"Out of the box": A study on a school’s international exchanges and the role of English in relation to them

En studie om en skolas internationella utbyten och engelskans roll i förhållande till dem

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Abstract

This paper has two main focuses. It aims to investigate the role of English in relation to short term international exchanges in a secondary school in the south of Sweden and also discusses the reflections of the outcomes of a number of participating students and teachers. The data were collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews. The results indicate that the role of English is fundamental to the internationalization process and as the language of communication and the common language on the exchanges. Furthermore, English is seen as key in the implementation of internationalization in the education at the school. Both the interviewed staff and students reflected on communication problems when away and how they dealt with them through language strategies. Moreover, the data revealed that the reflections from the outcomes of the exchanges were centered round two aspects: the student’s development of their communicative English and the social aspect. The interviewed teachers and students discussed the fact that the short term exchanges provided new learning opportunities through the out-of school context. In addition, a possibility for further research within the area is proposed as a result of the data collection and based on the gap in the research concerning compulsory schools’ internationalization process.

Keywords: EIL, exchange programs, internationalization, role of English,
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1. Introduction

Our world is growing smaller through global communication and information flow. As teachers, we prepare our students for the possibilities of an international career and empower them to become participants and citizens in an extended internationalized society. As discussed by Martin, Smolen, Oswald and Milam (2012) it is important that schools and educators participate in the creating of an understanding for the challenges that we meet and will meet as global citizens.

The Swedish school system at university level is not new to international collaborations and student mobility increased rapidly after the 1989 change in students’ possibilities to receive loans when studying abroad (Regeringen, 2000). According to Centrala Studiestödsnämnden, during the study year 2011/2012, 27761 Swedish students received funding for international studies. Amongst the Swedish students, Europe was the most popular continent to locate their studies, followed by North America (Central Studiestödsnämnden, 2012). Furthermore, on the international scale it is estimated that 3.42 million students are taking part in international studies, where USA is the most common host country and China the country that has the most students abroad (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2012). However, it is not only at the higher education level that international exchanges and the internationalization of education are encouraged. It is also manifested in the curriculum for compulsory schools in Sweden.

In the Swedish Curriculum for compulsory schools, (Skolverket, 2011) the international perspective is stressed as part of the school’s overall mission in order to contextualize the students’ own situation and to create global solidarity. Furthermore, it is stated that the international perspective prepares students for a society bridging cultural and national borders. It is also stated that internationalization develops an understanding for cultural diversity within one’s own nation, in this case Sweden.

In the internationalization process a common language is needed and Nunan (2001) emphasizes the fundamental role of the English language in this process and its increasing usage in all aspects of society (p. 605). Moreover, in the curriculum for
English (Skolverket, 2011), it is stated in the purpose discussion that the teaching of English should lead to the increased awareness of the need for English and should further stimulate the interest in the English language. In addition, this discussion follows,

Language is the primary tool human beings use for thinking, communicating and learning. Having a knowledge of several languages can provide new perspectives on the surrounding world, enhanced opportunities to create contacts and greater understanding of different ways of living. The English language surrounds us in our daily lives and is used in such diverse areas as politics, education and economics. Knowledge of English thus increases the individual’s opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in international studies and working life. (Skolverket, p. 32)

One could argue based on the above quote, that there is a need to investigate the role of English as a subject and a common language in the internationalization process. This paper focuses on English as a subject and the role it plays in the internationalization process on a local scale in one school in the south of Sweden where English is the language of communication. The school has a number of international collaborations; this paper focuses on short term exchange opportunities for teachers and students.

From a personal point of view, I argue, as a future English teacher, that I will work with matters closely related to this and, therefore, consider it to be relevant for my occupation to research this field further. Moreover, I have noticed a gap in the research when it comes to secondary schools’ internationalization process since there is very little written on internationalization involving younger students, even though internationalization is stressed in the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011). Furthermore, I believe it to be imperative to discuss the whole process, from the school’s administration to the participating students in order to achieve a holistic view. How the actual internationalization process is implemented in the teaching at the school is discussed further in this paper.

1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to discuss expectations, objectives and outcomes behind the short term international exchanges of a school in the south of Sweden and the role of English as a subject in relation to them. The focus is going to be on short term student
and teacher exchange opportunities. The data were collected through semi-structured qualitative interviews with the international coordinator/teacher, one English teacher and three students who have participated in the international exchange initiatives. The interviewed students went to Iceland and Turkey on their exchanges and the interviewed staff have been away on multiple exchanges with students, including the interviewed students.

1.2 Research question

1. What role does English play in the school’s short term international exchanges?
2. Literature Review and Theoretical background

In this chapter, previous research is presented together with relevant steering documents. Furthermore, terms relevant to the international education field are defined and discussed.

2.1 Definition of the term Internationalization in education

The term internationalization, which is a term used extensively in this paper, is discussed by Knight (2004) who argues that there isn’t a common understanding behind the meaning of the term in relation to education and states that it is used in many different contexts.

…it means a series of international activities such as academic mobility for students and teachers; international linkages, partnerships, and projects; and new, international academic programs and research initiatives. For others, it means the delivery of education to other countries through new types of arrangements such as branch campuses or franchises using a variety of face-to-face and distance techniques. (Knight, 2004, p. 6)

Furthermore, Knight (2004, p. 6) continues that internationalization means, to many, the inclusion of an international agenda in the steering documents and in the learning process. She also discusses how the term internationalization is sometimes used in the same way or as a synonym for globalization, however, she means they are separate but related concepts (2004, p. 8). In addition, Knight advocates that there is a need to try to define the term and to reach an understanding in order to use it in debates and
discussions. At the same time, the author does not believe that it is possible to reach a universal understanding of the term (2004, p. 6). This, Knight continues, might be a product of the fact that the term has been used for centuries in different contexts, such as economics and politics. However, it is relatively new within the field of education and Knight argues that it was during the 1980’s that the term really became popular. The author states that it is important to keep reevaluating the term since the time and context affect current interpretations (2004, p. 9).

The investigation that was carried out by the Swedish government, (regeringen.se) to increase the number of international students and teachers at universities, defines the term internationalization as a scientific collaboration between universities and staff across borders and the opportunities available for student mobility. Furthermore, it is argued in the investigation that internationalization is a way of improving and insuring that the quality of research is met and challenged (Regeringen, 2000).

Ortloff, Shah, Lou and Hamilton define international education through both a practical and abstract perspective (2012, p. 6). The practical aspect is defined as concrete skills for the students, such as language skills and further knowledge of the world. The abstract aspect is defined as a development and an increased understanding of human rights and global citizenship and other international concerns. The authors argue that the two different perspectives on internationalization will lead the students to gain a better understanding of the global society we live in. Moreover, the authors believe that this will lead the students to become citizens who are fair and are working for a better and more enlightened society (2012, p. 6).

Hughes-Warrington (2012) discusses in her article, the concept of internationalization through a different perspective. She argues, in accordance with Knight (2004), that a global understanding of the concept internationalization is at present not available (2012, p. 313). The author discusses that simply attempting to define the term internationalization is not enough, but states that there is a need to relate it to ethics and what consequences the rhetoric around the term has (2012, p. 313).
2.2 Internationalization in steering documents

The internationalization of schools is widely promoted within the education field and the believed outcomes are documented extensively. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Swedish curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) has the international perspective implemented in the school’s overall mission with the intent to reflect the whole education. Moreover, Fanghanel and Cousin discuss the fact that many of the European curricula have an international agenda and that this is stressed in the steering documents (2011, p. 39). In addition to this, more support for an international approach in education is found in the UN’s child convention (1989) where the following is stated:

States Parties shall promote and encourage international cooperation in matters relating to education, in particular with a view to contributing to the elimination of ignorance and illiteracy throughout the world and facilitating access to scientific and technical knowledge and modern teaching methods. In this regard, particular account shall be taken of the needs of developing countries. (Article 28:3)

Stewart (2005, p. 229) argues from a U.S perspective, that an internationalization of the curriculum is necessary in order for the country to keep up in the internationalization process of the work market. Even though the higher education systems have incorporated internationalization of their curricula to a greater extent, Stewart points out that, the younger students are left behind in the US (2005, p. 230).

Internationella Programkontoret in Sweden provides schools and organizations with contacts and help with networking in order to get started with international collaborations. Through their website, they give examples of how international collaborations can help schools strive to meet the aims in the curriculum, for example, by working thematically. In their report Internationaliseringen i skolans styrdokument, they state that part of their mission is to aid and facilitate the internationalization processes of schools. This, by distributing financial aid and by sharing experiences and results of international collaborations (2011, p. 8).
2.3 Premises for internationalization and its challenges

As mentioned above, internationalization is something that is required of the school system and is widely promoted. Lee (2012, p. 53) argues that schools today face completely new challenges than our previous schools because of increasing globalization. Furthermore, Lee discusses that because of globalization and the new demands on the work market, the schools’ internationalization process is needed as it prepares the students for the new circumstances, where everything from people to information is more mobile than ever (2012, p. 53).

Ortloff et al, discuss the historical background of the internationalization of education in the US and the role of the social movements in the 1960’s and how they generated interest in internationalization. Moreover, they say that the reason was to educate students about human rights, the peace movements and environmental concerns etc. They also mention the elements of competition and even fear of losing a leading position as motives behind the increasing internationalization process in the US (2012, p. 5).

A challenge that comes with an internationalized education system is that the school staff and teachers need to be properly prepared and educated. Stewart (2005) discusses that some states in America are acknowledging the new demands on the educators as follows:

States are taking steps to prepare a more globally sophisticated work force through creating new policy frameworks and new curricular and professional development initiatives, using distance education and online courses, encouraging partnerships with schools in other countries, and creating internationally themed schools as part of their high school redesign. (Stewart, 2005, p. 232)

Moreover, Juknyte-Peteikiene (2006, p. 94) argues that the internationalization process of higher education is not evaluated and monitored to the extent it needs to be and adds that the evaluation systems that are in place often do not involve the internationalization. Furthermore, she argues, in accordance with Knight (2004) that there needs to be a common understanding of the concept of internationalization in order to assess the method’s quality.
2.4 The role of English in the internationalization process

As stated in the previous chapter, the role of English cannot be emphasized enough when discussing international collaborations. In the syllabus for English, in compulsory schools in Sweden, the role of English is discussed as follows: “Knowledge of English thus increases the individual’s opportunities to participate in different social and cultural contexts, as well as in international studies and working life.” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 30). Thus, English as a language can be seen as a key aspect in the internationalization process. This section provides a brief overview of the status of English as an international language.

Crystal (2004) discusses how the English language has grown into a global language over the centuries and how it has affected smaller languages and as well as how this process came about. In addition to this he continues to discuss what characterizes a global language and Crystal means that a language cannot be seen as a global language if it is just the mother tongue of a large amount of people, but instead has to have been taken up by countries with other native tongues (2004, p. 7). Moreover, The British Council have estimated that over 1 billion people are studying English at the same time (2004, p. 8). Crystal continues to explain the rapid growth since the 1950’s of English comes down to the fact that there was and is a need for a lingua franca, a common language of communication (2004, p. 9).

McKay points out that there are potentially negative side effects of the expansion of English. It might be, for instance that it threatens smaller languages and can lead to the extinction of certain languages and a reduction in cultural diversity (2002, p. 20). Furthermore, McKay argues that it might be seen as a necessity to learn English in order to be able to take part in certain parts of society and certain professional fields (2002, p. 21). She continues, “The relationship between the spread of English and cultural identity has also been raised in relation to encouraging a negative view of non-western cultures”. (2002, p. 22).

Crystal (2004, p. 20) continues to define English as a global language by suggesting that in order for a language to be a real international language it needs to be a worldwide language of communication. Today this also means that it is electronically communicated. The Internet was invented for English usage and Crystal states that it is
still dominated by the English language (p. 20). Moreover, McKay defines an international language as a language that does not just belong to one single culture, no single nation, but caters to a global and local context as the language of common communication (2002, p. 25), this in accordance with Crystal’s (2004) discussion. In Crystal’s book *English as a Global Language*, he argues that there is a need to talk about “Englishes” and the fact that English as language no longer belongs to one state (2003, p. 140). In addition to this, Crystal continues to discuss the linguistic consequences of the “New Englishes” (2003, p. 146). He accounts for different factors that influence English as a global language, such as the fact that word formation and collocations are closely linked to the local context were English is spoken. New words are needed in order to describe for example, local flowers and animals (2003, p. 146). Moreover, Crystal puts it: there are many cultural domains likely to motivate new words, as speakers find themselves adapting their language in order to meet fresh communicative needs (2003, p. 146).

2.4.1. Internationalization and English teaching

English is the language of communication on the short term exchanges and since the role of English is researched in relation to them in this paper, it is important to briefly look into the teaching aspect of English as an international language. McKay (2002) argues that the role of English as an international language requires new teaching approaches and considerations. One of the goals, she discusses, is that the teaching should guide the learners to develop strategies in order to use when communicating with speakers from different cultural backgrounds (McKay, 2002, p. 127). Some of the strategies being: clarification, establishing rapport, and the ability to minimize cultural differences (McKay, 2002, p. 127). Furthermore, she advocates that within a community of learners there are certain rules that underline language use. Thus, it might be necessary to re-evaluate these rules when communicating cross-culture (McKay, 2002, p. 127). As mentioned before, in the curriculum for the compulsory school, it is stated that the international perspective on school is meant to help the students see their own reality in a global context (Skolverket, 2011, p. 9). MacKay (2002, p. 129) discusses local and global perspectives in relation to English learning and states that it is
necessary to think globally and act locally in order to make English relevant for all learners and cultures.

### 2.4.2 Students outside the classroom

In order to discuss the international exchanges that this essay is centered round, it is important to further investigate the out of the classroom context and the impact that might have on the students. Singal and Swann (2011) conducted a qualitative study on British students’ perception of themselves as learners inside and outside of the school. The interview results showed that the students felt that the school based learning was hard to connect to their reality and they expressed that it felt distant and belonged to an adult world (2011, p. 476). Moreover, the results showed that the social part of school learning was highly important for the interviewees and friendship was a reoccurring theme. In addition to this, it was also revealed that the school work was considered by the students as “work” and by association as something hard (2011, p. 476). In contrast to the school learning, the out of school activities and learning were not associated with these feelings but the opposite (2011, p. 477).

Evenshaug and Hallen discuss the school’s role in a student’s socialization process (2009). Additionally, the authors discuss the relationship between school results and confidence and how the students perceived themselves in school situations (2009, p. 258). As a result of this, the school’s performance and the student’s level of confidence are basis for challenges for the teachers, school and the home situations (Evenshaug & Hallen, p. 258). Sangal and Swann (2011) state that, based on the outcomes of their research, it is important to realize that a student can learn in a variety of ways and settings and that schools can learn from the informal learning context and approaches can be transferred into the classroom. Moreover, the results showed that out of school learning played a major part in nurturing the students confidence in relation to learning (2011, p. 481)
3. Methodology

In this section, the research context and methodology chosen is presented, motivated and discussed. The interviewees are also presented.

3.1 Research Context

The data collection took place at a secondary school in the southern part of Sweden. I chose this specific school because it was familiar to me. Through my teacher placement I have previously worked with the staff and students. Moreover I am well informed of the school’s way of working. The school is a charter school with a science specialization, and is relatively small, with about 200 students and 22 teachers in the staff. The students are in years 6-9. The school is situated in a suburban area. The school has an Internet platform functioning as a hub of information for teachers, students and parents. This hub is where the results from tests are logged, where students can read about activities and homework and also find all necessary information related to the school and the staff. All students have access to a personal laptop.

The school has a thematic approach to education which most subjects are engaged in with themes like, pandemics, environment, the family, 100 years etc. The school has three English teachers, who work closely together but also plan their lessons individually depending on the thematic approach.

The school has had an international agenda since it started in 2007 and has been involved in numerous international collaborations. This has ranged from arranging Skype chats with other schools abroad to short term exchanges for staff and students.
The collaborations have mainly been between schools in Europe, but a school in China has also participated. The exchange opportunities have all been within Europe. Some of the projects that the school has collaborated with are Comenius and Nordplus. Initially, participating students were divided into groups before the exchanges and worked on projects related to the topics of the exchanges. However, the school has now embarked on a new project through Nordplus. This time, the whole school is involved and the project theme, sustainable development, is implemented in the whole education. So far, roughly 125 students have taken part in the different international projects and the school is currently embarking on a new project that will involve roughly 160 students. The participating students stay with families when they are away and the other way around when the students from the other countries come to visit the school in Sweden. The selection process used to be based on a first come first serve basis, but that has changed along the way. At present, the selection process is based on the level of participation and engagement of students during the preparatory steps of the project. When the students come back from the exchanges they discuss their experiences with the rest of their classes and with the team that went away.

3.2 Qualitative Interviews

A qualitative data analysis is described by Lantz (1993, p. 72) as something that both puts emphasis on the description and the analysis. Another aspect of the qualitative research approach is that the data collection often is concerned with a small focus group and that the results from the data collection should not be viewed as generalizable, but as an attempt to capture the unique and subjective (Lantz, 1993, p. 71-72). The aim of this paper was to further investigate a few people’s experiences in a specific context; therefore I chose a qualitative approach to the data collection.

The qualitative nature of this paper and the flexibility that comes with the interviewing led to the choice of interviewing as the method in the data collection. Interview enables the researcher to find ways to adapt to different context and to accommodate potential needs of the interviewees (Bell, 2008, p. 157). The type of interview chosen was semi-structured interviews, since the flexible nature of this
interview type was seen as an advantage and a possibility to get more out of the interviews.

I chose to use qualitative interviews in the data collection and deemed this method as most beneficial to my study. Nevertheless, Bell discusses that this method comes with challenges, such as the procedure behind creating interview questions and the complex nature of the interpretation of the data. In addition to this Bell argues that “it is a highly subjective technique and therefore there is always the danger of bias” (2008, p. 157).

3.2.1. The interviewees

Altogether five interviews were conducted. When deciding on how many to interview, Thomson (2010, p. 55) discusses that the number of interviewees depends on your research focus and intention with the data collected. Since this research project’s focus is to highlight a small number of people’s experiences, the quantitative aspect was not an issue, meaning it was not a concern to try to incorporate many interviews. However, when looking to cover the internationalization process of the school, I chose to interview participants representing different stages of the internationalization process e.g. the schools administration, the participating teacher and student perspective.

No names are used in order to keep the interviewees anonymous. The international coordinator is also an English teacher at the school, but was interviewed in his role as the coordinator. He has been at the school for five years and teaches English, Spanish and occasionally drama. Since he started at the school he has been involved in the school’s internationalization process. The English teacher interviewed was chosen since the teacher had participated in a number of different exchanges and also in the role of language teacher. She has been at the school for four years and teaches English and Spanish.

Both interviewees are familiar to the interviewer. Thomsson discusses the advantages and disadvantages with this interview scenario (2010, p. 125). The advantages can be that the interviewee feels at ease and is comfortable in opening up him or herself to the interviewer; however, it can also lead to a pre-understanding of the interviewers stand
point on the topic being investigated. This might lead to a situation where the interviewer does not let the interviewee talk enough (Thomsson, 2010, p. 132). When the interviews were conducted these were things that needed to be taken into consideration, especially when the interview questions were composed.

The student interviewees are all in year 9 and were chosen in collaboration with the interviewed English teacher and the international coordinator. The choice was based on their assumed willingness to participate and also the fact that their exchange experiences were relatively close in time, within two years from the interview date, and that they had been on different exchanges and to different countries. The participating students were given parent consent forms to take home and bring back with a signature before the interview process could begin (see appendix I).

3.2.2. The procedure

All interviews were recorded digitally. Bell discusses how digital recording is a tool for the interviewer to be able to focus on the interviewee and not on taking notes and as a help in the data analysis process (2005, p. 164).

Before the interviews were conducted, three interview schedules were compiled, one for the international coordinator, one for the English teacher and one for the student interviews (see appendix 2, 3 & 4). The interview schedules were created to form a natural and chronological flow in the interview and lead the interviewee through the process. Kvale maintains that the interview guide can have different functions in different research contexts and vary in the how closely it is followed (1996, p. 139). Furthermore, the purpose of the interview schedules used in this data collection was to keep the interviews semi-structured, whilst leaving room for spontaneous follow-up questions that might occur during the interviews.

During the interview with the International coordinator we got interrupted by a student and one teacher, however it did not seem to interrupt the interviewee and the interview was resumed in a matter of seconds. After I stopped the recording after the last question the interviewee wanted to add some information to one of the questions so we proceeded with the recording as he wished.
The interviewed students were given the choice to either use Swedish or English in the interview situation. As the interviewer, I wanted to give the students the opportunity to choose the language to be interviewed in and therefore allow the students to have influence over the situation. This also left room for a personal choice. In addition, it was also of importance to note that English is not the students’ first language and the implications that might have in the abilities to express themselves in an interview situation. However, all students chose to use English and thus all the interviews were conducted in English. Unfortunately, one of the students was sick on the day of the interviews; thus, three student interviews were conducted. The interviewed students were from two different classes, one girl and two boys. The two boys went on the same exchange.

Thomsson discusses the place of the interview and the importance of the seating arrangement in the interview situation and how important it is to find somewhere were both the interviewer and the interviewee are comfortable and secure (2010, p. 85). The interviews with the staff took place at the school on a Friday afternoon, which is for both the interviewees and the interviewer familiar surroundings. The actual room the interview took place in was a classroom. The interviews took place after school and were conducted with one interviewee at a time; the interviewees were under no time constraint. Alongside the digital recording, the interviewer took notes in order to capture things the recording would not, such as facial expressions and body language. The interviews with the staff varied considerable in length between 13 minutes to 35 minutes, the international coordinator being the longest interview. The student interviews were conducted in a small room, where the interviewer and the interviewee sat across a table. The student interviews varied between six minutes and eleven minutes. There were no interruptions during the student interviews. The three student interviews were done back to back. The interviews were conducted in relation to an English lesson and the student interviews were conducted individually. The interviewed students had been to two different countries and the time of their exchange varied from May this year to two years ago. The time frame of the events asked about is also sometime to bear in mind when interviewing.

After the interviews were conducted I chose to divide the results into themes for their analysis. The themes were constructed with regards to the data from the interviews, research question and the interview guidelines, but were ultimately sprung from the data. I made this choice, since I believed it would make the results easier to manage,
account for and to follow in the following discussion. The selected passages from the interviews that are presented in the following sections, were transcribed and put into context (see appendix 5). By doing this, the selection of quotes is more transparent and makes the data analysis easier to follow and critique, as discussed by Bell (2005, p. 164).

As an inexperienced interviewer, I found my role as interviewer challenging in the way that I needed to be able to be flexible in my interview questions and really pay attention to what was said, and not think about my own role and the next question. However, as the interview process progressed, I found myself more at ease in my role as the interviewer. Another thing I noticed as the interview process went on, and especially with the student interviews, was that I tried not to rush with questions, but to give the students time to explain and waited them out in order to allow them to fully process their thoughts. Nevertheless, through the data analysis process and when I transcribed the used passages, I noticed that I commented more in the interviews with the students than with the staff interviewees. In some cases the students were asking for help in finding certain words in English to express themselves. This may have led to them feeling more relaxed and supported, which in turn might have created a less formal environment. Due to this their responses may have differed in comparison with a more formal interview setting.
4. The Results

In this section the interview results are presented. The interviewer is referred to as I. The members of staff that were interviewed are referred to as IC for the international coordinator and ET for the English teacher. The student interviewees are hereby referred to as S1, S2, and S3.

4.1 The staff interviews

As mentioned in previous chapters, the two staff interviews were conducted in order to create an understanding of the school’s view on the international collaborations and the outcomes. Furthermore, this allowed for an insight into the thoughts of the English teachers themselves. The interviews will be accounted for through themes. As stated in the previous section the themes emerged as the interview results were analyzed and are related to the research question and the interview guidelines.

4.1.1 The objectives, challenges and implementation of the internationalization in the school

As mentioned above, the school has had an international agenda since it started and consequently it has become an important part of the school. However, when the school started no one had any experience in initiating and going through with international
collaborations and exchanges. The collaborations have, according to the IC, almost always been initiated by this school and through teachers who are active on different international platforms. During the interview, the IC was asked what the school’s objectives were behind the international collaborations and he answered that the school wanted to have a focus on language and that he got involved in the internationalizations through this perspective. As an example of the variety of international collaborations and how they in general are implemented in the English teaching, he answered that he sometimes let the students Skype with his father, a native English speaker and he added:

I would like to do more of that type of stuff, where I invite people from other countries to talk about something, but there is always the problem with hmm time, does it work? What time is it there? (Interview with IC 120914)

The ET said that the specific international exchanges were previously not that well implemented in the education as a whole in the school. However, it is changing and with the new collaboration the whole school is involved through a cross curriculum theme of sustainability. Nevertheless, she added, that English as a subject often is part of the internationalization process, in all its forms from letter writing to Skyping. Moreover, the IC discussed how sometimes in the past it has been a challenge for the participating students, since they have been expected to finish schoolwork and to be able to take tests when they get back by teachers who have not been involved with the exchanges. This is something that is now discussed at the school in order to prevent the exchange opportunities becoming isolated events but ensure implemented in the teaching as a whole.

When the IC was asked what the expected outcomes of the exchanges were, then and now, he summarized in the following way: individual growth, learning how to use ICT, language development, cultural understanding, and networking.

The IC was asked about potential downfalls and challenges with the exchanges and he answered that there are a lot of practicalities that take a great deal of time, such as sorting out accommodations with the families and making sure that the economic side of the projects are working and that the guidelines for documentation are met. Moreover, he mentioned that he is afraid someone might get ill or hurt when away, however, he added that they are “surrounded by help” if anything were to happen. In addition to this the IC mentioned that they have had problems with bullying on one of the exchanges.
4.1.2 English in the internationalization

The English teacher was asked to reflect on the role of English when the students are away on the exchanges and the ET answered as follows: “Well it plays a major role since it [English] is the language of communication, the language that the students speak with each other”. Furthermore, she adds that the exchanges she has been involved in have had participants from seven different countries, with English being the common language. During the exchanges, the main focus is on spoken communication in English and the preparatory work the students undertake before the exchange can be written in English. When asked what changes she had noticed in the participating students’ English during the exchanges, she answered that some students who are more shy than others have spoken more and communicated in English more than in classroom situations at home. When the ET was asked what the expected outcome of the exchanges were from her point of view, as an English teacher, she answered that when she was away on her first exchange she had expected there to be more focus on the language. She went on to highlight that the other countries’ participating students were not as fluent in English as the Swedish and the consequence was that it in fact was hard for the students to communicate. The ET was asked if anything has surprised her when it came to the student’s language development. She answered:

Yeah I think they dare more, they have become more open, not only about the English development, I think also about finding yourself when going on one of those trips. You have to like…hmm how do you say it…embrace it. You cannot just stand there with closed arms. You have to like welcome the people around you and all the impressions around you. By doing that I think your language development increases also and you become more secure. And you like, I really did this I said this, and I did it in English and it’s not even my own language. I think that …it makes the student grow, and it makes them feel more secure and they dare to do more. (Interview with ET 120914)

The IC talked about the role of English in the following way: “It [English] makes it real”.

4.1.3 New environment for the students

As mentioned above, the ET stated that she could see a different side to the participating students when away and mentioned that it could be the fact that the students are outside of the classroom and in a new environment. She continued and said that she has seen a change in the students in classrooms situations after the trips in the way that some students are more willing to speak English after they get back from the exchanges. She put it like this:

I think that still this is a school, a closed room, and I don’t think that they, even though I tell them they are a little afraid since there are twenty four other classmates around them, that are, so if they say something wrong then maybe it becomes scary for them. And I think by travelling to, communicating in English and using the English language, whether you want to or not, you just have to do it, and they find it some security there, like they find, how do you say it… hm I don’t know how to explain myself. But I think that, yeah. They probably feel like if they can do it there, they can do it here. So they done it there one time and well I can do this here as well. (Interview with ET 120914)

When the IC was asked to think if he had noticed any changes in the students socially and academically he answered at first that he found it hard to answer the question. He said:

I have seen them in a different situation and in that situation then they are not in the same environment. Then they can show different sides of themselves, they can be more outgoing or less outgoing, they can, but academically I have no idea actually, hmm maybe more relaxed with speaking English in certain cases. But you know, you just don’t know, because these are young people and they are changing every second. (Interview with IC 120914)

The IC chose to come back to this question after the last question and wanted to add an example of a participating student who developed a lot during his time away, both socially and in the way the student used English and that these changes have had a lasting effect on the student.

The ET was asked about the observations when it comes to the student’s informal usage of English when away and answered that the students are used to an informal way of communicating through social networks, computer games and music. Being outside of the classroom also adds to the informality and the relaxed attitude of English. Furthermore, the ET mentioned that one downside of the usage is that the students sometimes bring the informal langue into classrooms situations and into their written language. And she adds “It is not that easy for them [students] to understand that this [informal English] is not okay in formal texts”.

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4.3 The student interviews

The student interviews will also be presented in a thematic way that emerged in the same ways as described for the staff interview.

4.3.1 English as the common language

When asked about what ways English was used, all students interviewed answered that it was used all the time when away and that it was the common language and the language of communication. It was used when communicating with fellow students or teachers or when getting around. S1 put it like this:

   It is very important to use English, you know, it was, we were from different countries, different cultures that [English] was the thing that...made us together, that was connecting, that all of us knew English. (Interview with S1 121001)

Moreover, S1 said that he used English “to solve problems”. The problems he referred to was practical matters such as exchanging currency. S2 said that” I used English a lot when I was in Iceland, probably the whole time”. S3 also pointed out that everybody was “forced” to speak English.

4.3.2 Communication problems during the exchange

The interviewed students stated that they had problems communicating with some of the students on the exchange because of their level of English. S1 added that the participating students’ level of English varied a lot and sometimes made it hard to communicate with each other. S1 stressed that English was used in order to find out more about the students background and cultures, even if it was hard to understand each other.

   S1: It would have been nice if they [some of the students] knew a bit more English so.
   I think they appreciated that I tried to spoke to them, but I don’t know how much they
understood, but it is also a challenge to try you English at someone were you have to, you know…anpassa?
I: Adapt
S1: Adapt you language. (Interview with S1 121001)

S3 also reflected over the fact that it was hard to communicate and the fact that she had to adapt her English in order to make herself understood. S3, who went to another host country than S1 and S2, mentioned that it was very frustrating with the communication problems, since she had problems making herself understood in the family she lived with and she even had to change host family because of the language barrier. S3 described the communication problems in these terms:

It was so hard to speak because they didn’t know what they should say. So sometimes you change it [English] because you need to make it so more…when you talk with them you need to make it so much easier for them to understand. Because they didn’t know what to answer at all. (Interview with S3 121101)

4.3.3 Changed views on English

During the interview the students were asked if they had noticed any changes in their English during and after the trip. S2 mentioned that he didn’t feel like his English changed a lot, since he mentioned that he has been around English all his life. However, when S2 was asked if the exchange had changed his view on English as a language and as a subject he answered:

Yeah, probably a little, because when I were on Iceland, before I came there, I were a little shy to talk English, but now since that I have started to talk more freely and I have, yeah, I don’t feel like. I came out of the box, like I can talk to everybody with no problem because before that I was a little scary about how it was going to go in that subject. (Interview with S2 12101)

S2 was asked why he thought this happened and he answered that he talked to a lot of different people during the exchange and that as he got closer to the people he started to “open up“ his language as he described it. In addition to this S2 mentions that he made use of “inappropriate” English, which he described as making it more fun to talk. However, he added that he knew that it was not to be used all the time.

When S3 was asked the same question, the student put forward that the exchange had changed her views in the way that she was exposed to different accents and that travelling made it more interesting to learn the language. She put it like this:
S3: Yeah. I learned more because there was different accents, different people, it’s hard to explain but it was more interesting to travel and learn and yeah.
I: In what way was it more interesting?
S3: Because you listen to more, and everybody was forced to talk English, so you got to snap up what everybody said so yeah. (Interview with S3 121001)

S1 stressed the fact that the exchange had changed his view on the language and that it enforced his views on how important English is and the usefulness of the language.

The students were asked if they noticed any changes in their English during and after their trip and in what ways, S1 answered:

Yeah, you are so much into it, so, you know. If you are thinking and you are going to sleep, you are thinking in English. And when you came home, you know, it was hard to switch to Swedish, eh, you constantly said English words in the middle of the sentences, you know. Otherwise, it was what is the word in English? Now it was what the word in Swedish is? That is pretty funny actually. (Interview with S1 121001)

Moreover, the same student added that he realized some of his strengths when it came to vocabulary and grammar.

### 4.3.4 Memories and lasting outcomes

During the last part of the interview the questions were structured in a certain way in order to get the students to reflect over the outcomes of the exchanges. All the students answered in ways that can indicate that the social development was a big part of the exchange alongside the practice of English. Meeting new people and interacting with people from different cultures and countries was mentioned several times during the interviews. S1 stated “The best thing was to feel participated, united, in the group”. Likewise, the same student discussed, after having been asked if the trip had affected him in any way since he got back, the fact that he had joined Facebook after the exchange. This, in order to stay in contact with his friends and that he needed English in order to communicate with them on the Internet.

As under a previous theme, S2 reflected over the fact that the exchange had had a big impact on his willingness to speak English on the exchange, but also had a lasting affect and changed his view on English as a school subject too. Even though he didn’t think his English had changed during the trip, he did reflect over his English learning later on
during the interview. When he was asked what he had learned during his trip he put it like this:

I learned a lot of English, not my accent or something. I learned words and more like grammar. And I came out of the box, I learned to speak with everyone in appropriate and in inappropriate ways, so that has affected me real much. (Interview with S2 121001)

S3 answered as follows when asked what she learned when she was away: “To use the language in another way”. She continued to say that it was different than English in school and in the classroom. S3 added that often English in the classroom is text related. The students were asked what the best and the worst things were with the trips and S1 and S3 both answered that practicing English was one of the best things and that the communication problems because of language barriers was the worst thing. Moreover, S1 highlighted the fact that he felt that his personal development was the best thing about the trip and the feeling of participation. S2 answered that he found many new friends during the trip. Together with his increased willingness to speak English, this was the lasting effect of the trip.
5. Analysis and Discussion

In this section the collected data is analyzed and discussed in relation to the previously presented literature and theoretical background.

5.1 Analysis and discussion of the staff interviews

During the interview situations the members of staff were asked, amongst other things, to reflect on the outcomes of the internationalization. The international collaborations have, according to the interviewees, had more or less visible effects on the students in different ways. The “outside of the classroom” factor was highlighted by both the interviewees as a factor that created new and less formal circumstances for learning. The ET had seen lasting changes in the students after coming back. Evenshaug and Hallen (2009) discuss, in their book, the relationship between academic results and performance and self-image (p. 258). One could argue that what the ET observed during the exchanges was a development of the students’ confidence and their willingness to channel this in a classroom situation when they got back home. The IC had also noticed changes in students, but found it hard to pinpoint the reason behind them. However, he did bring up an example of a student that he felt had grown in confidence when it came to his English language use and his social life.

Through the internationalization program, new teaching approaches are demanded of the teachers as previously discussed by Stewart (2005) and McKay (2002). This raises the question as to what extent teachers and student teachers are being prepared for the internationalization process at hand. The IC brought up the fact that there have been times when the internal communication in school had been lacking and the exchange

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situations were viewed as events separate from the rest of the education which led to a high workload for the participating students. This also ties into Stewart’s (2005, p. 232) discussion of the teacher preparation and the new demands that education is faced with through internationalization. It also highlights the fact that internationalization is a process that changes as time goes by and looks very different depending on what the current project is and the people and school that is undertaking the process.

The role of English during internationalization is fundamental and both interviewed members of the staff highlight this fact. Like Nunan (2001) and Crystal (2003) argue, that English is the language that is used in so many aspects of society and makes it needed in the internationalization process as the common language. Through this international and global development, English as a school subject plays a major role and according to the syllabus for English, the subject should aim to prepare the students for an international career and studies (Skolverket, 2011, p. 30). The interviewees both stated that English both as a subject and language plays a major role in the schools internationalization process. Moreover, the interviewees said that the exposure to English and the immersion in the language that comes with the exchanges had in some cases affected student’s English long term.

The IC was asked about the expected outcomes and the objectives behind the internationalization and stated that language had a central role and also that the individual growth was one of the expected outcomes. This is in line with Ortloff et al’s (2012) expectations of the development of students as citizens, as part of the internationalization of education.

The exchange provided new learning opportunities that both interviewees reflected over. Both members stated that the out of the classroom environment lead to a change in the participating students’ behavior and language learning. This ties in with Singal and Swann’s (2011) discussion on the informal learning opportunities that accompany an out of school context. One of the aspects of their discussion is that the school environment is strongly associated with one type of learning and the assessment process, however the out of school learning was viewed as both a way of socializing and as learning without the demands of the formalized school context (Singal & Swann, 2011, p. 481). In this case one can continue the discussion in relation to what the participating staff witnessed when away, the social part of the exchanges also played a major role in the new learning environment.
5.2 Analysis and discussion of the student interviews

In the curriculum for the compulsory school in Sweden, the international perspective is stressed and is said to help create a society with close international contact (Skolverket, 2011, p. 9). The students interviewed stressed the social part of the exchanges and that they had used the English language in order to communicate. When asked how the exchange had affected them, S1 mentioned that he had got a Facebook account in order to stay in contact with the people involved with the exchange. Crystal (2004) discussed the role of English when it comes to internet communications and the key role English has in the electronically global communications. In this case this is illustrated by S1’s reflection on his usage of English on the social networking site, and that he needs the language in order to stay in contact with his new friends. S2 also mentioned the new friendships as one of the lasting outcomes of the exchanges. The IC reflected over this in his interview and named networking as one of the objectives behind the exchange from the schools point of view. It is interesting to note that the interview results indicate that there is a clear cohesion behind the expectations and the outcomes of the exchanges.

The social aspect of the exchanges must not be underestimated and the group dynamics and the fellow students are all linked in to the experience of the student. S3 mentioned the fact that she was younger than the other students. S1 mentioned the feeling of participation and belonging to a group as one of the best things with his exchange. The social aspects are crucial for the participating students and the IC mentioned, during his interview, that they have experienced problems with bullying at one of the exchanges and that this is something that is a challenge with the exchanges.

The communication problems were highlighted by the students as being difficult and that they had to use language strategies such as adapting the language to persons they communicated with. These types of language strategies are mentioned in the Syllabus for English as means of being understood (Skolverket, 2011, p. 33). Two of the interviewed students (S1 and S3) talked about their language adaptation during their trips. This is an example of what Mckay discusses as ways of working around communication differences and she argues that the usage of such strategies is one of the teaching goals for English as an international language (2002, p. 127). The
communication challenge was something that the ET also mentions during her interview.

S1 in particular, mentioned that he had gained a further understanding of the usefulness of English as a language during his exchange. Also, his reflections tie in well with the purpose of English in the syllabus where, it is stated that: “Teaching should encourage pupils to develop an interest in languages and culture, and convey the benefits of language skills and knowledge.” (Skolverket, 2011, p. 30). In addition to this, Mckay (2002, p. 129) discusses the local and global perspective in relation to English teaching and learning. This perspective also adds to the student’s perception of English as a language and the global necessity of the language. Consequently, it therefore enforces the student’s view of the usefulness of English.

The intercultural perspective and the further understanding of other cultures were mentioned by S1 in his interview as positive outcomes, as highlighted both in the curriculum for the compulsory school (Skolverket, 2011) and by the IC during the interview as one of the expected outcomes of the exchanges.

When it comes to the outcomes of the exchanges from the student interviews, one can see similarities to the Ortloff et al (2012) definition of internationalization in the way that the outcomes from the exchanges could be divided in to practical and abstract. The practical being in this case the students’ development of their English and the problem solving, and the abstract being the attitudes towards the participating students from other countries and the personal growth that was mentioned by S1.

Another thing that was interesting was the discussion on informal English and that S2 mentioned during his interview that the “inappropriate” language was more fun to use but also showed that he was aware of that it was not to be applied in all situations. This ties in with what the ET witnessed when away and the relaxed ways her students used English out of the classroom and she also mentioned the challenges it also brought into the classroom.

To conclude, the role of English and the outcomes of the exchanges are closely related entities, as both the staff and student interviews suggest. When the students were asked about the outcomes of the exchanges and what they had learned they all mentioned that they had practiced their English with an emphasis on spoken communication. It is also interesting to compare the responses from the interviewed school staff and realize that the students consider themselves as having developed their language as seen by the participating teachers.
6. Conclusion

In this paper, the role of English in relation to short term international exchanges has been investigated. Furthermore, the students’ and teachers’ reflections on the outcomes of the exchanges have been examined. The data were collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews in a secondary school in the south of Sweden.

The results from the interviews show that there was a close connection between the school’s expected outcomes of the exchanges and what the participating students reflected on. Another aspect that was highlighted through the results was the school’s changing view on the exchanges and how they are now working in such a way that the exchanges are implemented throughout the teaching in order for the exchanges to not be viewed as isolated events, but as part of something bigger.

As shown in the interview results, English plays a major role during the international exchanges. It appears that English is viewed as an anchor in the internationalization process and is the subject that has been the key to the implementation of internationalization at the school. It is established that it is the language of communication on the exchanges and that it therefore, has a prominent role. Moreover; it was interesting to hear both the staff and the participating students reflect over the communication problems with the fellow students from other countries and how the challenges were tackled and how the students resorted to using different language strategies. Since the communication problems were widely discussed, one might argue that more attention should be given to this in the school’s preparatory and evaluative work. In addition to this, the role of English was discussed as the language of communication and the facilitator to solve practical problems and to sustain the contacts that were made with the other students on the exchanges. The diverse role of English on the exchanges provides challenges and opportunities for the English teachers at the school. The interviewed English teacher had noticed a transfer of the informal language use into classroom situations when back. One of the interviewed students also talked
about how he had gained further understanding of the usefulness of English after the exchanges.

The participating students and staff reflected on the outcomes of the exchanges in two ways: one way included the impact the social context had on the students and the effect the usage of English had on the students when they got back. Since these two factors were highlighted, it enforces the role of English in relation to the international exchanges but also how important the social aspects of the exchanges are and the correlation between learning and group belonging. The fact that he felt safe in the group and found new friends made him more willing to communicate in English, as S2 stated in the interview. In addition, the out-of school context that the exchanges provide was highlighted as creating new circumstances for learning and socializing for the students.

The title of this paper is taken from S2’s interview in order to illustrate the relation between the two aspects.

During the investigation of this topic some questions have been raised with regard to the role of the teacher in the internationalization process. How are they prepared? What expectations do they have to live up to? The IC mentioned in his interview that there are challenges to take in considerations, such as working to prevent bullying, the economics and the required documentations behind the collaborations.

One must remember that internationalization is not a product but a process and as shown through the interview results, the process has had a general effect on the education as a whole at the researched school and has now reached a point when the entire school is involved. I argue, based on the literature review and the collected data, that another aspect of the internationalization process that deserves more attention is the preparatory work the students do and how the evaluation process is executed. Future research on this topic could include a more extensive data collection through interviews with a bigger cohort in order to create a more in depth understanding. It would also be interesting to include observations as a research method and to observe the students when away on the exchanges and do follow up interviews with them upon return.

One needs to remember that this paper has a narrow focus and a small focus group and that the internationalization of the compulsory school is in its beginning phase. What is more, I believe it is imperative that further research is carried out since the new steering documents have such a clear focus on internationalization, as stated previously in this paper, and that there is a gap in the research field involving younger students and internationalization.
As I have argued in the previous section, the international exchanges provide the school and the teacher with tools and with opportunities to meet the aims and goals of the curriculum and the syllabus for English. Based on the interview results, of both the staff and the students, the international exchanges are anchored in English as a language and as a subject. Moreover, internationalization creates new arenas for students to learn, to solve problems and in some cases change their view on the English language and themselves.
Reference list


http://www.csn.se/polopoly_fs/1.3219!Utlandsstuderande-per-land-9798-1112.pdf


Skolverket. (2011). *Curriculum for the compulsory school, preschool class and the leisure-time centre*.


Appendix 1

Parent consent form

Malmö 17/9-2012

Hej,


Jag skulle uppskatta om ni tillåter er son/dotter att bli intervjuad som del av detta arbete. Intervjun kommer att spelas in digital. Alla etiska principer kommer självklart att iakttas; inga namn på elever eller skola kommer att publiceras. Om ni har några frågor angående detta arbete får ni gärna kontakta mig:

Ida Wales

Tel: xxxxxxxxx
ida.wales@xxxxxxxxxx

Med vänliga hälsningar

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Klipps ut och lämnas till … senast den …

Jag godkänner att _________________________________(namn på eleven) får medverka i denna undersökning.

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Signatur (målsman) Namnförtydligande (målsman)
Appendix 2

Interview Schedule: International coordinator

Background:

1. Could you tell something about your international collaborations?
2. How long has your school been taking part in the international collaborations?
3. What types of international collaboration do you take part in?
4. How did you come across them?
5. What countries are or have been involved?
6. How many students have taken part so far?
7. Who can go?

Objectives and expectations

8. From the school’s viewpoint, why did you start with the collaborations?
9. What are the objectives behind them?
10. What were the expected outcomes then and now?
11. How do you prepare outgoing students for their trips?

Outcomes

12. How do you work with them (the students) when they get back?
13. Are there any potential downfalls with the exchanges? If so what?
14. What kind of reaction have you had from the parents?
15. Do you see any development in the participating students academically and/or socially?
16. What part does English as a subject play in the collaborations?
Appendix 3

Interview Schedule: English teacher

Background

1. How many trips have you taken part in?
2. What role does English as a language play when you are away on the exchanges?
3. What are some of the things you have noticed with the participating students when it comes to their English?

The English subject and the internationalization

4. How are the collaborations implemented in the education?
5. What are the expected outcomes of the exchanges from your point of view as an English teacher?
6. Has anything surprised you so far when it comes to the participating student’s language development? If so, in what way?
7. In what way have the international collaborations affected the English teaching at your school?
8. In what way is it possible to see any academic changes (English) in participating students?
9. What are your observations when it comes to the students informal use of English when away?
Appendix 4

Interview Schedule: Students

Background

1. What country did you go to?
2. When did you go?
3. How many students went from your school?

English usage

4. In what ways did you use English when you were away? Give examples,
5. Did you notice any changes in your English during and after your trip? If so, in what ways?
6. Has the exchange changed your view on English as language and as a school subject? If so, in what way?

Outcomes

7. What are the strongest memories from your trip?
8. What did you learn during your exchange?
9. What was the best and worst thing with your trip?
10. Has the trip affected you in any way since you got back? If so, in what way?
Appendix 5

Interviews

120914 Interview with the international coordinator
120914 Interview with the English teacher
121001 Interview with student 1
12101 Interview with student 2
121001 Interview with student 3

Transcriptions

The transcribed passages used in the text are in size 10 and put into context.
I=Interviewer
Ic= International coordinator
Et= English teacher
S1,S2, S3 = Student interviewees

International coordinator
(8.11-10.27)
I: Are they all exchanges, sort of, exchange programs as part of the collaborations?
IC: No
I: Could you tell me a bit more about that?
IC: The letter writing is letter writing, a questionnaire is a questionnaire. And we skyped with a school in Prague where we made chocolate balls here and they made pirogues there and we showed each other how to cook…something it was just a game, it was just for fun. Just with a few students, it wasn’t a big deal. I just wanted to see if it would work. [short pause] And then my dad actually, this is another international side, I haven’t thought of, he is sometimes in my lessons, talking to the kids, it is pretty cool that you can do that. I would like to do more of that type of stuff, were I invite people from other
countries to talk about something, but there is always the problem with hmm.. time, does it work? What
time is it there? Can they be free at 11.15? Does everything work right there and then?
I: Oh yeah
IC: It would be so cool if I could say, we are talking about hmm say China, we are
doing a theme work on China and maybe our teacher here, who is from China has a
contact there who can teach about something and you put him on the screen and skype
and their telling I,t instead of me or reading it in a book. So cool. Hahaha.
I: So who can go? On these exchanges? The students, what are the criteria?
IC: There’s been different ways of solving that, certain things have been student
initiated, we have the English Club we call it but it is actually a disco club where they
work at these discos to collect money in order to make a trip, they choose were they
want to go. That group I pick. Because, It takes a certain kind of person who can handle
that kind of responsibility. I am here just to be as a guide. I don't do the actual work. I
just answer specific questions but they do everything. Erm..., which is very impressive,
because when we started that four years ago only twenty people went to each disco and
now we are up to about 120-150. It’s good. They did a great job and that is
entrepreneurship actually.

(29.36-32.29)

I: How many teachers would you say are involved in the internationalization of this
school?
IC: In the beginning it was eh, the first, the first one was just me and then I shared with
the others, so you could say everybody but actually it was me. And then I started to
invite others. I think we are up in about twelve teachers, have been away. But when we
are visited we try to have some sort of activity where the teachers who want to can say
hello to each other, but people are a bit shy, not everyone has got that… especially when
they have to speak in English. There is a barrier and just because you are a teacher does
not mean that you have had a lot of experience with other countries. But about half of
our teachers have been really involved, so twelve.
I: Do you see any development in the participating students academically and or
socially?
IC: Erm [silence] I don’t know because.. [silence] I don’t know, because you never know what it is that does something. I have seen them in a different situation and in that situation then they are not in the same environment then they can show different sides of themselves, they can be more outgoing or less outgoing, they can, but academically I have no idea actually, hmm ..maybe more relaxed with speaking English in certain cases. But you know, you just don’t know, because these are young people and they are changing every second. That is an exaggeration but I mean when I say goodbye to a kid in June and say hello in August they have changed and after a weekend they can change. It’s too big a question I don’t know.

I: What part does English as a subject play in the collaborations?

IC: A huge part everything happens in English, it makes it real no doubt about that. It makes ..they are really using English, they are not just talking to me or talking to someone else who speaks Swedish and pretending, yeah, it is all make-believe this language learning. If it is Spanish or Chinese If you are talking to someone who has the same mother tongue as you it’s kinda weird. So they have to and then they really appreciate the language.

The English teacher

(4.40-11.47)

I: What would you say are the expected outcomes of the exchanges from your point of view as an English teacher?

ET: Erm…[short silence] I have seen a lot of outcomes but the expected outcomes…At first on my first trip I was a little shocked, because ermm not shocked but I did not really know what it was about, I thought it was about, maybe more about the language itself like, it’s about talking English and communicating in and it is. I mean that project was called communication as an art. So of course it was about communication, but the problem I found was that many of the countries that we visited, their students did hardly spoke any English. I mean it was quite hard for them to communicate since their level of English was very low and our students they mastered the English language a lot better. And so there was a difficulty in that. It has actually always been like that when we’ve travelled except for the country Iceland. Because, in Iceland they also speak very good English, yeah. But in the other countries it has been hard for our
students to communicate with them since they have a lack of the English language, yeah.

I: Has anything surprised you so far when it comes to the participating students’ language development? If so in what way?

ET: Yeah I think they dare more, they are not, they have become more open, not only about the English development, I think also about finding yourself when going on one of those trips. You have to like...hmm how do you say it..embrace it. You cannot just stand there with closed arms. You have to like welcome the people around you and all the impressions around you. So, by doing that I think your language development also increases also and you become more secure. And your like, I really did this I said this, and I did it in English and its not even my own language. I think that ... it makes the student grow, and it makes them feel more secure and they dare to do more. So I have noticed that in the classroom after being on the trip. I have seen that the student becomes more secure, hmm bigger security in their language.

I: In what way have the international collaborations affected the English teaching at your school?

ET: Quite a lot actually, we are working with this site called e-twinning and E-pals also. Where students communicate with other students from English speaking countries but also from other countries that are in the project. And the language of communication of course is English. So it has had an effect.

I: In what way is it possible to see any academic changes in English of the participating students?

ET: Well, I think like I said you can notice that in the classroom that they are more willing to speak, they are not as afraid as they were before maybe. Even though, when I teach I say this is the place where you are allowed to commit mistakes and say things wrong. And I do, since English is not my first language, I do it all the time and to really make them [the students] feel like this is a very relaxing atmosphere and the classroom should always be like that, but, I think that still this is a school, a closed room, and I don’t think that they, even though I tell them they are a little afraid since there are twenty four other classmates around them, that are, so if they say something wrong then maybe it becomes scary for them. And I think by travelling to, communicating in English and using the English language, whether you want to or not, you just have to do it, and they find it some security there, like they find, how do you say it.. hm I don’t know how to explain myself. But I think that, yeah. They probably feel like if they can do it there, they can do it here. So they’ve done it there one time and well I can do this here as well. And also I think it gives them, they feel really good when they’ve been to these countries, since their level of English is so much better than many of the other unfortunately, than the other students.
It gives them a sense of “Wow I am really good at this”, even though they may be just average, makes them feel really good. I think that is a good experience for them to see “Wow I am not that bad”.

I: What are your observations when it comes to the students’ informal use of English when away?

ET: They have a, the informal, it’s a …I don’t think it’s very hard for them to communicate in an informal way, I haven’t noticed a problem, they speak freely cause like I said before it is not in the classroom. And I think that they are used to that type of language from TV, from music and so on. They hear it all the time, they play games on the computers as well while they speak to other people as well. It is a relaxed language which is great so they speak freely, but also in a negative way, the informal language they use all the time when they speak and when they play on their computer also affect texts, which I have noticed. There is a lot of “coz” and “wanna”.

I: Okay

ET: And it is quite hard to get them to I mean, it’s not that easy for them to understand that it is not okay in a formal text. But why? It sounds that way, and everybody writes that way, and he wrote it and he is from America and she wrote it and she is from England. You know. It’s like, to try to explain to them that it is not okay when it comes to writing but of course when it comes to speaking it is a totally different thing.

**Student 1**

*(0.01-3.40)*

I: What country did you go to?

S1: I went to Iceland, I think it was in May 2012.

I: So this year then

S2: Yes. I think it was the last trip of the project.

I: What project was it?

S1: It was Comenius. Communication as an art.

I: Oh yeah that was the theme right?

S1: Yes.

I: How many students went from your school?

S1: To Iceland, it was two, from the same class.
I: Super. In what ways did you use English when you were away? Can you give some examples?
S1: Yeah. It is very important to use English, you know, it was, we were from different countries, different cultures that [English] was the thing that made us together, that was connecting, that all of us knew English. Some knew it more and some knew it worse. Still if someone was worse at English I tried to talk to them also you know to communicate and learn about their countries and cultures. Those who knew good English you talked about other things you know and it was I used it you know in shops, if we were shopping, you know when I had presentations. As I said to learn about their countries and cultures, you know communicate with other students, teachers you know. To solve problems, if you didn’t have so many Icelandic cash you know, you had to trade it in and such things. So it was used very much in different ways. So you know, we really much used all that we had learned.
I: Okay, cool. Did you notice any changes in your English during and after your trip? If so in what ways?
S1: Yeah, you are so much into it, so, you know, If you are thinking and you are going to sleep, you are thinking in English. And when you came home, you know, it was hard to switch to Swedish, eh, you constantly said English words in the middle of the sentences, you know. Otherwise, it was what is the word in English? now it was what the word in Swedish is? That is pretty funny actually. But yeah I also realized that I was better in you know the verbs and do you say vocabulary?
I: Mm
S1: To böja?
I: Verb tenses.
S1: Yeah, you know swing, swung for example. Yeah you learn that pretty fast. It was much more free language. You learn very much you know and small talking, you are just talking normally like “well” for example, you learn to use that very naturally.

(7.15-10.00)

I: What was the best and worst thing with your trip?
S1: [silence] The worst thing was you know, because we had a bit different you know, as I said some were better in English and some were a bit worse and you would like to know a bit more from those who didn’t really understood you. But I really tried to speak to those persons also as much as I could, you know you try, even if I read French, I tried to speak Spanish to the Spanish students for example but, It would have been nice if they [some of the students] knew a bit more English so. I think they appreciated that I tried to spoke to them,
but I don’t know how much they understood, but it is also a challenge to try you English at someone were you have to, you know..anpassa?

I: Adapt
S1: Adapt you language. I think that that was the worst. They would have got more of it and I would have got more from them if we was on the same English level so to speak.
I: What was the best thing then?
S1: The best thing, yeah was to feel participated, you know united in the group and meet new peoples and as I said to personally development. utveckling?
I: Has the trip affected you in any way since you got back? If so in what way?
S1: I have to think a bit about that [short silence] I did not use Facebook before. Haha!
I: But now you do?
S1: But now I do because now I can talk to persons who are pretty far away you know, otherwise you would have to go back on trips and you can’t do that that often. Ut Facebook you know, it takes five minutes you know and then you can speak to them, and I need English also in many ways, both to get on Facebook and to use it to talk to them.

Student 2

(1.09-5.57)
I : Did you notice ant changes in your English during and after your trip? If so in what way?
S2: When I were in Iceland I didn’t see that much change, because I have used English all my life, since I grow up. I talked English about every week, every year and all day, probably. So I don’t think it affected me that much, but otherwise it is really good to get those words, it’s always good to have a big ….word…ja.
I:Mm.. Has the exchange changed your view on English as a language and as a school subject?
S2: Yeah, probably a little, because when I were on Iceland, before I came there, I were a little shy to talk English but now since that I have started to talk more freely and I have yeah I don’t feel like. I came out of the box like I can talk to everybody with no problem because before that I was a little scary about how it was going to go in that subject.
I: So why did you think that happened?
S2: I think that happened because I talked to a lot of people and it was not one peep..dude..or it was many friends. And then you came like closer and you started to open up your language and use like more inappropriate words so that is quite good and not so good, sometimes in some moments and sometimes it’s good to do that because of..maybe it’s gonna be more fun to talk and sometimes is different when you talk business with somebody you should not say inappropriate words. Yeah.

I: Has the exchange change your view on English as a language and as a school subject?
S2: Yeah it has

I: Mmm. What are the strongest memories from your trip?
S2: Probably when we saw the geyser. It was so funny to see the geyser because of it did not feel like it was real, it feels like it was made-up but it wasn’t. Because it took its’ heat from underground and then made it up in a water circle and then give all the energy up in the air with water float in it, so it looks really cool. And that was probably the best memory. But I also got the memory when I eat whale meat, it wasn’t that good but it was ok. Yeah.

I: Cool, what did you learn during your exchange?
S2: I learned a lot of English, not my accent or something. I learned words and more like grammar. And I came out of the box, I learned to speak with everyone in appropriate and in inappropriate ways, so that has affected me real much.

I: What was the best and the worst thing with your trip?
S2: The best thing were all my friends I got new friends and its really good to have friends because if I go to Iceland sometime I can just check them up on Facebook and then go get and meet them. If I don’t want to buy a hotel room maybe I can sleep at their place or something like that. And contacts is always good to have.

I: And the worst thing?
S2: I didn’t got anything..

I: okay. Has the trip affected you in any way since you got back? If so in what way?
S2: Can you say that again?

I: Have the trip affected you in any way since you got back? If so in what way?
S2: Yeah probably with the English I came out of the box that I said before, and that has properly affected me most and then it affected me on I have got more friends I don’t know if that is an affect but I think so actually.

I: So you think that you are more, so in school now, can you tell a difference in English as a subject?
S2: Yeah I talk more, not more in words but I talk more when I talk, explains more a lot and that makes my subject better and I get better grades probably yeah.

Student 3

(0.30-2.55)

I: In what ways did you use English when you were away? Can you give some examples?
S3: Erm. With the person we lived at their house, so we tried to communicate but it was hard because they didn’t know so much English.
I: okay
S3 So it was really hard, because their English was bad. First it was, I went to one house and she could not talk at all and then I got the opportunity to another place and she could talk pretty good so yeah.
I: Did you speak with the other students?
S3: Yeah but it was hard. Iceland was pretty good at talking English they are like us so they are good. But Turkey and Spain they weren’t good at all.
I: Did you notice any changes to your English during and after the trip? If so in what way?
S3: It was so hard to speak because they didn’t know what they should say. So sometimes you change it [English] because you need to make it so more…when you talk with them you need to make it so much easier for them to understand. Because they didn’t know what to answer at all. So it was a bit njaaa.. a bit a bit with the teachers they could talk English so you talked to them and you learned.
I: Has the exchange changed you view on English as a language and as a subject? If so in what way?
S3: Yeah. I Learned more because there was different accents, different people, it’s hard to explain but it was more interesting to travel and learn and yeah.
I: In what way was it more interesting?
S3: Because you listen to more, and everybody was forced to talk English, so you got to snap up what everybody said so yeah

(3.53- 4.40)

I: What did you learn during your exchange?
S3: To use the lang…language what do you say…
I: yeah, language
S3: in another way. In school we just learn to say the things with a text. You can read the text; there you got to use it in your head. So… yeah.
I: What was the best and worst thing with your trip?
S3: The best was that I meet many new friends. And it was a good opportunity to talk English and so on. But the worst thing was that not so many people could talk English, so that was pretty hard.