Cross-Cultural Communication

*Do Icelanders have the proficiency
to communicate effectively across cultures?*

The position of
cross-cultural curricula and training
in Iceland
and possible remedial action

Akureyri, April 28th 2005
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Statements

a) "Ég lýsi því hér með yfir að ég ein er höfundur þessa verkefnis og að það er ágóði
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b) "It is here by confirmed that this assignment satisfies the requirements of the course
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Rafn Kjartansson

Abstract Icelandic

Markmið þessa verkefnis er að sýna fram á mikilvægi menningarlæsis, kanna stöðu fjölmenningarfræðslu á Íslandi og ræða mögulegar leiðir til úrbóta.

Hinn huldi hluti menningar eins og gildi, norm og viðhorf eru þeir þættir sem oftast valda mestum misskilningi í samskiptum milli menningarheima. Víddir Hofstede geta hjálpað til við að skilja viðbrögð og viðhorf annarra þjóða sem hafa verið metnar á mælikvörðum "Power distance", "Individualism/ Collectivism", "Masculinity/Femininity", "Uncertainty avoidance" og "Long-term / Short-term orientation" . Eins eru víddir Trompenaars gagnlegar þegar horft er til þess hvernig hópar leysa vandamál og sætta sjónarmið.

Það getur verið mjög erfitt að aðlagast nýjum menningarheimi og valdið pirringi, vonbrigðum og kvíða vegna endalauss misskilnings(Culture shock). Framboð á áföngum sem fjalla um menningartengd efni hefur aukist hratt síðustu misseri, sérstaklega í viðskiptadeildum háskólanna, þó áherslan sé þar meira á svæðisbundna menningu og alþjóðlega þætti en minna á fjölmenningarleg samskipti. Þá eru fjöldamargir nemar sem stunda skiptinám erlendis í gegnum háskólana.

Niðurstöður könnunar sem lögð var fyrir tungumálakennara í framhaldsskólum landsins benda til þess að þeir séu mjög meðvitaðir um mikilvægi menningarlæsis og leggi mikið uppúr því að ræða menningarlega þætti eins og gildi, norm og viðhorf við nemedur sína jafnvel þó svo fæstir hafi heyrt Hofstede nefndan.

Útflutningsráð hefur brugðist við vaxandi þörf viðskiptalífsins fyrir fjölmenningarfræðslu með því að þjálfa ráðgjafa í menningarlæsi og bæta inní námskeið sín fræðslu tengda menningarmun.

Alþjóðahúsin veita mikilvæga þjónustu varðandi íslenskukennslu og menningarfræðslu til nýbúa en fjöldi þeirra fer hratt vaxandi. Menntakerfið er að byrja að bregðast við þessari breytingu á þjóðfélaginu með því að bjóða uppá áfanga í kennaramenntun sem miðar að því að gera kennara

menningarlæsa svo þeir geti miðlað áfram þekkingu og unnið að þjálfun í grunnskólum landsins í samskiptum á milli ólíkra menningarheima.

Það er vaxandi þörf fyrir fræðsluefni sem er aðlagað íslenskum aðstæðum og veitir þjálfun í að skilja menningarmun og færni í fjölmenningarlegum samskiptum.

Afrakstur CEReS verkefnisins mun svara þeirri þörf að hluta þar sem notendur þess, þ.e. nemendur og viðskiptalífið, hafa lagt sinn skerf í undirbúningi og hönnun fræðsluefnisins.

Lykilorð:

Menning

Menningarlegar víddir

Fjölmenningarleg samskipti

Fjölmenningarnámsefni

Menningarlæsi

Special thanks

I would like to thank my instructor, Rafn Kjartansson, for all his inspiration and constructive remarks.

Akureyri, April 28th 2005

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Steinunn Aðalbjarnardóttir

Abstract

The object of this assignment is to reason the importance of intercultural competence, find out the position of cross-cultural education and training in Iceland and finally discuss remedial actions.

The part of culture that usually causes the most misunderstanding and confusion in cross-cultural communication is the hidden part of it such as values, norms, assumptions and attitudes. Hofstede´s dimensions are useful when communicating with a country that has been placed in the indices of Power distance, Individualism/ Collectivism, Masculinity/Femininity, Uncertainty avoidance and Long-term / Short-term orientation. As well are the seven dimensions of Trompenaars, which focus on the cultural dimensions of business executives and are related to how a group of people solve problems and reconciles dilemmas. Adjusting to a new culture can be an extremely difficult task causing irritation, frustration and anxiety because of endless cultural misunderstanding (Culture shock). Language can be considered the vehicle of culture whereas language and culture are closely interwoven.

There is a rapid growth in cultural related courses both in under- and postgraduate in Business fields even though the emphasis is more on geographic areas or international relations and less with cross-cultural communication. There are as well many students studying abroad under the auspice of the universities. The results of a survey conducted among language teachers in the colleges indicate that the teachers are very culturally aware and motivated for discussing cultural issues such as values, behaviour and assumptions with their students even though almost no teacher had heard of Hofstede.

The Trade Council of Iceland has responded to the need of the business sector by training cross-cultural consultants and involving cultural topics into their seminars.

The International Centres play a vital part in the cultural education for immigrants whose number is rapidly increasing in Iceland. The general education system is just starting to respond to this multicultural change in Icelandic society by adding intercultural training into the teaching education to produce culturally aware teachers that are able to introduce cross-cultural communication in schools.

There is a growing need for intercultural teaching material adapted to Icelandic situations that provides training in intercultural awareness, proficiency and practical skills.

The CEReS project will produce educational material that will partly fulfil these needs whereas the users of the intended material, the students and companies, contribute systematically to the preparation and design of the material.

Key words:

Culture

Cultural Dimensions

Cross-Cultural Communication

Cross-Cultural Curriculum

Cultural Awareness

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Introduction

> The process by which we all come to believe that there is a "right" way to think, express ourselves, and act is called socialization. It is the process by which individuals learn what is required of them in order to be successful members of a given group, what is right and good. Socialization is such a potent process that once people have been socialized they are hardly aware that other realities can exist. This results in the presence of ethnocentrism, the tendency of people to judge others from their own culture's perspective, believing theirs to be the only "right" or "correct" way to perceive the world (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 5).

There are differing views on whether we are becoming more globally universal and alike or whether we are becoming more influenced by particular and unfamiliar national cultures.

Whilst the world is getting smaller and smaller, the need to communicate effectively increases. People tend to have the human instinct that ´deep inside´ all people are the same – but they are not. Therefore when the international business tends to standardize cross-cultural communication in order to simplify global trade – the chances are that some very bad decisions will be made due to cultural clashes.

Management gurus have for the past decades introduced the one best way to manage and to organize. They strive to create tools that will reduce the complexities of management but unfortunately the approach tends to limit innovation and intercultural success as well.

Cross-cultural proficiency is about having a fundamental understanding that cultural and social inheritance affects every detail of your life, from the way you dress and dine to ideas about work, economy, structure and so on. Also how everyone is coloured by his own cultural and social background. It introduces the main concepts that enable us to analyze multi-cultural situations and to simplify and make cross-cultural communication more effective.

Cross-cultural proficiency does not require knowledge about every specific culture but is rather the training in understanding social and cultural

processes. Such proficiency requires self-inspection and understanding and trains people to tackle situations where different cultural attitudes clash. The Cross-Cultural proficiency makes people more as well capable to endure insecurity and uneasy situations (Fjolmenning, 2005).

The Trade Council of Iceland implemented a research programme in 2003 in connection with the European project Intercomm which revealed that over 30% of Icelandic export companies had lost a business opportunity because of cultural difference or language difficulties and 85% of the companies had some problems due to the same things. Unlike what could be expected, it is not always the most far away markets that cause the most intense problems but just as well the closer countries as Sweden and Norway (Guðjón Svansson, verbal reference, March 9th 2005).

This leads to the presumption that Icelandic companies do have a need for employees with cross-cultural competence especially for two reasons: Icelandic companies are increasingly taking advantage of expansion opportunities abroad since their small domestic markets are quickly saturated and Iceland, which used to be a highly homogeneous society, is now developing a more diverse character through immigration.

Now there are approx. 10.700 individuals living in Iceland that have foreign nationality or 3.6% of the total population. For the last decade the number of foreigners living in Iceland has doubled for in the year 1995 they were only 1,8% of the population. National Statistics of Iceland (NSI) states that the ratio of foreigners is getting close to what it is in Scandinavia (NSI, 2005). Thus there is an urgent need for the educational system to respond to altered circumstances by promoting intercultural awareness and understanding.

The object of this assignment is to explore cultural dimensions and to reason the importance of cross-cultural competence. Then an attempt will be made to answer the question ***"Do Icelanders have the proficiency to communicate effectively across culture?"*** by finding out the position of cross-cultural training and education in Iceland. Finally there will be some suggestions about possible remedial actions in order to increase the cross-cultural competence of Icelanders.

1 Theoretical discussion

1.1 Culture - definitions

"Culture usually refers to something that is made by human beings rather than something that occurs in nature ….The most critical dimension of culture concerns itself with people's assumptions about life. Culture consists of the ideals, values, and assumptions about life that are widely shared and that guide specific behaviours. Triandis (1977) points out the distinction between objective and subjective culture whereas the *objective culture* refers to the visible, tangible aspects of culture, and includes such things as the artefacts people make, the food they eat, the clothing they wear, and even the names they give to things. It is relatively easy to pick up, analyze, and hypothesize about the uses and meanings of objective elements of culture. *Subjective culture* on the other hand refers to the invisible, less tangible aspects of a group of people. People's values, attitudes, norms of behaviour, and adopted roles - the things generally kept in people´s minds - fall into this category. It is much more difficult for people to speak about, observe, and understand what is going on when it is the subjective elements of their culture that are in conflict with those of another. It is thought that most cross-cultural misunderstandings occur at the subjective cultural level, and that this should be the focus of good cross-cultural training" (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 5-6).

In his Intercultural research paper "The current state of knowledge" Stephan Dahl (2004) gives a short overview of the main concepts and theories in intercultural and cross-cultural communication which will be looked upon in following paragraphs.

The first structured approach to form a theory how to classify cultural pattern came from Edward T. Hall when he, based on his experience in the Foreign Service, published two books, "The Silent Language" (1959) and "The Hidden Dimension" (1969). In them, he identified two classic dimensions of culture. Firstly the high-context and low-context cultures which deals with how much information is needed to be formally written down. Hall also representd a dimension of, polychronic, where many things can be handled at a time, versus monochronic time orientation where one thing is done at a time. Although both concepts are very useful, and like the

high/low context concept easily observed, the lack of empirical data makes the concept more difficult to apply in research (Dahl, 2004, p. 10-11).

Many researchers have since then tried to address the concept of culture. The most famous and most referred to in this area is the research by the Dutch organisational anthropologist Hofstede. By inspecting work-related values of employees of IBM during the 1970s he obtained his culture dimensions which he divided into: power distance, individualism/collectivism, masculinity/femininity and uncertainty avoidance which will be dealt with later in this chapter (Dahl, 2004, p. 12).

Definition of culture

Hofstede (1994, p. 5) defined culture as "*the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the member of one group or category of people from another*".

> Hofstede expands the concept of 'collective programming´ by suggesting that culture could therefore be situated between human nature, which is not programmed, nor programmable on the one side – and the individual's personality on the other side. This idea of the culture in the individual is particularly useful for explaining the concept of culture on the one side – as well as allowing for the diversity of individual personalities within any one culture (Dahl, 2004, p.3).

There is another concept of culture that Hall (1983) put forward. According to Dahl (2004, p.3) Hall views culture as often underlying and that people only pay attention to it when their values and assumptions are severely challenged, for example when encountering people from a different culture. He states that people in the same society, internalise the cultural components of that society, and act within the boundaries that are "culturally" acceptable.

Dahl (2004, p.4) cites Spencer-Oatey (2000) who adds to the definition of culture by stating that: "*Culture is a fuzzy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural norms, and basic assumptions and values that are shared by a group of people, and that influence each member's behaviour and his/her in interpretations of the "meaning" of other people's behaviour*"

1.2 Layers of culture

Culture has often been described as a set of layers. The most fundamental division is the iceberg model where culture is divided into visible level, showing behaviour or artifacts and the invisible level of values. In search for a more meaningful model of culture Hofstede put forward a set of four layers, each of which involves the lower level, something like an onion that can be peeled, layer-by-layer. At the core of Hofstede´s model of culture are values, which are defined as "…broad tendencies to prefer certain states of affairs over others"(Hofstede, 1994, p.8). These values are feelings which have a plus and minus side such as: evil vs. good, dirty vs. clean, ugly vs. beautiful, unnatural vs. natural, abnormal vs. normal, paradoxical vs. logical, irrational vs. rational. Around the values, Hofstede (1994, p. 7-8) describes three levels of culture that are more clearly noticeable: Closest to the values there are rituals such as ways of greeting and paying respect and social and religious ceremonies. The next level contains heroes, such as admired persons who serve as models for behaviour. In the third and most obvious layer there are symbols, which are words, gestures, pictures, or objects that carry a particular meaning.

Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997, p. 21-23) put forward a similar onion-like model of culture. They are more focused on the core level than the outer level, which consists of explicit culture such as language and man, made things. The middle layer reflects the norms and values of the group. The core contains the basic assumptions about existence which even the individuals of the group have problem explaining because it is so subconscious.

According to Dahl (2004, p. 5-6) Spencer-Oatey recombines the two inner layers of the onion so basic assumptions and values form the core of culture which again are encircled by a more basic level of beliefs, attitudes and conventions. This division makes it possible to give reasons for changes in beliefs without a great change in values. In Spencer-Oateys model, "beliefs, attitudes and conventions" influence another layer, consisting of "systems

and institutions", which again are embraced by outer layer of culture that is divided into non-behavioural items (artefacts and products) on the one side and human behavioural items (rituals and behaviour) on the other side.

> In conclusion, it is possible to describe culture as a shared set of basic assumptions and values, with resultant behavioural norms, attitudes and beliefs which manifest themselves in systems and institutions as well as behavioural patterns and non-behavioural items. There are various levels to culture, ranging from the easily observable outer layers (such as behavioural conventions) to the increasingly more difficult to grasp inner layers (such as assumptions and values). Culture is shared among members of one group or society, and has an interpretative function for the members of that group. Culture is situated between the human nature on the other hand and the individual personality on the other. Culture is not inheritable or genetic, but culture is learned. Although all members of a group or society share their culture, expressions of culture-resultant behaviour are modified by the individuals´ personality (Dahl, 2004, p. 5-7).

1.3 Hofstede´s Dimensions

The cultural dimensions model of Geert Hofstede is a framework that describes five sorts (dimensions) of differences / value perspectives between national cultures:

Power Distance

> This dimension indicates the extent to which a society expects and accepts a high degree of inequality in institutions and organisations. In a country with a large Power Distance, organisations are characterised by formal hierarchies and by subordinates who are reluctant to challenge their superiors. The boss is very much the boss. In a country with a small Power Distance, subordinates expect to be consulted and the ideal boss is a resourceful democrat rather than a benevolent autocrat (International business center, 2004).

Class distinction is very important when it comes to international business e.g. in marketing when defining the target group in a given country whereas knowledge of power distance in that country may apply to whom you select as actors to feature various consumer products and the words you use to describe them (Witiger - International business, 2005).

Individualism - collectivism

This dimension relates to the extent to which people prefer to take care of themselves and their immediate families rather than being bound to some wider collectivity such as the extended family or clan. In terms of organisational life, in highly individualistic societies, there will be a sharp distinction between work and personal life. Task will prevail over relationships. Also individuals will prefer work settings in which they can make their own decisions (International business center, 2004).

What this means when e.g. promoting consumer goods in highly collective countries it would be more successful if groups of people were in the advertisement than only one person. For example a TV commercial for promoting a cell phone in Japan would show how the person shared his new cell phone with all his friends while in trying to sell the same product in New York one would show an individual and how he used it to save time or money (Witiger - International business, 2005).

Masculinity - femininity

Masculine societies value assertiveness, competitiveness and materialism as opposed to the 'feminine' values of relationships and the quality of life. In terms of the workplace, organisations in feminine societies will aim for harmonious relations with a strong emphasis on social partnership. In masculine societies organisations will be more task-oriented and motivation more materialistic. Individual assertiveness is acceptable and appreciated. Within nearly all societies men score higher in terms of the masculinity dimension (International business center, 2004).

In some masculine cultures the difference between the men and women is quite extreme as it relates to clothing, job opportunities, religious regulations, language, human rights while in more feminine cultures the differences between men and women are very little. In marketing it is important to be aware of this dimension when adapting the promotional mix. Things like the appearance of women´s clothing and status in advertisements should be considered according to the cultural norms (Witiger - International business, 2005).

Uncertainty avoidance

This refers to the degree to which a society prefers predictability, security and stability. In societies with high scores on this index there is an emotional need for rules, written and unwritten. Thus organisations in these societies will deploy

formal rules in order to ensure that work situations are highly structured with clearly defined task roles and responsibilities. Deviant ideas and behaviours are not tolerated. Societies in which Uncertainty Avoidance is strong are also characterised by higher levels of anxiety that in turn results in a pronounced need to work hard (International business center, 2004).

Long-term versus short-term orientation

In his later work, Hofstede (1991) introduces a fifth dimension ... Hofstede describes long-term orientation as characterised by persistence, ordering relationships by status and observing this order, thrift, and having a sense of shame, whereas short-term orientation is characterised by personal steadiness and stability, protecting your "face", respect for tradition and reciprocation of greetings, favours, and gifts (Dahl, 2004, p. 13-14).

Criticism of Hofstede´s dimensions

The main criticism of Hofstede´s research is that it was conducted within a single organization, IBM, which has a strong organizational culture. Hofstede and his research team are from the Western part of the world, hence it has been criticized that the research is culturally biased. Hofstede has welcomed this criticism and amended his research based on the Chinese Value Survey by adding a fifth dimension to his original four dimensions. Additionally, Hofstede initiated the making and conducting of a similar survey model structured in Africa. The results of the survey supported the five cultural dimensions and their classification. It has also been criticized that the research is being outdated whereas younger people´s value are rapidly changing (International business center, 2004 and María Guðmundsdóttir, 2004, p.15).

1.4 The Icelandic Business Culture in the light of Hofstede´s dimensions

The Trade Council of Iceland has been working on a project named Intercomm where a survey was conducted that was intended to cast a light on the cultural environment in Iceland, from a business point of view. According to María Guðmundsdóttir (2004, p. 5) the Icelandic business environment has undergone some changes over a relatively short period of time which has resulted in a shift in the Icelandic business culture. In

general, power distance is low in Iceland even though some differences were detected in the relation to gender and occupation. Uncertainty avoidance is also low in Iceland. This is likely to be affiliated with the fact that Icelanders are accustomed to a great deal of uncertainty with regard to the ever-changing weather and the unstable natural forces in Iceland. Individualism is becoming more dominant that collectivism as is the masculinity now rated somewhat prevalent to femininity. Spontaneous and expecting quick results, Icelander´s values reflect a short-term orientation. However, a slow movement towards long-term orientation was identified. The Icelandic business culture very much resembles that of the Scandinavian countries. The only exception to this is the trend in Iceland towards more masculine values than feminine ones.

> The typical Icelandic businessperson is informal and casually dressed. He is hard working and dedicated to delivering quality, although it can result in a delay in the pre-set time schedule. On the first encounter he may appear to be a cold person, but as the business relationship progresses his flexible manner and humour will be revealed (María Guðmundsdóttir, 2004, p. 60).

1.5 Trompenaars Seven Dimensions

Fons Trompenaars and Charles Hampden-Turner classify cultures as a mix of behavioural and value patterns and in their research they have mainly focused on the cultural dimensions of business executives. In their book "Riding The Waves of Culture", they identify seven dimensions which some of them can be regarded as nearly identical to Hofstede´s dimensions. Trompenaars & Hampden-turner (1997, p. 6-10) indicate that it is useful to think of culture as the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas. They discuss how every culture distinguishes itself from others by the specific solutions it chooses to certain problems that reveal themselves as dilemmas. Those dilemmas can again be divided into three categories: Problems that arise from the relationships with other people; problems regarding time and finally problems relative to the environment.

There are five orientations covering the ways in which human beings deal with each other. *Universalism versus particularism* defines the preference of people to follow standardized rules or a flexible approach to unique situations. The universalist thinks that one rule should apply to everyone while the particularist wants to take circumstances into account when making decisions. *Individualism versus communitarianism* explores if the culture focuses on individual performance and creativity or on the larger group leading to cohesion and consensus. The *Neutral versus emotional* dimension identifies how much the culture accepts the display of emotions when communicating. The *specific versus diffuse* dimension goes into the degree of involvement in personal relationships when doing business. In specific relationships people have little personal contact while in diffuse relationships people have a real and personal contact. *Achievement versus ascription* describes how the culture judges people, whether it is based on what one has accomplished or whether it depends on nobility, gender, age or connections.

Societies look at time in different way. Some cultures lay great emphasis on what people have achieved in the past while it is more important for some cultures to have a good plan for the future. The dimension *sequential versus synchronic* focuses on how people organize time. If they do it in a sequential manner, doing one task at a time, or in parallel, keeping many things active at once. This can also be described by defining time either as a straight line with a sequence of different events or as a circle where the past and present are together with future possibilities

An important factor in cultural difference can be found in the attitude to the environment. *Internal-External Control* is a dimension that points out the differences in personal drives. It reflects on whether people are stimulated by their inner drive and the feeling that they can control their lives or if they are adaptive to external events that are beyond control.

According to Trompenaars & Woolliams (2003, p. 39) the behaviours in intercultural encounters can be identified in the light of universalism versus particularism in four ways.

Ignoring other cultures. People stick to their own standpoint either because they believe that their way of doing things and their values are the best or because they have not recognized others point of view or perhaps just have no respect for them.

Abandoning own orientation and go native. People try to adopt the customs of the other culture which on the other hand usually appears superficial. The consequences will be mistrust from the people of the other culture and that people will not be able to offer their own strengths to any alliance.

Compromise. People compromise by sometimes doing things their way and sometimes the way of the others. This leads to a win/lose solution or even a lose/lose solution.

Reconciliation. This is the approach where the two opposing views can come to fuse or blend – where the strength of one extreme is extended by considering and accommodating the other. Reconciliation makes people more effective and uses the strength and attribution of both parties in order to create a win/win solution.

1.6 Adjusting to a new culture

Kenneth Cushner and Richard Brislin along with Craig Cherrie and Mahealani Yong, developed the original book of Intercultural Interactions around 100 "critical incidents" that were spread across several themes of human interaction as a unique approach to learning about other cultures. These themes can be organized around three broad headings:

People´s intense feelings

In adjusting to life and work in another culture, people are likely to experience a number of emotional reactions such as anxiety, frustration because of disconfirmed expectations, loneliness, irritation due to ambiguity and other exasperation owing to feelings of displacement and unfamiliarity, and because of their status as outsiders (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 39). (Further in Appendix 2)

Knowledge Areas

Difficulties and misunderstanding concerning a number of commonly mentioned topics usually rise regarding work-related issues, time and spatial orientation, communication and language use, roles, importance of the group vs. individual, rituals vs. superstition, hierarchies and finally understanding values which is critical in cross-cultural adjustment (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 39-41). (Further in Appendix 2)

Bases of cultural differences

According to Cushner & Brislin (1996, p. 41-42) the attempt to understand the ways in which people respond to and organize information in order to communicate, gives a good insight into the cultural differences that people find frustrating as they try to adjust to a new culture. They have come to the conclusion that there are a few bases of cultural differences that can be identified such as categorization, differentiation, in-group and out-group distinction, learning styles and attribution.

Culture shock

Dr. Carmen Guanipa (1997) who has specialized in multicultural counselling states that the term, culture shock, was introduced for the first time in 1958 to describe the anxiety produced when a person moves to a completely new environment. This term expresses the lack of direction, the feeling of not knowing what to do or how to do things in a new environment, and not knowing what is appropriate or inappropriate. The feeling of culture shock generally sets in after the first few weeks of coming to a new place.

Culture shock can be described as the physical and emotional discomfort one suffers when coming to live in another country or a place different from the place of origin. Often, the way that one lived before is not accepted as or considered as normal in the new place. Culture shock has many stages, which can be ongoing or appear only at certain times. The first stage is called the "honeymoon" stage followed by the second stage where difficult times and crises appear in daily life. The third stage is characterized by gaining some understanding of the new culture resulting in the fourth stage where one realizes that the new culture has good and bad things to offer.

Finally the fifth stage is called the "re-entry shock." when returning to the home country. (Further in Appendix 2)

1.7 Stereotyping

It should be kept in mind that culture describes the norms, values and assumptions of a group. In the group there are individuals with a wide spread of these attributions that does have an distribution around an average. According to Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner (2003, p. 26) stereotyping is using extreme and exaggerated behaviour of a person to generalize about the nation. The danger is that this will give a highly skewed image of the nation whereas a stereotype gives a very limited view of the average behaviour in the country. People also often feel that if something is different then it must be wrong. Finally, stereotyping disregards the fact that individuals in the same culture do not necessarily behave according to the cultural norm.

1.8 Language as the vehicle of culture transfer

In most cross-cultural communication the parties also speak different mother languages. To resolve this problem has the use of English as a trade language been accepted in the business world.

It is obvious that even though the English is an important trade language it is sometimes not sufficient. The results in a recent research that InterAct conducted in UK stated that 40% of exporting companies in UK considered that they had lost business because they didn´t have employees qualified in the languages of their main customers (Rafn Kjartansson, 2005 b).

Sharing a language does not necessarily mean sharing a culture nor should a difference in language always impose a difference in cultural values. It is a question whether one can be bicultural without also being bilingual. Even though the language belongs to the surface level of a culture, it is also the vehicle of culture transfer. If one does not understand the language one fails to notice a lot of the subtleties of a culture such as humour. What is appraised as funny is very culture-specific. In cross-cultural encounters it is very important to be aware of that jokes and irony are taboo until one is

completely sure of the other culture´s conception of what represents humour (Hofstede, 1994, p. 213-214).

In a survey that Aleksandrowicz-Pedich, Rafn Kjartanson, Lázar and Skopinskaja (2001, p. 5) conducted in four countries, they investigated how often English teachers include culture-related activities in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. The results indicated that culture was still a neglected element in language instruction due to lack of intercultural communication training in teacher education.

2 Research

2.1 CEReS

"Cross Cultural Curriculum for European Regions and their Students",
CEReS, is a two year project, started in October 2004 and is supported by
the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The Faculty of Management in the
University of Akureyri is leading the project in cooperation with InterAct in
UK, which is an international research and management team, specialising
in cross-cultural communication skills. The Trade Council of Iceland is also
a party of the CEReS project, as well as the Universities of Gabrovo in
Bulgaria, Bialystok in Poland and Tärnöskolan in Sweden.

The object of the CEReS project is to find out the position of cross-cultural
education and training in the partner countries, with special emphasis on
business related material as well as suggesting remedial actions and
designing cross-cultural curriculum suited for undergraduates as well as for
companies involved in international business.

In order to be able to have normal business relationship with people it is
better to know something about their background and values. Same laws
can be applied to general communication so it can be expected that the
educational system in general will make increasing emphasis on cross-
cultural curriculum in their syllabuses, e.g. in relation with teaching foreign
languages. Such basic education in all stages of school would contribute to
reducing prejudices and conflicts of groups with different background. In
the long run it is the prospect that the results of the CEReS project will be
useful when making cross-cultural curriculum for other faculties, such as in
teachers education as well as in other areas (Rafn Kjartansson, 2005 a).

2.2 Research methods

In this research there will be made an attempt to find out as accurately as
possible the position of cross-cultural training and curriculum in broad
spectrum in Iceland.

Resources such as web sites of educational parties were inspected, teachers
and others concerned were interviewed either by phone or e-mail and a

quantitative research was conducted among 270 language teachers in colleges. The questionnaire was sent three times by e-mail. First March 8th which 70 teachers replied to and again to those who had not answered March 14th and 28th. The final results were 127 replies or return rate close to 47%. When sending the questionnaire it was sent in groups to each college so the replying teacher only had access to the database of e-mails of his fellow teachers.

2.3 The position of cross-cultural training in Iceland

2.3.1 Trade Council of Iceland

As a result of studies conducted in co-operation with InterAct International, UK, the Trade Council of Iceland is now able to offer companies several seminars where cross-cultural communication training is included.
The *PROTOCOL I and PROTOCOL II* projects focused on the training of intercultural consultants, with specialist contributions from the British Chambers of Commerce, for the benefit of Icelandic companies involved in trade abroad. This training programme has subsequently been expanded in the *EURIKA* project, which includes several European countries, with a special emphasis on Eastern Europe (Rafn Kjartansson, 2005 b).
The objective of Protocoll II is to increase the competence of Icelandic export companies by assisting them to establish a communication strategy in foreign communication. Knowledge of traditions, habits and customs of the customers and systematic use of language can open many doors, expand the market area and lead to productive business (Trade Council of Iceland, 2005).
The Cross-cultural consultants offer the service of analyzing the communication of export companies with their foreign customers and their marketing of goods. The consultant visits the company for couple of days, makes inquiries and after some research issues an "Export Communication Review – Importance of Cross Cultural Issues in International Business" where the content is quite standardized but again customized to the company. The report analyses the current position of cross-cultural issues,

written and verbal communication along with personal interaction as well as listing up the company's literature and supporting material.

Then the report makes recommendations about those issues in the light of whether the countries are deal-focused or relation-focused as well as how the country is defined according to Hofstedes dimensions. Followed by practical issues such as what is appropriate to do or say in concerned country. Finally the report gives information about further remedial actions and possible sources of available help such as the services of Intercultural Centres, books of interest, courses in language and the importance of making a communications strategy. It identifies obstacles and creates a complete solution regarding the languages and cultures of clients while providing a comprehensive solution to the staff. A recent co-operative venture between Iceland Trade Council and InterAct International, the *INTERCOMM* project has resulted in the production of a CD containing material relating to intercultural communication training which companies can use on their own to assist and prepare employees involved in international business operations or preparing for a stay abroad (Guðjón Svansson, verbal reference, March 9th 2005).

2.3.2 Companies

In spring 2005 approx. 70 export companies in Iceland are being interviewed by the CEReS team, in order to find out possible barriers in their intercultural communication and how they react to those problems. The survey also contains questions regarding cross-cultural education which the companies may offer their employees. When almost half of the companies have replied, the results are that 17% offer their employees some education in cross-cultural communication but very few companies enlighten their employees, who move abroad to work for the company, about culture shock or help their families in that respect, if they move too.

2.3.3 The Icelandic Red Cross - Intercultural Centres

One of the objectives of the Red Cross is to inspire mutual understanding, friendship, cooperation and lasting peace among nations.

Every year 20-30 Icelandic delegates work abroad for the Icelandic Red Cross. In their training they get instructions about the international protocol of the Red Cross with great emphasis on respect for different cultures. The role-play "To be on the run" deals with intercultural matter as well. In fall 2005, the Icelandic Red Cross will be offering seminar called "Attitude and respect" to organizations, companies and institutions. The seminar is based on a successful seminar originally from South Africa and is intended to reduce racism (Konráð Kristjánsson, verbal reference, April 7th 2005 and The Icelandic Red Cross, 2005).

Intercultural centres

Intercultural centres are operated in three areas in Iceland: Reykjavík in the south, Akureyri in the North and Ísafjörður in the West.

All three multicultural information centres provide services for immigrants and publish information in a number of languages. The Reykjavik centre, operated by the Icelandic Red Cross, offers an impressive selection of 12 languages: Albanian, Arabic, English, German, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Polish Russian, Serb-Croat, Spanish, Thai, Vietnamese. The Intercultural Centre works systematically to prevent prejudice in the society by providing extensive educational programmes, introductions to different societies, cultural events and by creating an inclusive forum where natives interact with immigrants. The Intercultural Centre offers lectures and information for wide range of customers such as: Companies, institutions, groups, teenagers, adults, community centres, schools, directors, employees, parents, teachers and organizations. The subject of the lectures is customised to each group and can e.g. deal with the activity in the Intercultural Centre, issues of the immigrants, human rights and racism, multicultural society, communication in a multicultural work place, service to foreign customers and more. A crucial aspect of the Intercultural Centre's activities and objectives is the implementation of the multicultural policies developed by the local authorities involved in the Centre. Both Reykjavík and Kópavogur have issued multicultural policies (The Intercultural Centre, 2005).

In addition to the Intercultural Information Centres, there are nine Centres of Continuing Education around the country, which offer courses in Icelandic as a second language as the need arises.

2.3.4 Exchange students/volunteers organizations

AFS is an international volunteer and education organization, which has the objective to increase communication and understanding between nations and people of different cultures, widen the horizon of young people and increase their education. All exchange students, 15-18 years old, take a preparation course before they leave for a stay in another country. And when they arrive in the host country they receive intercultural training for few days before moving to their host families. These courses are intended to help the exchange students to adjust to new situations and increase their understanding of different cultures. AFS sends approx. 100-120 Icelandic exchange students abroad every year and welcomes 35-40 foreign students to Iceland (AFS, 2005).

International Cultural Youth Exchange (AUS) is operated in Iceland and is a sending and hosting organization for young people between 18-30 years old willing to join voluntary activities abroad and experience living in a different culture. AUS is a non-governmental and non-profit making organization, promoting peace and understanding among people and nations. Around 20 Icelandic volunteers go abroad every year and approx. 15 people come to Iceland through AUS (AUS, 2005 and Anna Lúðvíksdóttir, verbal reference, April 19th 2005).

2.3.5 International student programs in universities

The universities take part in international co-operative ventures such as the SOCRATES and LEONARDO programmes of the EU, and the Nordic schemes NORDPLUS and NorFA along with the ERASMUS programme. Through these programmes along with regular channels the universities welcome around 700 foreign students every year. Most of the universities (HÍ, HA, Bifröst) offer a reception programme for foreign students in order to help them adjust to the school life and also a course, which introduces

Icelandic culture. According to the International coordinators of the universities, there are presently very limited opportunities for the foreign students to contribute formally to cross-cultural education in the schools (Guðný Gunnarsdóttir, verbal reference, April 25th 2005, Klemenz B. Gunnarsson, verbal reference, April 19th 2005, Sigrún Hjartardóttir, verbal reference, April 20th 2005, Valgeir Bjarnason, verbal reference, April 19th 2005).

2.3.6 Consulting Companies

There are several independent working consultants in Iceland that offer service in cross-cultural communication.

Fjölmenning ehf has been a leading company in teaching Icelandic to immigrants along with offering general counselling regarding multicultural communication and reception of foreign. The company has offered customised seminars in multi-cultural communication to companies and institutions where the object is to introduce cross-cultural proficiency and to help people to find ways to communicate effectively in practice (Fjolmenning, 2005).

IMG is a consulting company, which offers a wide variety of courses relating to business management, human relations in the workplace, marketing, salesmanship, decision-making etc. The company offers one course in intercultural communication training: *Cultural Difference in Business Operations.* This course is tailor-made for individual companies and specific markets. The course begins with a needs analysis within the company in question and the training is in the form of lectures, reading materials, videos, case studies, role-play and simulations, music, literature etc. (Rafn Kjartansson, 2005 b).

2.3.7 Universities

The following information about the position of cross-cultural curriculum in Icelandic Universities is cited from "*The CEReS Report on Culture and Education*" which Rafn Kjartansson has based on interviews, e-mail, Web sites and the syllabuses of the universities.

The University of Akureyri – (HA)

The University of Akureyri offers courses in *European Studies* and *International Business*. Some aspects of these courses have involved cultural characteristics and culture comparisons, esp. with regard to international communication in the area of business transactions. For some years HA has offered *Business English "with an Intercultural Flavour"* which contains an element of intercultural communication introducing Hofstede´s dimensions. *Intercultural Studies* as an optional sequel to the first year course on the basics of intercultural studies. The focus is on intercultural communication in business settings, e.g. in relation to marketing and advertising and the basic reading are of Trompenaars and de Mooij.

Bifröst School of Business

In undergraduate study programmes at Bifröst, two courses are in preparation that relate to intercultural studies and cross-cultural communication skills: *Negotiation across Cultures* is due to begin in the autumn semester of 2005 and focuses on a sensitive area of intercultural communication. In 2006 a new Faculty of Social Science and Economics is due to be launched. One of the courses featuring in this faculty is going to be *The Developing World – Different Cultures,* i.e. involving comparative culture studies with a focus on certain areas.

As part of a new Master's programme, which began in 2003, Bifröst offers the curriculum option of European Studies that contains two courses with a cultural focus, which are *The Nations of Northern Europe* and *The Mediterranean Nations*. These courses may be regarded as a blend of country-specific cultural study and general culture comparison since they involve a number of European national cultures. The Master's programme also offers the course: *Contemporary analysis – different cultures.*

During the past few years, about 40% of undergraduate students have completed one or two semesters of their study at a foreign university, e.g. in

Europe, Canada or the US. It is the general aim of the university that every year at least 40% of third-year students undertake a study period abroad.

Iceland University of Education

The Iceland University of Education has responded to recent developments in Icelandic society by offering two types of education relating to intercultural communication with a special emphasis on the educational setting of the primary school and its students. These courses, which were first on offer in 2002, are taught by distance at postgraduate level offering graduation with a diploma (Dipl.Ed.) after two semesters. The former course is *Teaching children of immigrant families* which deals with Icelandic language and society and methods of providing immigrants with language training and helping them to adapt to Icelandic community and culture. The latter is *General intercultural communication* and discusses general cultural differences with the aim of broadening the students' perspective

The University of Iceland - HÍ

A Master's Degree in International Relations is a programme that begins in autumn 2005. As indicated in the university prospectus, this new degree is intended to meet the growing need for specialised knowledge in international relations – a specialisation which until now has only been obtainable by study abroad. The programme presents five different specialisations, one of which is *Intercultural Studies* that offers two courses. *Cultural Diversity* which is a course beginning autumn 2006 and studies the part played by culture, particularly religion in the modern world. *The Integration of Politics and Religion* is a course starting autumn 2006 and deals with the integration of politics and religion with special regard to Islam in the Middle East. Special study will be made of the social structure of the Middle Eastern communities. Other specialised fields within this Master's Programme which may be of relevance to the topic of intercultural communication are *European Studies* and *Small States: vulnerability, status and influence*

The **undergraduate programme** of the Department of Business Administration offers a course entitled *Culture and Markets*. The course deals with aspects of cultural life in Iceland, such as book publishing, music and theatre and relates them to the market. The role of culture in tourism is discussed as well as the marketing of culture in general.

Reykjavik University

In autumn 2004, the School of Business at Reykjavik University launched an undergraduate programme of business-related language study. The programme consists of the equivalent of 150 credits in business studies and 30 ECTS in either English or Spanish. The language courses are spread over the three-year study period, with about half of them taking place abroad. At the end of the study period, the students should have obtained either the Spanish *diploma superior*/*básico* or *Certificate of Advanced English/Proficiency in English.* In addition to the business and language elements, all students enrolled in the programme are required to take a course in *international relations* and *intercultural communication skills*.

Hólar University College

Hólar is a small, recently established university college which emphasis on the area of tourism and agricultural studies.

The Tourism Faculty already offers, or is preparing to offer, a total of six courses which include aspects relating to different cultures and customs. Two of these focus on the culinary arts and their manifestations in different cultures, a field is obviously of considerable practical value, for example when preparing international meetings and conferences.

Culture-related courses on offer at Hólar University College are as follows:

Service and Quality begins autumn 2005 and has an emphasis on the need for services to adapt to different customs and cultures.

 Catering and restaurants is a course where the students are trained in the importance of recognising cultural variation *(awareness)* to study culture-related differences pertaining to food customs and composition (*knowledge*) and to be able to put this knowledge to practical use when receiving tourists from other countries (*skills*).

Culinary arts and culture. The main part of the course deals with cultural influences, e.g. with respect to religion and customs on the culinary habits of nations and communities and how this impacts upon the operations of tourist services.

Intercultural workshop **(in preparation)** From 2006 a regular workshop course for third year students on intercultural communication is envisaged. The Tourism Faculty offers two additional culture-related courses, which are more inward looking and deals with the Icelandic culture and tourism. A seminar on culture and tourism focuses on the dynamic between cultures, such as the relationship of Icelandic culture to other cultures as manifested through cultural influences such as immigration, emigration and tourism as well as cultural exchange in commerce, arts and sciences.

2.3.8 Continuing Education - University of Iceland

Foreign trade, economic geography and business procedures is a course in *Marketing and exporting studies programme*. In the course the students study regions, which are important in international business and learn about the economic, politic and cultural factors that influence business across borders.

Continuing Education offers a diverse course for college teachers who will teach Icelandic as a second language. The course is intended to make the teachers more aware of diverse ways in assessment, making curriculum and *cross-cultural teaching* having integration of subjects in mind.

Teaching immigrants in colleges is a course for college teachers as well as head masters (Continuing Education, 2005).

2.3.9 Colleges – Questionnaire to language teachers

A questionnaire was sent by e-mail to all language teachers in 28 colleges in Iceland, total of 273 teachers: 110 English teachers, 61 Danish teachers, 49 German teachers, 31 French teachers, 17 Spanish teachers, 2 Italian teachers and 1 Russian teacher.

The gender division of the teachers was 71 male and 202 female.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts. The former part was intended to give information about how important teachers felt discussing the culture of target language area, how much time they used in their classroom for that subject and which sectors of culture they considered most important to discuss. The question about what kind of teaching material they used to present the culture was intended to cast light on which "distribution channels" the teachers were accustomed to regarding cultural teaching. The latter part of the questionnaire focused on cross-cultural communication in general such as to find out the knowledge of the teachers in cross-cultural studies and how much they discussed the inner-layer features of culture, such as values and norms. Finally there are some questions intended to reflect on how much the teachers dwell upon culture shock, stereotypes and differences between cultures regarding general communication. (Further in Appendix 1 - Questionnaire)

Reply rates according to gender
    37% of male teachers replied.
    50% of female teachers replied.

Reply rates according to languages
    64% of Spanish, Italian and Russian teachers replied
    49% of Danish teachers replied
    46% of English teachers replied
    42% of French teachers replied
    41% of German teachers replied

Division of genders in replies
    Male: 21%
    Female: 79%

Age – distribution of the teachers who replied
    20-29:   6%
    30-39:   22%
    40-49:   30%
    50-59:   30%
    60 + :   12%

The combination of replies according to languages
    English teachers: 39%
    Danish teachers: 24%
    German teachers: 16%
    French teachers: 10%
    Spanish teachers: 9%
    Italian and Russian teachers: 2%

Lived abroad working or studying: 93%

Length of living abroad
Less than a year:	10%
1-5 years:	44%
6-10 years:	22%
More than 10 years:	7%
Born abroad:	17%

Number of foreign countries lived in:
1 country :	67%
2 countries:	17%
3 countries:	12%
4 countries:	4%

The importance of giving students insight into the culture of relevant language area
Rather important:	10%
Important:	26%
Very important:	64%

When asked why they thought it important to involve education about the target country in the language teaching, 30% of the teachers stated that culture and language were interwoven and inseparable. *"Language is the bridge to culture. Without the insight into the culture of the country you cannot really understand what is written. We learn the language to connect us to the culture because it matters to us. It would be ridiculous to build a bridge without an attachment on the other side"* (21)

15% of the teachers regarded discussion about the culture, made the language study more interesting and diverse and therefore easier for the students while they become curious and feel the study has more purpose. *"The students can appreciate and "feel" the language better if they have some understanding of the culture"* (1)

14% of the teachers mentioned that involving culture in language teaching was important to increase the interest of the students in the target country and prepare them for a visit or stay.
"It influences how the students understand some of the texts they read; they need to understand the cultural implications of certain kinds of language

use; its interesting for them to hear about different cultural customs; as a native speaker its a way of building a bridge to the students; it also builds the bridge between learning the language for academic purposes and for other real-life purposes such as travel, study abroad, developing friendships and contacts with foreigners". (107)

*"Language and culture are closely related, culture helps understanding the language and to associate with people e.*g. *regarding business, travel and study".* (26)

10% of the teachers considered that it was important to dwell upon the culture in language teaching because it would provide deeper understanding to the students, broaden their horizon and reduce prejudices. "*To make communication better, get deeper understanding on the way target country thinks – realize what is similar and what is different between cultures*" (7)

"*Insight in other cultures increases the broadmindedness of students so they become more tolerant human beings – all knowledge of other cultures reduces prejudices*" (96)

"Language cannot be pure words and grammar, it is alive and used by people who are raised in different cultures. The meaning of words is often originated from the culture and by learning a foreign language it opens a view into another culture both to find out mutual things and different. By knowing the differences and try to understand without judging, the communication between nations will be easier and friendlier. Breaking down the barriers in our own head, creating understanding between nations and intrigue what is different are the main subjects of language teaching" *(*6)

There is a positive **correlation** between age and the opinion of importance of teaching the culture of given language area. The older the teachers are, the more important they consider cultural teaching.

Parts of culture which teachers think is most important to discuss with their students
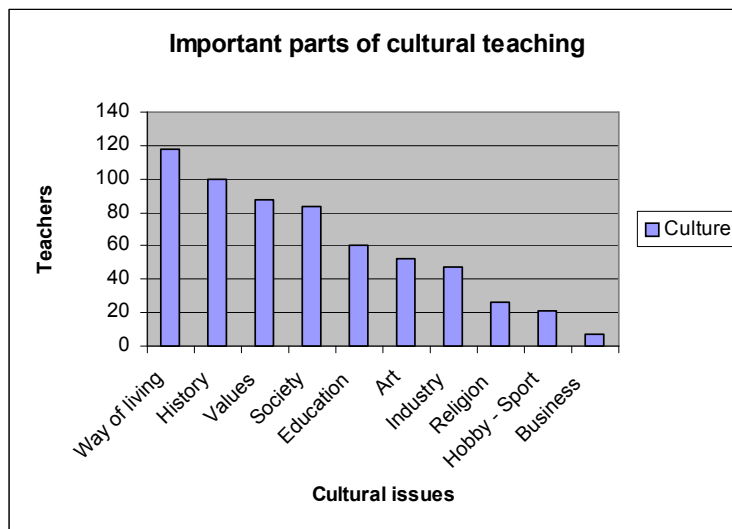
Important parts of cultural teaching

Figure 1. Cultural issues that teachers consider important

Time used in class for cultural discussion

Occasionally:	9%
Depends on given time:	6%
When possible:	54%
Good part of the time:	11%
Major part of the time:	19%

Material used to introduce the culture of relevant language area

Material in cultural teaching %	A lot	Something	Little	Nothing
Own experience	46	39	13	2
Schoolbooks	34	50	12	5
Internet	20	60	18	3
Magazines and news-papers	13	47	36	4
Video	11	49	36	4
Other books	10	32	46	12
CDs	9	42	42	7
Visiting the country	3	8	26	63
Communication with foreign students	1	15	41	43

Participation in seminars/lectures/courses in cross-cultural communication: 25%

Half of the teacher who had attended cross-cultural seminars or lectures did

so in Iceland, mostly in some courses related to post-graduate studies,

continuing education or short seminars for language teachers.

Knowledge of Hofstede´s dimensions: 3%

Introduction of Hofstede in class: 0%

Discussion of different values in societies
    Nothing: 3%
    Little: 28%
    Something: 52%
    A lot: 17%

Discussion of culture shock
    Nothing: 11%
    Little: 57%
    Something: 30%
    A lot: 2%

60 teachers reflected on how they discussed culture shock with students. 30% of them did so by mainly telling about their own experience. 24% of the teachers used chapters in schoolbooks and literature. Over 30% used other resources as articles, Internet, films, role-play and cases. Finally a few teachers had immigrants, exchange students or students themselves recount their experiences.

Discussion of cultural differences between countries: 98%
    Appropriate conversation topics: 55%
    Appropriate greetings and leave-taking: 85%
    Appropriate ways of criticizing and complimenting: 38%
    Appropriate ways of showing gratitude or turndown: 83%
    Appropriate personal space: 44%

Discussion about stereotyping
    Nothing: 7%
    Little: 47%
    Something: 37%
    A lot: 9%

Discussion about prejudices due to stereotyping
    Nothing: 8%
    Little: 47%
    Something: 30%
    A lot: 15%

Cross tabs
Teachers who claim that they use <u>good or major part</u> of their time in class for cultural discussion:

Danish:	47%
German:	35%
French:	23%
English:	22%
Spanish, Italian and Russian:	21%

Teachers who think it is <u>very important</u> to teach about the culture of target language:

Spanish, Italian and Russian:	86%
Danish:	80%
German:	60%
English:	54%
French:	46%

2.3.10   Colleges – Courses

There are 28 colleges in Iceland. Twenty of them offer language fields and eleven colleges hold out business fields.

According to the web sites of the colleges the syllabuses of most of the language courses contain similar objects. Following are some examples of objects describing what the students are expected to gain from the study:

- *Obtain knowledge of Spanish culture and the vast world of Spanish language*

- *Have knowledge of Danish culture and be able to use that knowledge in communicating with Danish people and other Scandinavians.*

- *Have general perspective of the culture and the way of living in English speaking countries and realize the significance of the English language for further education.*

- *Know the diverse culture in France and among French speaking nations and will be able to use that knowledge in communication with them.*

- *Have obtained some insight into the culture, customs and habits of German speaking nations, as well as German educational system and media.*

The Commercial College of Iceland (2005) is the college that has been offering the most developed international stream in Iceland. It offers four courses that are culture related.

Cultural studies (MEN103). The course deals with culture and particularity of nations and the students try to analyze the characteristics of the Icelandic nation. Among other things the students learn about cultural concepts, freedom, democracy, independence and how different cultures can have different understanding and views about these concepts.

Cultural studies (MEN203). The course discusses nations outside Europe and the diversity of their cultures. Globalization, cultural monotony / diversity, social situations and how these factors mould the society today as well as future development.

International studies (ALÞ103). Foreign policy, Cooperation of the Nordic Countries, ESB, EFTA, EES. Major countries in Icelandic export/import. Finally there is an emphasis on that students get to know how different cultures can affect business across borders. The project "Immigration in Europe" which is funded by Socrates/Comenius programme of EU is being processed in the course. One European country is visited every year. This year a group of students went to Russia.

Reading material: Cross Cultural Business Behaviour by Richard R. Gesteland

International studies (ALÞ203). Continuing of ALÞ103 plus discussion about institutions such as The Red cross, Amnesty International, and United Nations. The business environment of the ESB countries along with major export/import countries in Asia and America. Particularly looked at business procedures of the countries Iceland has most communication with along with cultural factors.Reading material: Mind your Manners by John Mole and Cross Cultural Business Behaviour by Richard E. Gesteland.

Heiðrún Geirsdóttir (2005) teaches the Cultural Studies. She says that every year around 25 students take the cultural and international courses. She feels that a good humanistic education must include education about different (and similar) cultures and analysis and comparison of diverse experience

and values of individuals and nations. She said that the students were quite keen on the cross-cultural matters.

Foreign communication is increasingly becoming an important factor in the Commercial school of Iceland in the form of communication through e-mail, student exchange and visits from other countries.

8 colleges offer a course *Anthropology (FÉL323)* in the field of Sociology, which discusses the diversity of cultures.

The College of Akureyri (2005) is offering course in tourism *Going abroad* where students learn about culture, customs and travelling habits of other countries. Visits to and from foreign schools will be used to compare countries and cultures.

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3 Analysis - evaluation

It is of particular interest to note the rapid growth in courses, both at university level and with a broader appeal, have appeared in the past 2-3 years and are in preparation for this year and the next.

12 courses that deal with cultural aspects are now being taught both in under- and postgraduate in Business fields. Most of the Business courses deal with certain geographic areas or international relations but also a little with intercultural communication. 7 more courses are in preparation for the next two years that partly dwell upon cultural aspects.

Courses offered now
- The Nations of Northern Europe- MA
- The Mediterranean Nations – MA
- Foreign trade, ec. geography and business procedures (Cont. ed.)
- European Studies and International Business. BS
- Business English "with an Intercultural Flavour" BS
- Intercultural Studies BS Culture and Markets BS
- International relations BS
- Intercultural communication skills. BS
- Service and Quality (In general cultural differences) BS
- Catering and restaurants (In specific cultural differences) BS
- Culinary arts and culture BS
- Tourism and Icelandic culture (In culture-specific studies) BS

Courses in preparation
- Cultural Diversity MA
- The Integration of Politics and Religion MA
- European Studies MA
- Small States: vulnerability, status and influence MA
- Negotiation across Cultures BS
- The Developing World – Different Cultures, BS
- Intercultural workshop (In specific cultural differences) BS

Iceland University of Education now offers two courses, which deal with cross-cultural communication, and the Continuing Education offers two seminars on the subject.

Courses offered now

- The School and multicultural society - B.Ed
- Religion in a multicultural society – B.Ed
- Cross-cultural teaching (Cont. ed.)
- Teaching immigrants in colleges (Cont. ed.)

Many students in the universities go abroad for a semester or a year as part of their studies and come home wiser and more able to communicate across cultures. As well do the universities welcome hundreds of foreign students by offering a reception programme along with a course introducing Icelandic culture.

At the college level, there is only the Commercial school that offers 4 courses relating to culture, a few colleges that offer a course in Anthropology that mentions cultural affairs and one holding out a tourism course where different cultures are discussed.

On the other hand, the language teachers seem to be the vehicles of culture in colleges whereas 90% of them consider it important or very important to teach their students about the target culture and 30% of teachers use good or major part of the time in class to discuss culture. The remarks from them were quite enthusiastic about how culture and language were intertwined. The cultural issues that they thought was most important for the students to know was the way of living, history, values and norms, the structure of the society and education.

This absolute interest in teaching culture may be related to the fact that most of the teachers had lived abroad, whereas 17% were of foreign origin and approx. 30% had lived in another culture for more than 5 years.

Surprisingly the Danish teachers or 47% of them seem to make the most effort in class to discuss cultural matters followed by 35% of the German teachers.

When dealing with culture, teachers mostly used their own experience and schoolbooks along with the world web.

Although 25% the teachers had attended some sort of a cross-cultural seminars only 3 of them had heard of Hofstedes dimension which makes one wonder if there is a wide gap between the theoretical world and the practical world!

Almost 70% of the teachers discussed different values and norms in cultures in terms of something or a lot. Notably fewer or just 32% had discussed

culture shock in class by sharing their own experience, using schoolbooks and other resources.

Almost every teacher talked to their students about cultural differences between countries; mostly about appropriate ways of greetings and leave-taking and ways of showing gratitude and turndown.

Finally less than half of the teachers discussed stereotyping and the prejudices due to such generalization.

Language teachers seem to be highly motivated in dealing with cultural matters so introducing cross-cultural content into language courses could be a first step in the direction of improving the cultural competence of Icelandic people.

The Trade Council of Iceland has responded to the need of the business sector in Iceland for culturally competent management and staff by training inter-cultural consultants and issuing information about cultural matters and cross-cultural communication available for companies.

Furthermore, consultant companies, such as Fjolmenning and IMG have offered tailor-made seminars for companies regarding different cultures and cross-culture communication.

The intercultural centres seem to be playing a vital role in the cultural education for immigrants and help them to adjust to Icelandic society as well as making the presence of them more visible and positive in the eyes of other Icelandic people.

The exchange student/volunteers parties contribute to the cross-cultural education by assisting around 200 young people every year in gaining valuable cultural competence through their stay abroad.

4 Possible remedial action

4.1 The content of cross-cultural training programs

What is the best approach to, and content for, cross-cultural training programs? People often lack the vocabulary to discuss issues when cross-cultural problems emerge. They typically respond first on an emotional level where they may become quite irritated and make negative judgments about others which often leads to a frustrated ending of the interaction. It is therefore very important for people to develop categories and vocabularies that will help tem to discuss freely the confrontation they experience thus enabling them to work out the problems before they get out of hand (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 7).

According to Cushner & Brislin (1996, p. 20) the goals of cross-cultural training is to help trainees to:

- Manage the stress of cross-cultural interaction and thus make good personal adjustments
- Develop and maintain interpersonal relationships
- Complete the tasks they originally set out to accomplish
- Restrict the time they need for successful adjustment to what would be expected in a more familiar context.

In designing actual training programs, most trainers choose a combination of following ways to accomplish these goals (Cushner & Brislin,1996, p. 21-23):

Cognitive training covers facts about the target country and its culture as well as information about what commonly happens to the sojourners in that culture. Teaching methods include lectures, group discussions, presentation of written materials, and conversations with someone who has experienced that particular culture. Quite a lot of detailed information can be transferred to trainees in a relatively short period of time through cognitive training but has little affect on people's ability to function effectively in another context. *Behaviour modification* discusses the roles of rewards and punishment in a person's life where typical methods involve asking trainees to visualize

what is rewarding and what is punishing for them in their own culture.

Experiential training places emphasis on activities in which trainees participate such as in role-playing problematic situations, taking part in simulations of other cultures for up to two weeks at a time, and going for fieldtrips. Also included are such classic cross-cultural simulations as Bafa Bafa and Barnga, which effectively re-create many of the experiences, encountered in real cross-cultural encounters.

Cultural self-awareness emphasizes the importance of culture by examining common experiences people have in their own countries and cultures. Typical teaching methods may include group discussions in which people might explore the roots of the value placed on individualism/collectivity in their culture.

In *Attribution training* people learn about how one makes judgements based on the causes of behaviour.

> The typical method of attribution training (called the *culture assimilator* or *intercultural sensitizer*) involves reading short case studies, called *critical incidents* that involve cross-cultural interaction and potential misunderstandings on the part of hosts and sojourners. Trainees are asked to choose from among a range of alternative explanations for each incident, each explanation representing a different attribution concerning the causes of behaviour (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p.22).

In their book, International Business, Czinkota, Ronkainen & Moffett (2003, p. 55-56) point out that in order to increase cultural awareness and induce innovative thinking inside a company, it is preferable that the employees get some cultural education. The objective of formal training programmes is to encourage responsiveness, sensitivity, tolerance and flexibility in employees. The programs may include culture-specific information, general cultural information such as values, practices and assumptions and finally self-specific information where one identifies ones own cultural pattern, values, beliefs and perceptions about others.

4.2 The CEReS action

The CEReS project is innovative in the way it approaches the preparation and design of the curriculum whereas the users of the intended material, the students and companies, contribute systematically to the project.

The curriculum will be published in Icelandic, Polish, Bulgarian, Swedish as well as English and will partly reflect on the cultural differences between these countries.

The university students that take part in the project will visit companies in all of the five partner countries and take video interviews with managers who are willing to reveal their perception of the main cross-cultural issues and barriers in their company. Emphasis will be placed on critical incidents in cross-cultural communication verbal and written, socialising, levels of formality, hospitality, body language, general etiquette, managing, attitude to time and more. The students will also keep ´video diaries´ about their experience in the visits to the companies as well as other interactions in their visits to the countries, which will be used along with sketches from the video interviews in making the curriculum

The actual experiences of the companies and students will thus be intertwined with the theoretical studies. The results will hopefully contribute to building a bridge between the academic and the business world whereas they will be distributed through networks of associations of vocational and training bodies as well as in the educational system. A Website and a set of CD-ROMs will further ensure that the results of the project will continue to influence teaching and training in cross-cultural communication (Rafn Kjartansson, 2005 a and Hagen, 2004).

Comment [H1]: What 'actions are considered for this'?

5 Discussion

In the light of rapidly increasing number of immigrants and foreign students there is a reason to think that Icelanders have easier access to cross-cultural training in practice whereas many natives work or socialize with immigrants. Or do the increased cross-cultural communication in Iceland evoke cultural barriers that are difficult for many people to overcome as a recent survey indicated in the form of growing prejudices of young people towards immigrants.

Do we need help from the educational system early in life to be able to benefit from these inter-cultural encounters? Is it perhaps vital for the Icelandic community to react quickly to prevent problems that are rising due to cultural differences? Is it possible for us to grasp the opportunity due to the growing diversity of our society, right from the beginning, and stand up to the challenge of adapting to new ideas and perspectives instead of digging the same grave as our neighbours in Scandinavia.

There are hundreds of exchange students in Icelandic colleges and universities every year who are a valuable resource in cultural aspects for their fellow students. They usually get some assistance in adjusting to Icelandic culture but there are few opportunities for them to contribute their own culture in order to increase cultural understanding in their schools. Icelandic exchange students come home every year with a great deal of cross-cultural knowledge and experience as well. It seems like a worthy project to find ways to activate this hidden treasure of cross-cultural proficiency in educational programmes of some sort.

Whereas the language teachers seem very motivated it might be a debate for the syllabuses constructors to reconsider the weight of grammar and writing in language courses in colleges and put more emphasis on culture and communication across borders. It surely would generate more tolerant and culturally aware individuals into the society and presumably increase the quality of their life as well as others around them.

6 Conclusion

Icelandic society is rapidly changing from a homogeneous community to a multicultural society with growing international business. Trade Council of Iceland has recently reacted to the need of exporting companies for cross-cultural training and the education system, particularly the business departments of universities, are just beginning to respond to those changes by offering and preparing new courses in cross-cultural matters. Furthermore, language teachers in colleges play an important role in discussing cultural issues. Very few of the courses which are available now discuss the theories of Hofstede, Trompenaars or Hall in connection with cultural differences of nations. At this moment it appears that the majority of Icelanders most likely do not have the proficiency to communicate effectively across cultures. In order to improve the situation the general education system has to act quickly and add intensive intercultural training into the teaching education as well as introduce cross-cultural communication in the schools. There is a growing need for intercultural teaching material adapted to Icelandic situations that provide training in intercultural awareness, proficiency and practical skills.

The CEReS project will produce educational material that will partly fulfil these needs and hopefully lead to more innovation and development in the field of cross-cultural education.

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Appendices

Appendix 1- Questionnaire

CULTURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING
QUESTIONNAIRE TO LANGUAGE TEACHERS IN COLLEGES IN ICELAND
MARCH 2005

1. Gender: _____

2. Year of birth: _____

3. The language you teach: _____

4. Have you lived abroad, working or studying? _____

      If yes, where and for how long? _____

<u>Culture of particular areas</u>

5. How important do you think it is to give students insight into the culture of relevant language area?
    ___ Not important
    ___ Rather important
    ___ Important
    ___ Very important
    Why do you think so? _____

6. Which part of the culture do you think is the most important to discuss with your students?
    (Mark which an X in front of **<u>5 items</u>**)

    ___ Religion
    ___ Art
    ___ Way of living - tradition - customs
    ___ Education
    ___ Industrial structure
    ___ Sports and hobbies
    ___ Structure of the society - class division - generations
    ___ History - Events of today
    ___ Business procedures
    ___ Values and norms
    ___ Other things, what? _____

7. How much time do you use for education and discussion about culture in your teaching?

    ___ No time
    ___ Occasionally,
    ___ Depends on given time
    ___ Try to intertwine it into the teaching when possible
    ___ Is a good part of my teaching
    ___ Is a major part of my teaching
        Comment: _____

8. How much do you use following to introduce the culture of relevant language area?
(Mark with an X in front of one option in each line)

Schoolbooks   ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
Other books   ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
The Internet   ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
Articles from magazines /newspapers ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
Own experience ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
Videos   ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
CDs   ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
Visit the country ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot
Communication with foreign students ___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot

Anything else, what? _____ ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot

Cross-cultural communication

9. Have you attended any lectures/courses/seminars in cross-cultural communication?
If yes, what kind? _____

10. Do you know *Hofstede*s definitions about cultural dimensions in societies?
(Power distance - individualism/collectivism - Masculinity/femininity - Uncertainty avoidance)
_____

If yes, have you introduced them to you students? _____

11. Do you discuss different values in societies with your students?
E.g. what is considered to be: Bad/good - dirty/clean - ugly/beautiful - unatural/natural -
abnormal/normal - illogical/logical - irrational/rational
___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot

12. How much do you discuss culture shock with you students?
___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot

How do you do that?
_____

13. Do you discuss with your students the cultural difference between countries?

If yes, please mark with an X behind appropriate items

a. Appropriate conversation topics   _____
b. Appropriate greetings and leave-takings   _____
c. Appropriate ways of criticizing and complimenting   _____
d. Appropriate ways to show gratitude or turn down   _____
e. Personal space, how close it is appropriate to stand to someone, touching and so on _____

14. How much do you discuss with you students about stereotyping?

___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot

15. Do you discuss the prejudices that arise because of the stereotyping?

___ Nothing ___ Little ____ Something ___ A lot

Appendix 2 – Adjusting to a new culture

People's intense feelings
- *Anxiety*: As people encounter many unfamiliar demands, they are likely to become anxious about whether or not their behaviour is appropriate.
- *Disconfirmed expectations:* People may become upset or uncomfortable not because of the specific circumstances they encounter, but because their experiences in the other culture differ from what they had expected.
- *Belonging:* People have the need to fill a niche, to feel that they belong and are accepted by others, but they often cannot when interacting in another culture because they have the status of outsider.
- *Ambiguity:* In their own cultural contexts people learn appropriate responses to a wide variety of social stimuli. When living and working across cultures, they may receive messages that are often unclear, yet they must still make decisions and take appropriate actions. People who are effective at working across cultures are known to have a high tolerance for ambiguity.
- *Confrontation with one's prejudices*: Part of socialization into a culture involves treating others who are noticeably different with reserve. People may discover that their previously held beliefs about certain groups may not be accurate or useful once they find themselves interacting with other cultures (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 39).

Knowledge Area
- *Work*: Differences in the amounts of time people spend on task versus time spent socializing, who has the obligation of control, and the manner in which decisions are made are examples of differences that may occur in this area.
- *Time and spatial orientation*: Various attitudes exist regarding the importance of adhering to clock time in certain situations, as well as the proper spatial orientations people adopt with respect to one another during different interpersonal encounters.
- *Communication and language use:* verbal and nonverbal
- *Roles:* Tremendous differences may exist with respect of the occupants of roles such as family provider, the boss, the volunteer, the leader, and how they are enacted in different cultures.
- *Importance of the group and the importance of the individual:* All people act at times in their individual interest and at other times according to their group allegiances. The relative emphasis on group versus individual orientation varies from culture to culture and may have a significant impact on people's decision-making processes, choices of peers and associates, and the degree to which they perform effectively on their own. Of all the differences found to exist between cultures, group versus individual orientation seems to be one of the most significant.

- *Rituals versus superstition*: All cultures have rituals that help people meet their needs as they cope with life's everyday demands. People in all cultures also engage in behaviours that outsiders may label superstitious. One culture's "intelligent practices" may be seen as another culture's rituals and superstition.
- *Hierarchies* – class and status: Whenever a large number of people have to interact frequently, leaders emerge and power becomes unevenly distributed. One manifestation of the unequal access to power is the division of people into various social class groupings. People often make distinctions based on various markers of high and low status, and these distinctions differ from culture to culture.
- *Values*: As part of their socialization, people learn to accept as proper a small set of ideas within such broad areas as religion, economics, aesthetics, political organization, and interpersonal relationships. Such learning becomes internalized and affects attitudes, preferences, and views of what is desirable and undesirable. Understanding these internalized views, or values, is critical in cross-cultural adjustment (Cushner & Brislin, 1996, p. 40-41)

Bases of cultural differences

According to Cushner & Brislin (1996, p. 41-42) the attempt to understand the ways in which people respond to and organize information in order to communicate, gives a good insight into the cultural differences that people find frustrating as they try to adjust to a new culture. They have come to the conclusion that there are a few bases of cultural differences that can be identified:

- *Categorization* occurs where people group the information into categories for more efficient organization. People in different cultures may place the same individual elements into different categories such as defining who is a friend, what a hard-worker is, causing confusion for people when communicating across cultures.
- *Differentiation:* People are likely to use the categories they have become accustomed to when faced with new information. People in another culture may differentiate pieces of information, treating those pieces as if they were quite distinct. This applies for example to when trying to overcome the red tape (any official routine or procedure marked by excessive complexity, which results in delay or inaction. If people do not differentiate information in the same manner as hosts, they may be treated as naïve or ignorant.
- *In-group / out-group distinction*: People divide fellow men into in-groups that are made up of those people with whom interaction is sought and out-groups who are held at a distance and are often the targets of rejection. People from other culture are often considered to be in the out-group and there are some activities or behaviours associated with in-group membership in which they will never participate.

- · *Learning styles:* The styles in which people learn best may be different between cultures. One way may seem attractive and efficient to one while it hits others as absurd way of learning.
- · *Attribution:* People observe the behaviour of others as well as reflecting upon their own behaviour and then they make judgments about the causes of behaviour. Such judgements are called attributions.

Stages of Culture Shock

Culture shock has many stages. Each stage can be ongoing or appear only at certain times. In this first stage, the new arrival may feel very happy and be pleased by all of the new things encountered. This time is called the *"honeymoon" stage*, as everything encountered is new and exciting.

Afterwards, the second stage presents itself. A person may encounter some *difficult times and crises in daily life*. For example, communication difficulties may occur such as not being understood. In this stage, there may be feelings of discontent, impatience, anger, sadness, and feeling incompetence. This happens when a person is trying to adapt to a new culture that is very different from the culture of origin. Transition between the old methods and those of the new country is a difficult process and takes time to complete. During the transition, there can be strong feelings of dissatisfaction.

The third stage is characterized by gaining some *understanding of the new culture*. A new feeling of pleasure and sense of humour may be experienced. One may start to feel a certain psychological balance. The new arrival may not feel as lost and starts to have a feeling of direction. The individual is more familiar with the environment and wants to belong. This initiates an evaluation of the old ways versus those of the new.

In the fourth stage, the person realizes that the *new culture has good and bad things to offer*. This stage can be one of double integration or triple integration depending on the number of cultures that the person has to process. This integration is accompanied by a more solid feeling of belonging. The person starts to define him/herself and establish goals for living.

The fifth stage is the stage that is called the *"re-entry shock."* This occurs when a return to the country of origin is made. One may find that things are no longer the same. For example, some of the newly acquired customs are not in use in the old culture.

These stages are present at different times and each person has his own way of reacting in the stages of culture shock. As a consequence, some stages will be longer and more difficult than others. Many factors contribute to the duration and effects of culture shock. For example, the individual's state of mental health, type of personality, previous experiences, socio-economic conditions, familiarity with the language, family and/or social support systems, and level of education (Dr. Carmen Guanipa, 1997).