't want to talk a lot then. The next day and the rest of the time, he was brave enough to talk. I knew a lot what it was like for him. | Did not host a foreign student | Was it difficult to host a student? Well, not really, but sometimes it was like, what could we do now? One night, we went sledding on a hill, because close by were a lot of other students. At least five others who had students from other countries. What was good about hosting? I met a lot of new people and we went on lots of trips, we went to Rovaniemi and I learned a lot, too. |

Anna-Kaisa knew that she would be hosting the same student that she had stayed with in Slovakia and this most likely contributed to the ease to which the Slovakian student came to Finland. Yet, Anna-Kaisa revealed that:

I was the one in a comfortable place and leading the other in another culture and she was the one a little lost. There is a lot of snow in Finland, and it's normal for us, whereas for them it's like "Wow! In Finland, there is a lot of snow!" Finland has clean snow and it's really beautiful. It's nice that they can appreciate it. She didn't complain, about the cold. My mom tried to give her more clothes but she said that, "I don't need them, I have snow pants with me."

Anna-Kaisa was asked about any difficulties, and she replied that the student who had stayed with her had received news from home that her sister was seriously ill. When asked how they handled the situation, she said:

She didn't want to talk about it. Her sister was in the hospital and she sent messages home. She didn't want to talk about it and we tried to get her thoughts on something else, so we went bowling and then to Mari's and had Mexican food. We laughed a lot and I was happy that she got to enjoy the trip even though she was worried about her sister.

I asked Anna-Kaisa if she had difficulties of her own, to this she replied that "I couldn't be like I normally am when I am at home when someone else is there, and it was more formal and I could not go on the couch and just hang out." Anna-Kaisa didn't have any other difficulties with hosting a student, but that she felt she had to be a little more conservative in her behavior at home when someone was living there.

When asked about how she spent the rest of her time with her visitor and what she showed her about Finland, she said:

I showed her our city and I wanted her to go in the sauna, but she wouldn't go...she must have heard some terrible stories and she said, "I can't because I have asthma." So we didn't force her.

In Slovakia, Anna-Kaisa had gone swimming with the students and noticed that people did not have to take off their bathing suits in front of each other like we do in Finland. She confirmed that she thought perhaps her visitor was afraid to be naked in front of others, which in Finland is not a strange thing to be when women go to the sauna together.

When asked whether Anna-Kaisa thought her visitor enjoyed her stay, she answered, "I hope so and I remember a teacher asked her this question, and she said it is too short of a time to be here." Students realized that the four nights and five days go very quickly and there is a limited amount of things to see and do. Yet, perhaps they also realized, as the interviewed participants noted earlier, that there was less homesickness as a result. Anna-Kaisa also shared, "It was just enough to time to get a taste of another culture, of other students from other countries, and to meet people."

Jussi had not had a chance to contact the boy who visited him from Spain. He said:

I had no idea who was coming, what he would look like. It was a pretty anxious situation, he was a little afraid and didn't want to talk a lot then. The next day and the rest of the time, he was brave enough to talk.

I asked Jussi if his own experience made a difference in how he accepted his visitor,

I knew a lot what it was like for him.” Therefore, he explained what he did to make the visitor’s time pleasant, “I tried to talk to him a lot and show places and I think he accustomed to the situation better than I had. He went in the sauna no problem, and jumped from the sauna into the snow bank, ate reindeer and lingonberries and watched snow-hill jumping.

In the interview, Jussi explained that the hosting experience was not difficult, “No not really, sometimes or once I didn’t know what fun we could arrange for him.” The students from all countries came to the bowling hall and I asked him if Jose had enjoyed that, “He didn’t really care for it, he watched from the side but he was interested in everything else.” All of the students also went on a group bus trip to Rovaniemi to see Santa Claus. Jussi said, “It was fun, but Jose said the best things about the trip was firstly the potkuri (kick sled). We went for a walk with the dog and the potkuri, and he got to ride it. That was the best thing. Secondly, was that after the sauna, we got to go in the snow. He was more interested in home culture stuff.” When asked when Jussi had last spoken to Jose, he answered, “yesterday”. I asked Jussi if Brian, who he had stayed with in Spain, had himself travelled before taking Jussi into his home if he thought the experience would be different, “Yes, he would have known how to speak to me more about things.” This reveals information that Jussi would have had a better sojourn experience if his own host partner in Spain had previously had a chance to experience sojourning. The aftereffect of all this, is, that because Jussi had already experienced living with a host family, he knew exactly what he could do to make this other boy, Jose’s experience better.

When Mari was asked about the experience of hosting the student she had stayed with in Slovakia. When Mari hosted the same student who she had stayed with earlier, she commented that it was easier for her than for some of the other students because she already knew her host student. She had mentioned some of the awkward moments of being at home with Kate, but most of her comments show a positive experience. Mari also said:

We took her horseback riding. She was quite afraid that it would be cold when she came. It was even -30 degrees some days. They didn’t realize how they had to dress, like to put gloves on or mittens and a toque needs to be on your head. She brought enough clothes from Slovakia. Eino (Mari’s brother) is very social and he and she became friends, my brother is really good at English, too. They also speak on Facebook. We went to the city, with Anna-Kaisa and Shannon, we went for a walk with my dog and I showed some places, and then we went bowling with the entire Comenius group. They were very excited about Santa Claus and the reindeer. They have a lot of pictures on Facebook of the reindeer.

Mari answered all the interview questions without being prompted on each item, they followed a narrative that came naturally and she was able to comment on the difficulties of hosting, the events, the interesting differences or what she noticed affected the sojourner as well as the resulting relationship formed with her brother.

Iiris's experience was different from that of the other three participants who also hosted students in Finland. Jussi had travelled before hosting, but hosted a different student than whom he had stayed with. Mari and Anna-Kaisa both hosted the same student with whom they had lived with on their sojourns. Iiris had not yet travelled on a sojourn for the Comenius project, but hosted a student from Spain. Iiris was prompted with the following questions in bold face, and gave the following answers:

You picked up the girl from the place and did not get to know her before she came, was she older? Yes, a year older.

Where did she sleep in your house? She slept in my room. **What about you?** I slept in our room with a fireplace.

Was it difficult having someone live there? Well, not really, but sometimes it was like, what could we do now? One night, we went sledding on a hill because close by, live a lot of the other students, at least five others who had students from other countries.

What was good about hosting? Well, I met a lot of new people and we went on lots of trips, we went to Rovaniemi and I learned a lot, too.

What did you learn? Exactly this, more of language.

Do you think that the visiting student was homesick? I don't think so, at least she didn't show it anyway. She seemed normal and energetic and called her mom and dad in the evenings.

Do you still keep in touch? Yes.

More or less than the student from Italy with whom you sojourned with? Maybe a little less because it has been more time since she was here, but we still talk.

What else did you show her about Finland? Well, we went to look at Raahel and to go see the avanto, and she went swimming there and looked around at the city and the snow because they don't really have any of it.

The host experience was different for Iiris, and her answers about it seemed to be a bit shorter than the ones received from Mari, Anna-Kaisa and Jussi. This could be the result of the fact that it had been a longer lapse of time between her hosting experience and her sojourn. Iiris had hosted a student three months prior to her own sojourn, so her own sojourn was fresher in her memory than the hosting experience which was fresher to Mari, Anna-Kaisa and Jussi. Mari and Anna-Kaisa had sojourned a year before the hosting experience, and Jussi had hosted eight months later. Another interesting thing to note is that the students, at the times of their interviews, had experienced a change in schools as well. The experiences differ largely in that Anna-Kaisa, Mari and Jussi were already attending a different school when hosting the students who were sojourning at the participating Finnish school with mostly sixth graders. Anna-Kaisa, Mari and Jussi had been in seventh. Iiris was in the sixth grade at the participating school while hosting and

then sojourning, but her interview happened the following fall when she had already moved to the same school as the other three, into seventh grade. Pekka was interviewed only for his sojourn experience because he and his family were unable to accept a sojourning student.

In sum, it is clear that having sojourned before hosting students, created an understanding of how to be a good host for Jussi, Anna-Kaisa and Mari. It is also clear that Iris had benefited from the hosting experience in that she knew what her experience would be like and therefore she was not as nervous about her coming sojourn. Regardless of whether students sojourn or host foreign students in whatever order, it is also clear from the Pre-sojourn section that students would benefit from getting to know their partner students beforehand. This can lessen homesickness and anxiety in general, only adding to the possibilities of having positive sojourn experiences.

4.4.7 Re-entry to Finland

The students were also asked to think back to how they felt upon coming back to Finland, whether Finland looked different then, whether fellow students or families asked about their trips and if they felt that their stories were appreciated. This section is titled “Re-entry to Finland” because it examines the state of understanding one’s own country and identity within that country as a result of experiencing the sojourn. Goals in this section of the interview were to find out whether the students gained new knowledge and understanding about their own country in relation to a foreign one. Questions to which this section of the study sought to find answers were: Did their own country, for instance look or feel different as a result of living abroad for a short amount of time? Did they perceive their homes to be different in any way as a result of learning what it is like to live in another culture? What sorts of things did they tell their friends and families about their sojourns? Why were those things important for them to tell? Were others interested in hearing about their trips and do they believe that these trips have impacted their lives? Table 18 shows whether the students saw their home country as different upon arrival and whether the experience changed their perceptions about home or not.

Table 18. Re-entry to Finland

| Post-sojourn | Mari | Anna-Kaisa | Jussi | Pekka | Iiris |
|---------------------|--|---|---|---|---|
| Re-entry to Finland | Did Finland seem different when you came back? No not really, we were only gone for 5 days, there was not enough time to miss home too much. | I learned to appreciate the Finnish culture. I thought before that this is just normal, but it is actually quite different for someone who comes from another country. I started to think like that, what someone else from another country would think of Finland. | It felt good to be home again, I could appreciate that it's nice to be at home. | Yes, we went to Piispa and it was pretty flat and a lot of trees. At first I thought that it would be colder than Spain, but it was warmer! | It was a lot colder when we got home. There, it had been nice and warm. I have gone quite often to other countries, so it (Finland/home) did not look that different. |

Mari's experiences at the point of re-entry were the following:

I told people that they were very kind, good hosts and that they think about other people. I had nothing bad to say. It took about a week, my friends asked about it and what did I do there. And friends of friends, who I don't know that well, came to ask me about the trip as well, they asked, "What did you do there?"

In the classroom after the sojourn, Anna-Kaisa mentions that the students did not seem to be too interested in knowing about the journey, but the teacher was. She did discuss the sojourn in class:

Well, I didn't tell my friends everything, but I told my class. They were not so interested, but our teacher was and he asked me more questions about it. My friends asked what we did in Slovakia. I think the experience is very useful, and it's amazing and like if you don't know English that well, you still have to use it and you learn to use it and learn it almost by force and it's nice to see all the sights and of course there, you become aware of the culture and you meet more people and make friends and friends that are long term. I send Shannon emails.

Students were gone such a short time that the experience did not strongly affect their view of their home countries. Anna-Kaisa saw the value of her own country more as a result of going abroad and having a student live with her in Finland.

Jussi was happy to come home and found a new appreciation for his own country, he had missed many things about being at home. For Pekka, re-entry was a different experience, because he saw the land differently and was surprised that the weather in his own country was warmer at that time of year than he had expected. He had learned that even in Spain, it can be cold.

Iris didn't notice a big difference in her home on re-entry, she merely observed, "It was a lot colder when we got home. There, it had been nice and warm. I have gone quite often to other countries, so it didn't look that different." Iris did not notice a large effect or difference on coming back to Finland because she has experienced being elsewhere.

Re-entry did not produce a lot of results in the interview questions, but the results in general from the narratives shows a lot of learning about languages and cultures. The students readily provided information about how much they reflected on issues such as language learning and understanding the cultures of others in Europe.

In sum, the results show major findings in concordance with the goals of the study. The sojourn experiences of these young adolescents thus provided many revelations about how the experience affects their views about English, their beliefs about foreign people and how much useful information can come from reflecting about sojourn experiences.

A major finding is that students on these short sojourns had much to say about how much easier it was to speak English towards the end of the journey. They also shared the realizations that relationships were formed and that people from other cultures are more similar than different. The reflections of these students did not provide a lot of information of cultural identity or learning about new cultures, but more about the acceptance of people. To ensure the most production in gaining knowledge and understanding as a result of sojourns, a suggestion for future Comenius projects would be to incorporate reflection activities into the project during and after the sojourns. If students are asked to focus on the tasks at hand, write them down and speak about them, they may remember more about the experience in general.

In sum, the analyses of the narratives show that the students in the present study did realize many effects of their experiences in regards to language use, attitudes about language and in their lives in general. The following section will discuss the results and the conclusions that can be drawn as a result of examining the five narratives.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The Comenius Project, EU & I, allowed the five students interviewed in this study to experience the phenomena of living in a foreign country. They lived with a host family in another European country for five days and four nights. During these sojourns, the students had the unique experience of living in a host culture and communicating in a foreign language, English. Each of the students had their own personal experiences, but also had similar worries, anxieties, and reflective thoughts about their journeys.

The interviews were carried out after the sojourns. The time of interviewing the participants ranged from six months to two years after the sojourn experience. The interviews were done from November to December 2011. Iris's interview took place only six months after her sojourn. Pekka's and Jussi's interviews were conducted after a year, and Mari's and Anna-Kaisa's two years after their sojourn. The reason for the differences in time between interviews and sojourns is that the study was conducted post-project for a Master's Thesis. It would have been optimal to interview the sojourners immediately after their sojourns, but the study was born later.

The results of the narrative interviews show the importance of reflecting on sojourn experiences in order to retrieve value from the experiences. Future sojourners, as well as and educators who chaperone sojourns can benefit from the advice that these participants gave. There are many positive outcomes shared by the participants of this Comenius Project, and the most positive or valuable results included learning about other cultures, creating long-term contacts with new people across cultures and improving their own attitudes and skills with the English language.

5.1 Discussion about the Importance of Similar Backgrounds

The backgrounds of the five participants involved in the Comenius project were similar in many ways. All of the students attended the same elementary school and were in the same grade at the time of their sojourns. All of the students lived in the same Northwestern Finnish town and spoke Finnish as a mother tongue at home. English was the lingua franca used in the sojourns for all participants. It is important that the sample group from which the data is collected have a similar background to give validity to the study. If the students were not originally from the same town, country, or were from different schools, they may have had different ways of perceiving their sojourns. This in turn, would change the results of comparing the sojourn experiences to each

other. In the study by Jackson (2008), she is able to identify the differences in the experiences of the participants by comparing their host family situations and cultural understandings during their sojourns. If her participants had been too different in backgrounds, the results of the data could have been due to other reasons than the sojourn experience itself. For example, a young Asian female has different cultural tendencies than a young Finnish female. If the two were compared for sojourn experience results, the narratives would differ on the foundation that their own cultures are so different. In the present study, the similar background of these students gives more validity to the results of assessing their sojourn experiences in comparison to each other.

5.2 Discussion about the Pre-sojourn Results

The students' experiences show that the students who leave for cultural excursions feel anxiety in relation to language, social contexts and travelling in general. It is important to discuss these anxieties pre-sojourn with each other and with the educators involved, in order to decrease them or reassure students that the outcomes will be successful. It is also clear that students leave for these journeys with ideas about what people will be like in certain places. It is interesting that some of the students did prepare for their journeys and did some research about the place they were travelling to. For example, some of the students studied the Comenius project's blog, explored the internet and/or brought dictionaries for the journeys. Pre-contact was a positive thing for Mari, in that it created some familiarity with her host partner. She knew who she would be staying with and what the girl was like. Mari had mentioned that she wasn't as nervous had she not had pre-contact with Kate. Therefore, it would be beneficial in future sojourns to have the students at this age contact their hosts in order to prepare themselves better. The participants who did not have a chance to contact their hosts, reported that they had hoped to have known more about the people they would be living with. These particular students had no idea who would be waiting for them at the airport, hotel or school, where they were going. Perhaps this element of anxiety could have been avoided.

Although Mari had gotten to know Kate before her sojourn, she was still anxious about the same language barriers and the travelling itself to another country as were the other students. The two boys who had had no contact with the hosts before their trip had no idea who they would be staying with and this was anxiety causing. In the same way, the other two girls mentioned in their interviews that they would have wanted to get to know their hosts beforehand. This type of

preparation can be seen to be an important part of future Comenius projects and other educational sojourns short or long. The important issue here is that pre-contact should be an important part of planning and carrying out sojourns.

All the sojourners experienced the anxiety of wondering how well they would be able to communicate in English with foreigners in another culture. The result of this anxiety to speak L2, showed that some of the students did not talk as much as they could have. For example, Anna-Kaisa and Mari both reported that it would have been better to be more outgoing and speak to more people. Dufon and Churchill (2006: 16) mentioned this same phenomenon in their study, where it was noted that motivation to speak was affected by anxiety (and this was created by the speaker's own perception of self as a speaker of L2). All of them felt that even though in their Finnish school settings, English is taught with an emphasis grammar, they were able to communicate without perfect English. The levels of anxiety differed among the participants, some experienced it before departure and some at the point of meeting their host families. The most common element of anxiety was, however, the fear of not being able to communicate efficiently in English – which the students soon realized, was not as difficult as they imagined it to be.

Along with the goal of this project, which was to enhance the use of the English language, learn about the cultures and languages of other cultures in the United Nations of Europe, and to identify oneself within that framework, the students had their own expectations and goals. In the study conducted by Tarp (2006: 167), it was reported that the expectations of students and the inclusion of students in the planning of sojourns need to be noted by educators to increase positive experiences. They all wanted to become better in English and to meet new people. The students believed that these goals were fulfilled and that the project was a success. In addition, the students learned about people from other European countries. For example, Anna-Kaisa's beliefs about Turkish people changed as a result of spending time and communicating with students from Turkey. In the same way, Iris had an idea of what people would be like in Italy as a result of having learnt things from communicating with students before her own sojourn. She left for her sojourn with a preconception created on the basis of what she had heard. She believed that Italian students would not speak any English and she was afraid of how communication with them would succeed on her sojourn. This perception of hers did not seem to change as a result of

her journey, although she was pleasantly surprised by the excellent skills her host family had in the English language.

5.3 Discussion about the Sojourn Results

All of the participants in the present study reported having had good experiences with the host families and during the sojourn overall.

The interview results showed that the students had had a lot of issues with self-confidence and had been worried about whether what they said in English would be understood (with the exception of Pekka). It is clear from the narratives by the students that their English language skills became better as a result of understanding that they did not have to speak perfect English to succeed in communication. As Jenkins (1996: 200) explained, using L2 in a specific setting can create changes in identity and promote tolerance about other cultures. Actively speaking English and establishing an identity as a member in a group of foreign students who were all using the foreign language, English, to communicate created a sense of solidarity between the participants in the Comenius Project in question. The students had clearly formed a community of practice, in which they felt part of an in group. This phenomenon was mentioned in earlier as well by Jenkins (1996: 200). They did not, however, create a Third Culture Formation as Citron (2002) mentioned had happened in his study on exchange students. The students were all participating in the Comenius Project and became a group of students from nine countries learning from each other.

The students had noticed cultural differences within their communities of practice. Some reported differences in daily schedules, personalities, food, schools, homes, and the education systems. They found that being in a foreign country had been a fruitful experience, in that they could learn from others and see what it is like to for other students their own age to live in another country. For example, Anna Kaisa realized things about her own life and about things that she takes for granted in her home country. She also mentioned that now she could appreciate other cultures and also realized what foreigners might experience when they visit Finland. Students shared music, jokes, hobbies and languages. The participants mentioned in the interviews that they had found the other students from the other countries to be more similar to them than different.

Hence, cultural differences did not deter these students from being able to relate to the foreign students.

Culture shock was not evident for any of the participants, but homesickness was felt by four of the five. Iris explained that she had not felt any homesickness because she had travelled before and she knew that she would be in Italy for such a short period of time. Pekka had felt homesickness towards the end of his sojourn because he had known that he had another trip to make after the sojourn, before he could go home. As in the previous studies by Brown and Holloway (2008: 232) and of Hull (1978: 112), for Jussi, Mari and Anna Kaisa, homesickness was stronger in the beginning of the sojourn, and as a result of contact with home, it lessened towards the end of the sojourn. All of the students had communicated with home during the sojourns, and this was most likely the reason for the fact that homesickness was so minimal. This is a factor that will affect students in differing degrees, in regards to personal experiences, thoughts, and situations. For educators, this information is important because it is clear that contact with home during educational sojourns for adolescents is imperative to guard against increased homesickness.

5.4 Discussion about Post-sojourn Experiences and Reflection Results

The students' experiences were positive in that all of them had found themselves to be capable speakers of English with the skills they already possessed and that they all improved in their skills. Originally, some of the participants had reported being anxious about speaking and that they were worried whether their skills would be good enough to communicate in English. In the study by Dufon and Churchill (2006), one of the defining factors in the willingness to communicate was not their competence levels, but their own perceptions of their speaking abilities. In Finland, many students in the classroom are timid and afraid to speak because they feel they must be perfect. On this sojourn, the students realized that they don't have to pronounce or speak English perfectly to be understood. The participants reported feeling more confident and brave in speaking English as a result of their sojourns. This knowledge increased with the use of the language in their communities of practice, or countries of sojourn. They also reported feeling that speaking English had become easier and that they had a better vocabulary and ability to use the language. Pekka mentioned that his pronunciation had improved, while Iris noted an increase in her vocabulary knowledge. All of the participants' attitudes about languages were positive.

Each of the students felt that English is an important language to learn and that they enjoy it. Anna-Kaisa reported that is now able to understand English spoken with different accents and is interested in possibly pursuing a career using languages. She also revealed an interest in learning Swedish, while Mari spoke about her interest in French and the possibility to use that language in many countries as well. The results here show that the students improved in English and had positive attitudes about learning languages.

Other positive results of the sojourns included the fact that students had gained confidence in themselves as speakers and as individuals. Anna-Kaisa and Mari shared that they are not as shy as before the sojourn; Pekka, Jussi and Iris mentioned feeling braver as a result of the sojourn. The sojourn also taught these students about ways that they can relate to others in foreign countries, and how to relate to others travelling to Finland. Mari shared that she cared more for others and learned that being kind to foreigners is very important, to make people feel welcome and safe. The participants learned to appreciate their own and others' cultures. Remarkable is that the students have all formed long-lasting relationships with other students from other European Union countries. As a result, they still converse via email and Facebook. One participant's family was even invited the following summer to stay with his host student's family during the vacation. The effects of the project reach farther than for the participants, it effects the future of their families, friends, school and even the town that they live in.

The students' advice for future sojourners included, for example that it is important to avoid being shy, but to learn to take risks. Speaking was considered important, and the students encouraged future sojourners to speak as much as possible and to as many people as possible, because that was the best way to ensure that the sojourn would be the most fruitful. Compared with the study by Dufon and Churchill (2006), their findings showed that students who were motivated to speak in L2 did have better experiences with host families on sojourn experiences. Similarly, in the present study, participants advise future sojourners to take risks and speak as much as possible to benefit as much as they can from the experience. The students also included wishes for more time with other home country travelers to discuss current events and issues during the sojourn, and more opportunities to meet in smaller mixed groups and events for better possibilities to meet and speak to more people.

The experience of hosting showed the importance of sympathizing with travelers who come to the participants' home country. Three students had learned what it was like to travel to a foreign country and live with a stranger and were therefore prepared to give positive experiences to the students they took into their own homes. The reverse situation was true, however, for Iris, who first hosted a student herself and realized what her own experience would possibly feel like – which caused less homesickness and anxiety for her sojourn. It is difficult to say which of these situations was more fruitful to the students because they all gained tolerance and understanding for each other in the same situations.

5.5 Conclusions

The results show that the experiences of these sojourners were valuable educational moments in their lives that affected their thoughts and understanding about themselves in relation to other cultures. The data found here provides a look into the possibilities that are provided for students who sojourn to countries outside their own at the age of twelve to thirteen years.

There is not a lot of research done on short-term sojourns on adolescents. What we can draw from previous research is that sojourning involves many challenges that students must face. For example, students may face culture shock. In this study, students were not away long enough to experience this phenomenon, yet there were instances of homesickness. Being aware of the symptoms of homesickness is important to educators and it is clear that contact with home lessens this. Also, anxiety is a feeling that students had about going to a foreign country and speaking English as well as living with strangers. The motivation to speak English and to succeed on a sojourn can be deterred by anxiety. Pre-contact with host families is advised in order to lessen this anxiety.

Not only is it important to understand the effects of study abroad and short sojourns on college-age students, but ascertain the effects on younger people. The experience of travelling to a foreign country for an adolescent student is different in that it can build interest into learning languages and begin the foundations of future ideas of study abroad. The short sojourn in this study was so brief that important study abroad issues like culture shock did not play a role, but it is clear from the results that students were changed by their experiences. As in the study by Comp (2008: 76-83), students will go through changes as a result of their sojourns. The sojourn

in question provided these students with a better self-confidence as individuals and as speakers of the English language in both abroad and within their own home country. The results of this study provide information on what sorts of things are important to remember in pre-sojourn preparations and what could be improved so that future school projects that involve students travelling other countries can utilize the experiences of others for more successful experiences of their own. The study also shows the importance of educational sojourns where students learn to understand and sympathize with others from foreign countries, especially in the situation where students host and also sojourn. This also helps educators in that they can formulate their own future projects and experiences of their students – which also touch the lives of their families and those of others in other countries. The experiences that these students have will also reflect their future attitudes about learning other languages as well as understanding and learning a tolerance for other people in other cultures.

It is important that in future Comenius-type projects where adolescent students travel or study abroad, educators and researchers pay attention to the importance of reflecting upon the experiences. As mentioned by Citron and Mendelson (2006: 65), reflection is an important process through which the sojourn experience could be taken advantage of for all of its accomplishments. By accomplishments, I mean that by reflecting on sojourn experiences throughout the sojourn and after, students can take advantage of what they have learned and apply it to the rest of their lives. Hopefully, more research will be done on the effects of short-term sojourns on students from elementary and secondary schools so that more cross-cultural work can be done and English teaching and learning will be benefited by the act of speaking in a community of practice other than only in the classroom.

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APPENDIX 1 – Interview Questions

Background questions:

1. Has your family always lived in Finland? Have you ever spoken languages other than Finnish at home?
2. What does your father do? What does your mother do?
3. What are your hobbies? How do you spend your time after school? Do you prefer to spend time with your friends or do you prefer to spend your time alone? Explain. Do you see yourself as a social person?
4. How old were you during the trip on the Comenius Project? How old are you now?

Pre-sojourn:

1. What kinds of preparations did you do and what did you think before you left for the trip? Did you have anxieties about living with strangers in a host family?
2. Were you nervous about going to live with a strange family? What kinds of things did you worry about?
3. What were your biggest fears and/or hopes about the trip?
4. Did you have any stereotypes or beliefs about the places, cultures or people in general before you left? What were your expectations about the trip? Was the outcome the same or different?
5. Which country did you visit? Did you have any ideas about what it would be like to live there? Did you have any stereotypes about the people/country/language?

Sojourn:

1. Try to remember the moment you got off the plane, what sights, smells, sounds can you remember?
2. What was the family like with whom you stayed? What was most difficult in living with a family in a foreign culture?
3. What kinds of misunderstandings occurred when speaking with the people in English?
4. What was different about the school you visited?

5. Was it difficult or easy to communicate with your partner from another country? Did speaking English become easier during the visit?
6. Did the meaning of some words in English differ for you in your language understanding compared to that of another student from a different culture?
7. Did you miss home?
8. Was it a culture shock? Culture shock is the feeling of being a little lost when your own familiar surroundings, language and daily patterns are changed.
9. Did you experience any stress or stressful situations? Explain.
10. How included or excluded did you feel in social groups? Situations? With host family?
11. Were there “conversations” in which you shared something about your cultures? What kinds of things did you ask each other and what was important or non-important?
12. What was the first impression like of the host family and your partner student??
13. Did you experience being different? Did anyone stereotype you in a category because of your culture? How?
14. Did you expect people from certain countries to be a certain way? Were you surprised?
15. What did you like about the culture? Dislike?
16. How and with whom did you spend your time?

Post-sojourn / Re-entry:

1. What did you learn about the culture?
2. When you arrived back in Finland, did your home country seem different to you? Did anything feel or look different at home? What about with your friends, when they asked you about your trip, what kinds of things did you tell them?
3. How did you benefit from the experience? Positive or negative?
4. Has the Comenius experience affected you as a language user? How?
5. What did you learn about yourself/identity?
6. How did the experience affect your social skills (in general)?
7. How did the experience change you?
8. What kind of expectations did you have of the project? Did you feel that the expectations were fulfilled/not fulfilled? Why?

9. Did your attitude to English change? Has learning been easier at school after the experience?
10. How attitudes or perspectives changed as a result of experience?

Reflection questions:

1. How long has it been since your Comenius experience?
2. What do you remember most about your discussions with students from foreign cultures?
3. What do you remember most about the people on your trip?
4. Please describe your feelings about expressing yourself in English during your stay in a foreign country.
5. Do you feel that you have grown or changed as a result of your trip? Why or why not?
6. Do you think that students in other countries/cultures learn English differently than you do in Finland? How?
7. Rate your skill level of English before the visit:

| | | | | |
|------|---------|------|-----------|-----------|
| Poor | Alright | Good | Very good | Excellent |
| 0--- | 1--- | 2--- | 3--- | 4--- |
| | | | | 5 |
8. Rate your skill level of English after the visit:

| | | | | |
|------|---------|------|-----------|-----------|
| Poor | Alright | Good | Very good | Excellent |
| 0--- | 1--- | 2--- | 3--- | 4--- |
| | | | | 5 |
9. Do you still keep in touch with any of the other students (from other countries) from the Comenius Project? Who and how?
10. Do you think the Comenius Project has given you a positive experience to help you in your future travels, education and life? What are your future plans?
11. Did you keep a journal? Can we look at it now?

Hosting Students from Foreign Countries:

1. What was most difficult in having a student from abroad stay with you in your own house and go to school with you? What was easy or fun?
2. Do you feel that the student who stayed with you enjoyed his-her stay? Why or why not? What do you hope that they remember about Finland? Do you still keep in touch?

3. Was communication with the student who stayed with you different than when you were hosted by a foreign family? How?
4. Where did you get the ideas that you wanted to show/present the guests about Finland?

APPENDIX 2 - Permission Form for Parents:

OMIA KOKEMUKSIA ULKOMAILLA 12-14 VUOTIAILLE SUOMALAISILLE OPPILAILLA**Tutkijoiden yhteystiedot****Vastuullinen tutkija**

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Tutkimuksen taustatiedot

Tutkimus on yksittäinen tutkimus, joka toteutetaan Jyväskylän yliopistossa kielten laitoksella pro gradu-tutkimuksena. Tutkimuksen harjoittelu ja mittausjakso suoritetaan syksyn 2011 aikana ja tulosten analysointi kevään 2012 aikana. Tutkimuksen suorittaja vastaa tutkimusaineston turvallisesta säilyttämisestä ja sitä käytetään vain tähän tutkimukseen. Haastatteltavien tietoja käsitellään nimettöminä, eikä niitä luovuteta tutkimuksen ulkopuolisille. Osallistuminen tutkimukseen on täysin vapaaehtoista. Tutkittavilla on tutkimuksen aikana oikeus kieltäytyä mittauksista että siitä aiheutuu mitään seuraamuksia.

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus, tavoite ja merkitys

Tutkimuksessa tutkitaan kuinka 12-14 vuotias oppilaiden reflektiot kokemuksista asuessa isäntäperheessä eri maassa tuottaa tärkeitä tietoja. Tavoitteena on siis selvittää onko ulkomaan kokemuksista Comenius Projektissa 2009-2011 EU & I ollut semoisia jotka tuottaa oppilaille identiteettisiä muutoksia ja/tai uusia näkemyksiä kulttuurista. Tutkimuksen merkitys on huomauttaa opetus yhtiöille tärkeys reflektion harjoituksista ja ilmiöt oppilaille lyhyt oleskeluista ulkomaissa.

Menettelyt, joiden kohteeksi tutkittavat joutuvat

Tutkittavija haastatellaan joko omassa tai tutkimuksen suorittajan kotona. Haastatellu äänitellään MP3 laitteella ja video kameralla joten suorittaja voi kuunnella aineiden sisältöjä tutkimuksen mittausta varten. Haastattelun aineistot pysyy vain tutkijan tiedoissa. Tutkija käyttää haastattelujen aineistot kääntämällä englannin kieleen omassa pro-gradu kirjoituksissa ja poista äänittelyt kuin ne ovat tutkittu.

Haastattelussa tutkija kyselee tutkittavilta kysymyksiä mikä liittyy Comenius Projektin EU & I reissusta eri maahan. Hän kyselle oppilaan elämän taustasta, kokemuksista ennen lähtöä isäntäperhelle ja ulkomaahan, kokemuksista kuin hän oli projektin kautta ulkomaille, kokemuksia ja näkemyksiä sen jälkeen ja mahdollisesti kysymyksiä siitä että minkä laista oli majoittaa ulkomaalaisia omassa kotona (jos samat tutkitelevat osallistui tähän myös). Tavoite haastattelussa on saada tietoja tutkittavalta tarinan muodossa haastattelijan johtelun avulla.

Tutkittavan suostumus tutkimukseen osallistumisesta

Olen perehtynyt tämän tutkimuksen tarkoitukseen ja sisältöön, tutkittaville aiheutuviin mahdollisiin haittoihin ja tutkittavien oikeuksiin. Annan lapseni osallistua tutkimukseen annettujen ohjeiden mukaisesti. Voin halutessani peruuttaa tai keskeyttää lapseni osallistumisen tai hän voi kieltäytyä tutkimuksesta missä vaiheessa tahansa. Lapseni tutkimustuloksia saa käyttää tieteelliseen raportointiin (esim. julkaisuihin) sellaisessa muodossa, jossa yksittäistä tutkittavaa ei voi tunnistaa.

Päiväys

Tutkittavan vanhemman allekirjoitus

Päiväys

Tutkitjan allekirjoitus