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A GUIDED ROLE-PLAY IN A DOLLS HOUSE

Learning to play in English at the beginners' level

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TIIVISTELMÄ

Ohjattu roolileikki nukketalossa.

Alkeistason englanninkielien oppiminen leikkimällä.

Leikkimistä on käytetty englannin alkuopetuksessa jo 70-luvulta lähtien, kun kommunikatiivinen kieltenopetus valtasi alaa opetuksen muita lähestymistavoilta. Suomalaisessa englannin kielen kouluopetuksessa on kuitenkin tietämäni mukaan vielä hyödyntämättömiä mahdollisuksia leikin käyttöön.

Tutkimusprojektini käsittelee leikkiä roolileikkinä, jossa oppilaat toimivat pareittain rakentamassaan yksinkertaisessa nukketalossa. Luomalla tällaisen oppimisympäristön pyrin siihen, että oppilaiden taidot ja kyvyt muullakin kuin kielenoppimisen ydinalueella tulisivat käyttöön. Kokeilin nukketalossa leikkimistä pirkanmaalaisessa koulussa, sen 4. luokan 12 oppilaan kanssa sysyllä 2004. Tunnilla loimme keskustelurungon opettajan antaman aiheen perusteella ja sitten oppilaat nukkejensa rooleissa keskustelivat aiheesta taloissaan pareittain, tai vierailutilanteessa nelistään. Kahta paria nauhoitettiin kerrallaan. Tutkimuksen aikana ilmeni, että parit luovat suomeksi niin kiintoisia keskusteluja, että päätin toimia oppilaslähtöisesti, ja auttaa heitä toteuttamaan omat suomenkieliset keskustelunsa englanniksi. Tämä ”scaffolding” -tukemistyö sai oppilaat puhumaan paljon enemmän englantia verrattuna alkuperäisiin keskusteluihin, joista pääosa oli suomea.

Opetus- ja oppimisprojektin toteutuksessa on paljon aihetta kehittämiseen. Uskon, että käytän ohjattua leikkiä tulevaisuudessakin, mutta todennäköisesti oppilaslähtöisemmin ja toisin kuin tässä lyhyessä projektissä, integroin sen luokan toimintaan pidemmälle ajalle osaksi viikottaisia oppimistuokioita.

1. INTRODUCTION

Playing has been integrated into the learning of the English language in since the initial years of the Finnish comprehensive schools. In the 70's communicative language teaching gained ground from behaviorist approaches even in the educational policy written down in the first national curriculum (POPS 1974) and the textbook makers in the late 70's. Since then there have been activities that emphasize interaction of some kind. The 90's saw a development in that beginners' English study books could include, for example, board games that involve reading, talking, answering questions, and so on. The pupils' workbooks also have plenty of role-play activities where the pupil is expected to take a given role and play out the part.

As a relatively new teacher of English I feel that research might give backing for the development of my way of working. During the course of my teaching career as a class teacher and a substitute teacher in various subjects, which, has been a lot longer than that of a professional English teacher, I have been enthusiastic about trying to allow pupils to utilize the good qualities and skills they already have in different areas and explore new ways of learning, especially by crossing boundaries of traditional school subjects. I see that this wish to broaden the variety of teaching and learning techniques has given me the impetus to try to create a new kind of learning environment.

The approach that allows the dual roles of researcher and teacher is action research . At its best the main outcome of action research would be "improvement of professional practice" (Richards 2003: 14). This improvement contains three levels: improving the practice, the understanding of the practice, and the situation where the practice takes place (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 165). Action research seems to have perfect fit for me as I see all the outcomes as important goals in my career as a professional.

My main goal is personal and professional development as an English teacher. For me this means that I will seek to develop learning environments and techniques that would work both for the individual learners and for me. My preconception of the ideal learning environment entails that learning would take place in an environment that involves communication in as relaxed and free an atmosphere as possible. The technique would give as much freedom for creativity and space for pupil-based construction of communication as possible. The teacher's role would be that of a supporter and a guide.

In practice, I would want to create learning environments that encourage pupils to play with concrete things and let them take a role and in that role use their various competences like the social and the creative competence, in addition to their language learning competence. The environment of the study is a dolls house shared by two pupils whose doll characters inhabit the house and live in it. I think this is an interesting possibility that has not been reported as having been utilized previously in foreign language learning or the learning of beginners' English in Finland.

Why play or drama like activity?

I have noted that pupils do not consider play activities as studying (also Wood and Attfield 1996). This kind of thinking may give them space for freer creative action, and during the course of creating the dialogue the learning element can be brought to their conscious attention, too, simply by giving different alternatives of how to express what the characters wish to convey in the play.

My second motive for using play or drama like activities is to give the pupils a chance for explicit social constructivism in class, i.e. learners creating an understanding of the world they are living in. Thereby the students would be explicitly making meaning, as subjects of action in class. By choice of the character and its characteristics pupils can draw on their understanding of the world: in this

case when friends live together. The pupils choose the details of the environment the characters live in, their hobbies and at least in part, their ways of acting towards each other. This study may help me to find out how this can be realized keeping in mind the main goal of learning a foreign language.

Penny Oldfather et al. (1999) have concluded that "learning is a collaborative enterprise in which students help each other" (1999:17). In their work Oldfather and others take up many aspects of classroom interaction but they find cooperation the most significant of them. In practice, I would put this into test by creating an opportunity and necessity to work on a project in pairs while aiming at a shared goal.

Ellis et al (1994) conducted a study on the effects of classroom interaction in second language acquisition. Their findings make them speculate on some of the reasons why interaction helped learners to acquire new items. One of their ideas was that "the long-term storage of these items may have been facilitated by having the learners carry out an action involving the items. That is, the act of responding nonverbally to a directive may help to "fix" new items associated with the action in memory. (Ellis et al. 1994: 478). By the practice of "living" in the house via the character the pupils carry out actions involving the items of the environment all the time. The names of the parts of the house and the furniture, the contents of the fridge etc. are repeatedly used.

My intention is not to study the memory processes per se but to focus on the interaction in the learning environment. This means that I am looking at how I work and compare that to the factors that the literature on learning environment consider important in facilitating learning. I would need to evaluate these qualities in terms of the interaction between the teacher and the pupil or between the pupils.

2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

It seems that it would be fruitful to look at Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research in the frame of sociocultural theory. Language is acquired in culture through language use. This is the basic principle in sociocultural theory which sees that "the human mind is always and everywhere mediated primarily by linguistically based communication" (Lantolf 2002: 104). Activity theory looks at this mediation more specifically and considers the social, cultural and individual experiences focal ground for learning, in this case, an L2.

2.1. Constructivism

Constructivism is a philosophy of learning founded on the premise that by reflecting on our experiences we construct our own understanding of the world we live in. Each of us generates our own "rules" and "mental models," which we use to make sense of our experiences. Learning, therefore, is the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate new experiences.

As constructivism has become the main paradigm in education since 1990's it is interesting to take its ideas and see if they connect with the activities in my classroom. The theory sees the learner as an active creator of knowledge and thus the teacher's role in learning has changed from the giver of the right answers to a coach or provider of scaffolding in the knowledge constructing. This entails that the teacher becomes a reflective practitioner himself, too. Thus, the teacher understands what belief systems lie behind his actions as a teacher. (Thanasoulas 2002: 2).

Murphy has looked at constructivism in terms of how this theory can translate into practice. She compiled a checklist with 18 characteristics that constructivist learning projects could include. Her list of the points to be considered includes "student-directed goals, teachers as coaches, learner control, authentic activities and contexts, knowledge construction, knowledge collaboration,

problem solving, consideration of errors and scaffolding” and so on. (Murphy 1997: 1-2). I will discuss these and their relation to the environment created in the project.

2.2. Task-based instruction and learning

Task-based learning has its roots in the development of the functional syllabus and experiential language use (learning through communication) approaches in the late 70's and early 80's . According to Bingham and Skehan (2002) this meant development in methodology, too. The practitioners at school took up use of communication games and looked for possible ways of encouraging learners to use the L2 in a meaningful way. Thus communication gap activities became popular, and by early 80's communicative language teaching had been accepted. There was a variety of materials used but no uniform syllabus that would include a set of communicative activities. (Bingham and Skehan 2002: 212-213).

Skehan 1998, Nunan 1989, Breen 1987 Ellis 1982 among others, have given definitions of a task. Skehan sums these up by suggesting that a task is an activity where 1) meaning is primary, 2) there's a communication problem 3) there is a relationship with real-world activities 4) priority in that task is completed and 5) the outcomes count in the assessment of the task. (ibid.: ?). To use tasks in the present day classroom requires taking into account the constructivist frame. Thus, the theoretical foundation based on process orientation requires a new, broader, reading of the outcomes mentioned in the list.

The study of classroom action as tasks involves the concepts of activity and topic. They can be distinguished as van Lier (1988) does in that the activity may be the same every time, whereas the topic varies. The general goal remains the same, too. In my study the activities are relatively similar: the pupils either talk in the house in pairs or with another pair visiting. The topics center around the things and activities that have to do with building and living in a house.

Murphy (2003) discusses task-based learning in terms of the desired outcomes that are achieved via the tasks. He sees as three possible and competing focus areas: accuracy, fluency and complexity. He concludes after his study that "it appears premature to rely on manipulation of task characteristics and processing conditions to achieve intended pedagogic outcomes" (Murphy 2003: 358).

He explains the constraints referring to Breen who thinks that the intended focus planned and the realized focus that the learners give may be different both in terms of form and content. Situation is an important factor affecting the outcome, too (Murphy 2003: 352-353, Breen 1987: 23-25). Another potential area "for mismatch" is the interpretation of the task: the teacher's intention and the learner's interpretation may be different. Here Breen suggests that there is a continuum of possible orientations towards completing a task from 'achievement orientation' to 'survival orientation'. Breen attributes these differences to personal learning needs that decide how relevant each task is to a pupil. (ibid.: 25).

2.3. Play

The concept of play has been defined in various ways in order to highlight its different dimensions (see discussion on this in Saracho and Spodek 1998: 2-4). Some scholars think that it is not even necessary to define the word because of the high consensus of naming the activity there is among those observing this activity (ibid.: 2). In this study the concept 'play' is used with specific limits. Play can be seen in dimension from pure to less pure play (Pellegrini 1991, cited in Wood and Attfield 1996). The kind of play that this study introduces is structured play. This means that it has an orientation a) towards activity itself when realized in the English language and b) towards the goal of activating some of the vocabulary and of the speech chunks introduced to the pupils earlier on during the class. In this sense, it is not "free from rules imposed from the outside" (Rubin et al. 1983: 695). The communication tasks given will orient the pupils to using the introduced vocabulary and the speech

chunks. This input introduced for filling the communication gap between the participants is not necessarily the only possible one but it is one that pupils can use if they do not figure out their own solutions.

Play with objects, materials, resources and ideas is needed in order for play to integrate cognitive processes and stimulate the imagination (Wood and Attfield 1996:157-158). In role-play taking place in a dolls house the doll character, the house materials, language resources and imagination and ideas introduced by both participants of the play give a wide range of possibilities of constructing "the reality" via life in the dolls house.

2.4. The Drama methodology

Mäkinen uses the analysis Healy (1990) has presented when giving grounds for the necessity of activating both the left and the right hemisphere of the brain when processing or learning a language. With integrating the more specific, structuring oriented left hemisphere with the right hemisphere that mediates more holistic and symbolic meanings the learning process can lead to genuine understanding (Mäkinen, 2002: 177-178). Drama in foreign language learning would allow pupils "to practice what they have learned in a creative manner in a novel and unanticipated situation" (Mäkinen 2002: 178).

According to Leavitt (1995), drama methodology develops both the effective and affective speech, i.e. the ability to convey both the message and the emotional content that is dealt with. It develops confidence to express opinions, ability to use the imagination for meaning-making, and promotes critical and constructive thinking and problem-solving (ibid.: 178, Leavitt 1995: 161).

Pasanen gives a practical reason for using drama in class: it prepares pupils for communication situations by giving them the possibility to simulate reality. She also emphasizes that taking a role will be a protective measure for those pupils who do not feel they can be themselves, or feel otherwise inadequate when trying to express themselves in a foreign language. Drama activities work also as

socialization when pupils learn to know each other better and cooperate in a new way. Drama provides an open space with no ready made answers, and thus those pupils that may not have many correct answers to questions on areas like grammar, may feel more encouraged to participate in this kind of activity.(Pasanen 1992: 17-18).

3. RESEARCH METHODS

3.1. THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The study focuses on beginners' English students making dialogues by taking the role of the doll character in a play house. It will describe and analyze how the pupils realize dialogues in pairs on the different topics laid out by the teacher. How is the dialogue produced in relation to the materials provided in the pupil - teacher dialogue preceding the dialogue in the play house? The audiorecordings and the observation reported in teacher-researcher journal of the activities cast some light on the pupils' actual language use in the role-play and the variations they create out of the basically same frame of language materials and how these are affected by the teacher-pupil interaction.

The study includes reflection of the checklist of constructivist practices. I look at which activities in the relationships of the participants could be read in terms of these practices.

Goetz and LeCompte (1984) list questions that are useful for the purpose of participant observation. I think they are worth considering when working on the materials in retrospect, too:

1. What are the regular and irregular behaviors, routines, events and activities and the social contexts? This is what the description part (5.2. and 5.3.) is concerned with.
2. How do people in the classroom behave towards each other: what roles, between teacher and pupil, and between pupil and pupil? Is there a pattern to interactions in the class? What attitudes would these

reflect? These questions would be meaningful in the discussion on control and rapport mostly in terms of how constructivist the environment is.

3. What is the content of the conversations: beliefs they reveal, and control, what nonverbal communication took place? The content is the focus when considering the learning process. (Robinson 1994: 45-46).

3.2. Methodological considerations

Ethnographical method

I have a background in ethnomusicology and cultural studies in the 80's and therefore have been educated to appreciate qualitative research, especially ethnography. As Richards states, the qualitative approach is valuable especially in that 1) it allows the researcher to get close to practice, 2) especially in language teaching it allows one to center the attention to persons, individually and as members of a group, and 3) it presents the researcher with transformative potential as it depends on the "engagement with the lived world" (Richards 2003: 8-9).

The research process

I take that the way a teacher practises research necessarily has some particular characteristics. Biott talks about practitioner research and sees as one of its central properties latency. By this property he means three things: 1) "the promise of the emergence and growth of a researching 'self'", 2) "the expectancy of what has not yet been made visible by the process of research", and 3) "awakening or revival of what is dormant or in abeyance" (Biott 1996: 67).

Sanger (1994: 183) says of the number 2 sense: shape of research can resemble the structure of good jokes: it is about "putting knowns together and coming up with a striking unknown which makes

sense of what precedes it". Biott comments that 1) research which makes a difference is more likely to come from the imagination of researchers than from the coding and ordering of data and 2) visionary experience in all cases was prefaced by intense periods of concentrated work in the research undertaking.

I would also endeavor to admit that I am in the process of becoming a teacher researcher by "setting out the dispositions, triggers and life events which made this inquiry possible" as an anonymous student says in Biott (1996: 76). This student analyses his situation with a concept of 'setting conditions' which he sees as the "predisposing and precipitating events which led up to a decision to intervene" (ibid.: 77) The process would entail digging deep into my preconceptions of basic issues about foreign language learning, starting from the ideas of what learning, and for example language competence, are about, and how I have ended up constructing the ideas the way they present themselves at the moment.

Key concepts of the 80's ethnography have been *emic* (insider's perspective) and *etic* (outsider's perspective) (Richards 2003: 15). Classroom action research in your own class would suggest that the perspectives could be those of the one as a subject in action and the one looking back at the action through the documented data. To allow this looking back it is necessary to have many kinds of materials. Antola Robinson discusses ethnographical methodology and notes that there is a need for multimodal strategies to "ensure that the meanings conveyed by an informant are understood in the frame of reference of the informants (Robinson 1994: 41).

My understanding of these multimodal strategies is that they mean multiple methods of data gathering and analysis. Robinson uses the concept *triangulation* (Denzin 1978) that entails just this. In her research design she is a participant-observer of the study, whereas I am the teacher-researcher. Thus fewer separate sources of meaning maker roles are available for me. It would be different for an ethnologist coming into somebody else's class. At the moment of the group activity I have the

participant-teacher and the observer roles at the same time, supported by audio-recordings and videorecording for my personal use. I kept a journal after the classes and the pupils gave feedback in the evaluation forms during the last lesson. Some feedback from the pupils and parents I got already during the field-work.

Having a background in ethnomusicology I initially took it for granted that the classroom study I planned would be also ethnographic in the sense that it would be a descriptive account of the classroom and have focus on "complexities of the discrete event" rather than aiming at generalizations (Richards 2003, 105). This is included in the list of the common characteristics of ethnography that for example Pole and Morrison (2003) present. However, they see that one of the principal characteristics that it is concerned with is "the full range of social behavior within the location, event or setting" (Pole and Morrison 2003: 3). I find that the language use is the focus of my study, and other interactional events get less attention in description and analysis.

The model for analysis

I will here introduce the model that Robinson (1994) used in her classroom study. The ideas for practice in analysis techniques I have adopted from Richards (2003). Even if Robinson defined her study as an ethnography I would see that most of it can be applied to the type of action research my study is about, too. As mentioned earlier in this section, Robinson discusses ethnographical methodology and notes that this kind of qualitative study gets its reliability by means of using multiple methods in data gathering. As her main method was participant observation, one of the key data collection methods for her was making field notes (Robinson 1994: 45-46). In action research this could be realized in retrospect with the help of recordings.

The fact that the project took place during ordinary English lessons meant also that I had to negotiate between the priority of research over teaching. The research permit was only valid during a

limited time and my planned schedule for the research project required field materials for analysis in the fall. The method I used was not an established one, so I had a reason to doubt whether it would be useful. Therefore, to be on the safe side, it was good to use ordinary teaching and learning techniques, too.

Richards divides preliminary analysis of qualitative data into four steps: 1) general characterization, 2) identifying grossly apparent features, 3) focusing in on structural elements and 4) developing a description" (2003: 185). The following chapter 4. is concerned with the general characterizations not on the text level but describing the classroom situations in general. Section 5.1. deals with the "grossly apparent features" also listed by Goetz and LeComte.

Section 5.3. takes up the points of analysis which Richards discusses as patterns in the talk (ibid.: 195). In my analysis these findings lead to a critical evaluation of the project and its applicability to teaching and learning English in the beginner's level.

4. THE FIELDWORK MATERIALS

4.1. Data gathering

As I wanted to conduct action research that would benefit my professional growth and contribute to developing working techniques that would suit me and the pupils I work with, I decided that the research should be based on materials gathered in the classroom. I wished that these materials would work as a source of feedback for the pupils, too.

How were the subjects chosen?

When I got the opportunity to teach beginners' English I immediately sought the chance of conducting research during the school term. I got the permission from the school administration and the parents to realize a study in the 4th grade of the school I teach in. The 4th grade class has 12 pupils, 6 boys and 6 girls. I chose the 4th grade because I thought that the pupils as 3rd year English students were young enough to be open to role play with doll characters and mature enough to be willing and able to use the English they already knew to back up the new input there would be during the class (in this school studying English starts in the 2nd grade).

The school of the project is an institution with about 80 pupils, situated in eastern Pirkanmaa in western Finland. The data gathering started in late August, two weeks after the initiation of the fall semester and finished in early October. The class had 2 lessons each week, and most of the lessons included an about 30-minute-long project activity. I made the original research plan 18 months before this, and revised it in August. The "living in a house" theme made me decide that I would try to start the project immediately as the textbook curriculum had the same subject areas and communicative

materials that would be needed for the dialogues in the initial chapters of *Yes, My Own Book*, the workbook that is used in this school.

Why this data?

The choice of research subjects

Before introducing the project to the pupils I had decided to choose two pairs to focus on during the field period. I had expected that not all parents would allow their children to participate, so there would anyway be some pupils that would not be part of the study. All parents went for the study, though. Furthermore, when I told the pupils about the project they were all very excited about it, and the fact that they would be recorded. Here I decided that all pairs would be recorded at least once. This would make it possible to give everyone some exact feedback on their dialogues. I still kept my mind set to the goal of having a focus on two pairs. These were playing with the characters of Emily and Huyhua (4 out of 8 sessions recorded), and Ken and Ace(changed his name from Mark)(4 with Ken/ 3 with Ken and Ace). I did not know their previous performances as my first contact with the group was in the May 2004, so I was a new teacher, and Ace was a new pupil in this school. These pairs had chosen those seats at the back of the class which were the easiest to plug to the recording equipment. Some instant decisions about the pairs to be recorded had to be done in class when pupils were absent but no change of groupings happened once when Ace was absent: then his pair Ken was recorded on a visit with another pair.

In action research conducted by the teacher researcher audio- and videorecording seem necessities while the researcher has the role of a teacher at the time of the data gathering. Journal use was a necessary choice during the project while so many questions and critical notes arose during most of the classes. I didn't keep a journal in the beginning because I was too exhausted after the project work day and I concentrated on transcribing the field recordings to be able to give some feedback and work accordingly during the next lesson and the day of gathering data. In the period immediately after

the fieldwork keeping a journal has turned out to be an important way of documenting the ideas that arise from the contact with the field materials. I also found that 'latency', a characteristic described by Biott (1996), and further discussed in section 4.3., came to play in that questions started to pop up only when the study was in progress. I video recorded the class activities from two different angles in turn. I have agreed to leave the pupils participating in the study anonymous. That is why the videorecordings cannot be part of the data open to public scrutiny.

How was the study carried out?

I gathered the data in the course of 6 weeks, which had 12 English lessons in all. Out of these, 2 included no fieldwork (I was ill once, and the class after that had 4 people absent most of the lesson). The initial lesson was entirely dedicated to building the first rooms of the house. The final lesson consisted of dialogues which the pairs selected from the ones they had created during the previous weeks, and filling out a feedback form and a personal data form. Thus, the role-play dialogues were created in 8 lessons.

The field materials consist of:

- 1) Plans for each dialogue creating session on OHP transparency. Most of these are in paper copies now as material 2).
- 2) Copies of the hand-outs the pupils got after each dialogue making in pairs. These 8 papers contained the plan and the input the pupils gave for the English needed in the dialogues.
- 3) Transcripts of the audiorecordings of the dialogue creating sessions with the whole class. The sessions are 6-10minutes in length.
- 4) Transcripts of the audiorecordings of the dialogues of two pairs at a time (6 sessions), and group discussions for two groups at a time (2 sessions). The dialogues lasted from 3.30 to 7 minutes.

- 5) Feedback transcripts with suggested vocabulary and speech chunks for expressing in English what the pupils said in Finnish. There were five of these, two of which were made for group dialogues.
- 6) Teacher-researcher journal (not systematically kept: in the beginning less, towards the end of the project more and more) - level of reporting general, analysis fragmented notes using video recordings as a memory help.
- 7) Transcriptions of the audiorecordings of the final performative dialogues for evaluation and self-evaluation.
- 8) Forms of pupils' self-evaluation and feedback from the activities
- 9) Pupils' characterizations of themselves with "continue the sentence" -technique
- 10) Photographs of the houses

Section 4. on the themes of analysis gives some examples of these materials.

Critical view of the data gathering

I made quite a few technical mistakes during the classroom sessions and therefore not all project work was recorded. One of the dialogues of a pair wasn't audio-recorded because of problems with one of the tape-recorders. During the final session where the pupils re-acted out one of their dialogues, the same recorder had bad batteries, and one of the pairs did their bit three times before it got taped.

I was new to the particular video camera the school gave to my disposal and couldn't work it with confidence, the end result being that some sessions were not recorded. I also changed the videorecording angle: for the start the camera was focused on one of the audio-recorded pairs. After some sessions I, however, decided that I wanted to get a general picture of what was going on in class and the wide angle of the camera caught most of the action in the class-room. Furthermore, its microphone caught some discussions that were not so clear via the audio-recordings. Even if the

videorecording is not an official part of the materials, it gives me some backing compensating for some of the limited attention I could pay to the rest of the class while talking to one pair at a time.

4.2. An account of the materials

4.2.1. Description of the class-room and the pupils

The classroom is about 30 m² in size, the door in the southeast corner and the windows looking to the east and the north. The room functions as a textile work and special education classroom, too, so there are open shelves and drawers for the materials and equipment for the use of the pupils and teachers of these subjects. There are several sewing machines at the window and an ironing board in sight. There are some maps on the notice board and colourful balloons present the different colors written on them in English. There are also English pictionary pages with different themes on the walls. The blackboard has the date written on it. In front of it there's an armchair with a toy cat and a toy dog sitting on its back, and a clothes line with cuddly toys.

The pupils sit at desks for two except one pair that sits at a bigger table at the back closer to the door wall. When the pupils act in a role they stand by their desks with the character in their hands when needing to move it. Some of the furniture made doesn't hold the weight of the doll character, so some of the pupils have the character in their hand all the time.

The two desks at the back have taperecording equipment above them. When the role-playing part starts the pupils bring their houses or parts thereof (most rooms are made of a xerox copy paper box) that have been completed onto their desks, arrange the furniture (that has many times been tampered with by pupils from other groups).

The working pairs

Alex and Alice. These girls were very much into playing in the house. But first they wanted to make it well functioning and were developing the interior/ decorating it throughout the project. They talked a

lot about ideas for repairs in the house, so their dialogues turned out to be mostly discussions about what to do about the house in the first sessions (recorded Sept. 8th). They would have needed more time in Art class to finish their house so they would have been able to concentrate on playing in English from the start. Alex was throughout more active in talking both in Finnish and in English. When realizing the dialogues they kept to the examples on the OHP transparency and repeated some questions several times when visiting with another pair.

Tiger and John (who changed his name from Matt). These boys did not bring their own doll characters from home. It seemed they had difficulty in taking a role of the character. The boys were many times restless and when visiting with another pair joked around and spoke a lot of Finnish. They would repeat the suggested dialogues also copying the OHP transparency examples. They worked showing an understanding of what they talked about but did not develop the discussion further in English nor in Finnish except when they wanted to play fight and when meeting with Ken and Ace they joked about going to the toilet.

Tina and Rita. The girls were recorded only when they did their final discussion due to technical problems the teacher had with the recorder they used. Tina was an active speaker and a support to Rita on many occasions – Rita might ask what was expected and Tina gave her the example which Rita then repeated. Tina also clarified some of the ideas of what was expected in general in the play.

Carl and Key. Carl and Key were both active in creating dialogues – they had original ideas and a clear picture of what kind of characters they played with. Carl supported Key with English phrases and they thought together about new items: Key suggesting something in Finnish and Carl trying to translate or then they asked the teacher.

Ken and Ace. Ace had a clear idea of what his character was like. He made suggestions for the dialogue according to that. The house of this pair was also personal in its setting, so the extra areas like

the separate toilet and the swimming pool gave them new ideas about what the dialogues should include. Ken helped with English and he was always up to what was to be done. He repeated the examples exactly the way they were on the OHP transparency but could afterwards use them again. He remembered the phrases, questions and words rather easily once he had played them out.

Huyhua and Emily. These girls used all their English skills and asked each other for English words when they wanted to say something out of the preplanned dialogue made together with the whole class. Huyhua and Emily tried to make very natural dialogues for morning and evening meals and for things to say. These girls were creative in that they changed the roles of the dolls into those of their pet dogs – so the dogs Huyhua and Emily took over the household. First two sessions their house included also a niece that lived with the two young ladies.

5.3. Description of the project activity time

The plan and the realization

Each date from 30th of August to 6th of October had a topic outlined in advance by the teacher – 12 lessons all together. The plan changed due to the absence of the teacher on one lesson. The other change occurred when I had transcribed some of the dialogues the pupils produced because the pupils provided such lifelike dialogues in Finnish and this made me try to encourage their initiative by giving them the main points of their dialogue in English so they could realize in the second language the things they really wanted to say. Huy-hua and Emily and Ken and Ace got a revised dialogue to talk through already on the 3rd. session, and so did the quartet Tina and Rita - Huyhua and Emily and the trio Ken - Alice and Alex in the latter part of the project.

The project classes consisted of a homework check at the beginning of the lesson, and the project activity with the two parts 1) dialogue creating which was teacher led and 2) the pupils playing out the dialogues. The lesson finished most of the time with independent activity from *Yes. My Own*

Book (MOB) activity book, during which the teacher went to make photocopies of the dialogue transparency to give as a handout and homework reading to the pupils. Homework included also exercises concerning the structure or vocabulary of the theme of the lesson in MOB.

On August the 30th we started to build the house. Before going to the first topic I introduced the list of dates when we would study using the doll characters and the house. I had the settings of the interaction laid out so that there would be activities and talk concerning the living-room, the kitchen, the bathroom and the bedroom. The construction of the rooms took place in the time span of three weeks, mostly in Art classes, so the building of the last room, the bathroom was finished only in the middle of the project. Thus the topics concerning the bathroom could be taken along to the dialogues. I introduced some English instructions like "*please, take turns in...*" or "*please, list...*", I would use and the pupils would possibly need to understand when the pairs were to act in a role.

The dialogue period started on September 1st. In the following there is a description of the dialogue creating session in which the teacher and the pupils gather the needed core language materials of the structures and vocabulary to realize the play dialogue. The play dialogue situations are then introduced and their realization described.

The first dialogue that was created in class is descriptive of the dialogues that follow the next time, too, in terms of what the procedure was like and how much pupil participated in all, even if the pupil's participation in giving suggestions varies according to their interest in the topic or their level of concentration in the dialogue making. The roles of the participants are marked as T= Teacher, H= Huy-hua(girl), E= Emily, C=Carl, Key, Alex, Matt (later on John), the rest of the pupils didn't take part in talking at this point. (I had trouble in remembering to call pupils by the name of their character – that is why the real names have been removed here to protect the anonymity of the pupils.) The dialogue making proceeded in the following way:

Dialogue making 1.9.2004

T: No ni. Kertokaas, mitäs ne vois tehdä siellä. Mitä varten ne etsii joitain?

H/E:Sano sää.(giggles)

T: Carl kerro.

C: Ne ettii tän silmälaseja.

T: Ja mitkäs silmälasit on englanniks?... Ne on *glasses*. Mitäs muuta ne vois etsiä? Antakaa ehdotuksia. Koska teidän omaan leikkiin nää tulee nää ehdotukset. Huihua.

H: Kissaa.

T: Kissaa. Niil on kissa siis. Sen te tiedätte. Ehdota vaan, Key.

Key: Kenkiä.

T: Kenkiä. Mitäs varten ne kenkiä ettis?

Key: No kun tää ois lähdössä ulos.

T: Joo. Hyvä. Mitkäs kengät onkaan englanniks? Mitkäs kengät onkaan englanniks? Yeah? Tiger?

(Tiger): Shoes.

(H/E: kokeile sitä...(playing in the house already)

T: *The cat* - se on tietty kissa, ja *the shoes* -myös. *The shoes* tai *My shoes*. Mitäs muuta. Tiger, keksis vielä mitä on hukassa. Onks näistä jokin semmoinen mikä sopis teillekin. Mikä ois hukassa. Matt?

Matt: Tärkeä paperi.

T: OK. Tärkeä paperi. Oikein hyvä. Tai vihkokin vois olla -te otte koululaisia. Tärkeä paperi. Mikäs on tärkeä englanniks? - Important. Teidän ei tarvitse tietää näitä. Sitä varten täällä niittä kerätään että käytetään kaikki teidän tiedot ja nää mun tiedot. Important. Mikäs paperi on? Sano vaan.

?: Paper.

T: Paper. Hyvä.

Sept. 1st, Wed: Situation evening – place the living-room . Looking for a lost thing, asking *Where's the/ Where's my...* and answering by using preposition suggestions

We created the first dialogues on September the 1st. Here the "owners" of the characters were asked to decide the identities of the characters: their name, age, interests. The interests suggested by pupils were listed on the OHP transparency and pupils copied them in their notebooks as an introduction to their character.

Then they had a problem solving task of something having been lost in the house. Asking Where's the... and being able to give instructions of where to look, and how to react after the lost thing in the living-room was found

Sept 6th, Mon Evening or morning in the bedroom: greetings and comments on the day .

The time of the day was decided to be morning. In dialogue making the teacher and the pupils gathered greetings and possible answers to How are you? –question, comments on the weather. Characters were to plan their day and use the structures "*I 'm going to*" and "*Let's + action*" and give both positive and negative comments to these. The dialogue creating part took this time longer than the first time, 10 minutes, and some of the pupils showed impatience in waiting for to get " to play". Their dialogues were realized mainly in Finnish.

Huihua and Emily talked about what to eat in the morning and planned to go to Särkänniemi (amusement park) and leave their niece at home. The girls used at least one English word in each sentence of their dialogues. Especially Huihua came up with many words. Emily, however, taught the phrase *I know* (ai nou) which Huihua thought meant *I no* with same pronunciation.(transcript sept 6th, 2004, Huihua and Emily)

Sept. 8th, Wed Day in the living-room talking about interests and hobbies. *Let's –suggestion...a problem.*

The characters suggested again something to do together according to their interests or hobbies. In the planning of the house the teacher suggested they show their interests in furnishing the living-room. Some pupils had a piano, most of them a computer and tv in the livingroom. One pair had icehockey card folders on their bookshelf to show they were interested in collecting hockey cards.

The second part of the dialogue was that one of the pair suggested an activity the other one could not do yet. The one suggesting then offered help with phrases like "*Try this*", "*Look, here*" "*It's ok. I can teach you*".

Sept 13th, Mon and Sept 15th, Wed No new recordings,

On September 15th the pairs recorded the previous week reread their dialogues with the teacher support in the transcripts of their dialogues. Those that had not been recorded had communication exercises not related to the project.

Sept 20th, Mon Kitchen –preparing for visitors to come: *What have we got? We've got/ We haven't got.* Make a shopping list and go shopping –teacher the shop clerk

The characters were to make a list of what they needed for an evening with friends. They examined the fridge and possibly the freezer to find out what they should go and buy for the evening. They wrote down a shopping list and went shopping.

The teacher took the role of the shopkeeper. The pairs lined up in front of the counter and took turns in reading out their lists. The shopkeeper made additional questions like giving alternative flavors, asking "how many ?" and finally asking for payment in euros.

The shopping situations gives an idea of the differences in language speaking/ communication skills of each pair and pupil. Huihua-Emily pair are responding like in a real communication situation, Michael also shows good understanding of teacher's talk. The others read out their shopping lists.

The special setting where the teacher was involved in the dialogues would have required better planning for the entire time. Only two pupils could talk at the same time –then the 10 others did not have anything to do, until the last minutes when the teacher invented an exercise. The teacher also tried to employ the pairless pupil as a shop clerk selling eletctric appliances which the boys of the class looked for. Partly successfully.

Sept 22nd, Wed Using the entire house - visiting with another pair. Introduce the house and furniture.

The goal of this lesson was that the pairs got to know how other pairs had planned and decorated their houses. The main idea was, however, to get the hosts to introduce their house like in a realistic visit.

A practical problem arose in two groups like that of Ken and Ace: they have no entrance door and there are visitors on the way (Teacher Journal Sept 22nd, 2004). Of the quartets recorded the group Tiger and John hosted by Ken and Ace talked in Finnish until the teacher joined the group and gave instructions of what to say at each phase. The hosts were joking and John made fun of Ace when Ace wanted to find out what to say in English. Teacher's advice lead to more active visitors but the hosts did not introduce their house in English – rather the visitors named different pieces of furniture. The hosting characters got into a fight. Some English was finally spoken. (transcript Sept. 22nd, 2004, Tiger and John + Ken and Ace).

Tiger and John visit with Alex and Alice. They start with talking some English in exchanging greetings but after that they speak Finnish. Without teacher's assistance the introduction of the house remains incomplete. Some English is heard when the boy characters suggest some activities: they want to watch tv and go to sauna.(transcript Sept 22nd, 2004, Alex and Alice + John and Tiger).

Sept 27th, Mon Livingroom/ Kitchen –the group have a snack

Due to the feedback from a parent we went through how the handout given at the end of each lesson was to be read. After that we created the dialogue and the pairs two by two had a snack at the hosts' house.

Dialogue making differed this time because "I had framed it more precisely than the ones before I added some translations. The OHP pen was the thicker one, and the prewritten text, which had the basic topic introduced with some vocabulary was the thinner one, so the emphasized text became the one written during the class, i.e. the language suggested by the pupils, as it has been for most of the handouts." (Teacher Journal Sept 27th, 2004).

The dialogue was about the visit a pair would pay to another pair's house. The group was supposed to have a snack/or a meal at the table and practice offering the snack and responding to that and commenting on the meal.

This lesson seemed to be different from the previous ones in that during the class the groups seemed to pay more attention to the support of the OPH transparency and I was asked questions, too. I was conscious not to talk too much in too loud a voice. Still I interrupted The group Alice-Alex and Ken to help out when the girls had difficulty in talking, and Ken asked for help. Alex misunderstood -i.e. I used English too much, but finally she understood what was supposed to happen.

Huihua-Emily and Tina-Rita group was exceptionally quiet, Emily withdrawing physically further away from the house/the microphone. Huihua tried to keep the dialogue going.

The group Carl-Key and Tiger-John had their dialogue over so fast that I asked them what the hosts served their visitors. The guests (John) joked about the too small a table with no chairs to sit around in Carl's and Key's kitchen.(Journal Sept 27th, 2004).

Sept 29th, Wed Redoing the dialogues, naming the parts of the house and furniture

Teacher Journal September 29th, 2004:

"I felt no pressure in that I found in the middle of the lesson that we won't have time to make a new role-play session this time. I saw the benefit of giving the feedback to the teams that were recorded the previous time. Still - I could have introduced some activities leading to the role-play to the pupils that were not involved with the feedback (5 boys). They got to talk anyway, and it seemed that at least two of them really could benefit from extra help in learning to pronounce the months even if they had had some practice in them before."

Oct 4th, Mon Evening chores bedroom and bathroom

Here the dialogue creating with teacher help gave pupils phrases for activities that needed to be done in the bathroom before going to bed. These were phrases like "taking a shower", "washing my face", brushing my teeth/ hair" Carl also suggested that there'd be a note of the transition from the bathroom to the bedroom and this was shared with the entire class.

Huihua and Emily used the phrases exactly as suggested. This time their dialogue followed the pattern suggested in the OPH transparency but then they departed from it and started to talk in Finnish like they might when having a sleepover at each others house. They had private jokes that made them laugh.(transcript Oct 4th, 2004, Huihua and Emily).

Ken and Ace got going only when I checked upon them. The following dialogue took place:

T: Are they in bed?

A: What?

T: Bed? Are they in bed?

A: Niin mitä se tarkottaa?

T: Onko ne jo vuoteessa?

K and A: Eei.

A: Tää on internetissä.

T: Mut teidän pitä mennä kylppäristä sängyn.

A: Joo, mut

K: Tää on sohvalla.

A: tän pitää käydä ostamassa netistä viä pari asiaa.

K: Tää on jo (unclear)

T: I'm going to...mitä se ostaa oli?

A: No, jotai.

T: Buy...ja sitten keksi mitä se ostaa.

A: Pyörän.

T: Joo.

A: Polkupyörän.

T: Se on englanniks?

A: Emmä muista mikä se on. Bike.

T: Nii. I'm going to buy a bike in(sic!) the internet.

A: Nii. Internet (Finnish pronunciation)

T: In the internet. Then to bed. Bed. Missä sun sänky on?

A: Tuolla. Meidän makuuhuone on siellä.

T: Ja mitäs ne kertoo ton seuraavan päivän suunnitelmista? I'm going to...

A: Metsästää.

T: In English.

K: I going fishing and hunting elk.

A: (pretend sleeping)

K: Tää ehti viä paraatipaikalle.

....

T: Mitä ne sanoo seuraavan päivän suunnitelmista?

K: fish. Go fishing and hunting elk.

A: Nii, Sillai.

...

K: Hei, play football ja go swimming, play cards. Now I go to bed.

(transcript Oct 4th, 2004, Ken and Ace).

Oct 6th, Wed Pairs recorded a dialogue of their choice the second time and gave feedback about the project in writing.

The fieldwork period finished on the 6th of October in a feedback session where the pupils re-created/re-acted out a scene of their choice in the house. They also gave written comments in Finnish about the way they perceived the project, whether they saw any personal benefits of it, and the pupils also gave some background information about themselves. (Teacher Journal Oct. 6th, 2004). The pairs acted out the dialogues but as they felt this was time of evaluation, many were nervous and read directly from their notes. Some repeated the same phrases and questions, so that the dialogue became very monotonous (Ken and Ace, Tina and Rita especially, also Alex and Alice).

5. DISCUSSION

Social interaction is a central component in learning a second language. Social interaction is not only the point where language use is realized in its everyday contexts. As Mondada and Pekarek (2004) conclude "social interaction and the related coordination of perspectives, activities and cognitive efforts contribute to creating the task at hand, to defining the problem to be solved, and thereby to shaping the context of learning as well as the meaning of what learning is"(Mondada and Pekarek 2004: 515) . I do think that second language learning can be meaningfully discussed as language outcomes on an individual level as in section 5.3.. However, it is always defined also by the interaction that takes place in the learning. This interaction is discussed in the following section. Mondada's and Pekarek's socio-interactionist perspective bridges the two foci of analysis.

5.1. Constructivism and classroom interaction

In the following sections I will discuss the pathways the pupils found into creating and playing out their own worlds in the role-play and factors that prevented them from getting to do that. The analysis is limited by the fact that the data gathering was not specifically focusing on these questions.

5.1.1. Construction of reality

I hoped that second language learning would be facilitated in the project by creating an environment that could be seen as realistic by the pupils. Several pupils expressed in their self-evaluation forms that they liked the process of building the house with the pair (feedback form Oct. 6th, 2004, Tiger, Tina, Ken). Hands-on task requiring little use of L2 in the process was necessary to create the environment for the project. The vocabulary of the parts of the house was the English material that the pupils got to

hear and see written repeatedly at this phase. Later on these were the words all pupils could use in their dialogues.

The construction phase gave the pupils a chance to talk a lot with their pair in designing the house and in practical building of the house. During the construction the pairs could consider what kind of characters would live in the house and share these ideas with each other. Even if this went on in L1 it maybe prepared the pupils to play the role and feel comfortable with speaking L2 then. I would think this as a smooth entering into the character's world via L1.

The feedback also recognizes that there was only limited freedom in creating the role-play while there were the fixed themes for each session. This was expressed by one pair when asked what was regrettable about the project. This was the pair that made excursions to other topics when they had covered the dialogue planned together expressed topics. They also used as much English as they could realizing the new topics. One of the girls wrote about the disappointment in having to stick to one topic: "Kun joutui tekemään samat asiat kuin muutkin" (When you had to do all the same things that the others did) (feedback Oct. 6, 2004, Emily).

On the other hand the dialogue making was most flexible and appreciating the pupil's initiative when it continued throughout the realizations of the dialogues. One example of this is from October 4th when the pairs were talking in the evening about their evening chores. Carl asked how to say "Menen nyt vuoteeseen", and after the teacher translated that for his use, she also shared the idea with the rest of the class and wrote it on a transparency.(Dialogue making Oct. 4th, 2004, Carl and teacher) This can be interpreted either as a teacher flaw of not giving the transition phrase in advance but also as pupils sharing their desired dialogue contents with each other via the teacher help. Some of the pairs used the phrase in the dialogues (transcript Oct 4th, 2004, Huihua and Emily). Taken this way the teacher would be seen as a facilitator in the classroom and thus realizing one aspect of what constructivism entails in the learning context.

5.1.2. The question of control - Whose voice?

The question of control arose several times when listening to the audio-recordings of the dialogue making and the pupil - pupil dialogues. It was obvious that sometimes the dialogue suggested came near to a behaviorist stimulus -response -drill. The OHP transparency had questions and suggested answers that some pairs repeated just changing the item or items in the answer. Still, even that kind of starting point could be developed into something more. It seems that this could be explained to some extent by existing skills and different interpretation of the task discussed in 5.3.

The other end of the continuum between the reactive and the active participant was also performed in the role-play. At times some pairs improvised something entirely outside the dialogue that had been planned together (transcript Sept. 1st, 2004, Huihua and Emily, transcript Sept 8th, 2004, Ken and Ace). One of them used their language skills in a creative way and at some instances applied coined (for example a combination of Finnish and English) concepts when they did not know the English equivalent (ibid, Huihua and Emily).

Pupil's choices

Teacher Journal October 13th , 2004:

The rooms dictated the topics? No wonder some of the feedback of what was boring about the project included the topics. Had I spent more time in planning the topics on one hand and developing the topics with the pupils on the other we could have had wiser topics and could have left the structure of the house to have a value as such, not only having the instrumental value I find I gave it. I guess my view of the houses and their value as the final product of building – not the process, which could have been an English language learning process as well, was reflected in that I found that I had not looked at the houses in detail, i.e. only the last day I noticed the fine personal solutions the pupils had made in building them.

Teacher Journal Sept 22nd, 2004:

**Both boys and girls disliked the fact they couldn't choose their visitors. I explained that the prearrangement was needed for the meetings to have a visiting pair for every host, though.*

Pupils had two kinds of ways of going about realizing the dialogues. Some used their imagination and had the English skills at use, too – they spoke quite a lot of English but were not that free to express themselves while a lot of words and structures were out of their reach (Huihua and Emily were such pupils). Some used their imagination and got very far from the suggested dialogues but they had little English resources even if they asked each other for help. Their dialogues included little English apart from the suggested but a lot of Finnish dialogue that sounded very natural in the characters' environment. Ken and Ace and Carl and Key created such dialogue.

As I listened to the recorded dialogues after each session I realized how little pupils could say in English, I decided to provide scaffolding in translating the parts that I saw as key to speaking about the details around the topic which the pupils had taken up. I transcribed the dialogues and attached this translation in them. The next time the pairs could read through the dialogue with scaffolding and some also recorded the new version of their dialogue. The girls team: Huihua, Emily, and Tina and Rita showed very much enthusiasm in getting to do this. Firstly , they liked to see what they had talked about in writing, and secondly, they were glad to be able to say more in English. Bingham and Skehan (2002) note that this kind of opportunity to repeat a task, even if it here was not dramatized and as such a different kind of task, "produces beneficial results and more form-focused performance". I chose to keep focusing on the content and encouraging pupils to speak English even when not on the topic the teacher had initiated.

The following is a excerpt from the transcribed version with suggested scaffolding. Scaffolding is written in upper case.

R F:Mikäs tämä tässä oikein on?
 H: Se on mun tekemä hieno pöytä. A TABLE I MADE
 T: Ja tämä on mikä?
 H: Pöytä.

Questions pointing like that to lautanen, kukka, puu,

E?: Alan pian soittamaan piano. I'M GOING TO

R: F:Mikä täällä on?

H: Lattia.

E:Lattia. Se pistetään kiinni.

(Teacher loud so the group doesn't talk)

H/E: Would you like some sips(chips)?

R: Yes.

T: Mitä sää sanoit? PARDON. OR WHAT DID YOU SAY?

E: Would you like some sips?

T: Yes.

The repeated task dialogue was realized as follows. The scaffolded parts are here in bold:

R: What is this here?

H: Se on mun tekemä hieno pöytä. Anteeksi. **A table I made.**

T: What is this here?

H: Table.

Tina and Rita ask more *What* -questions pointing at different items in the house like a plate, a plant, a decorative tree.

T: **I'm going to play the piano.**

T/R: What is this here?

H: Floor.

T: Floor. We shut it.

(Teacher loud so the group doesn't talk)

H or E: Would you like some sips (meaning *chips*)?

R: Yes.

T: Mitä sää sanoit?

E: Would you like some sips?

T: Yes. (transcript Sept. 29th, 2004, Huihua, Emily and Tina).

Here the dialogue was not produced orally but the group took some time to translate the rest together before reading it out.

The initial lesson was spent in defining the character that the pupil would play with. They could choose the name, age, characteristic features and interests of the doll character. I tried to get the pupils who did not do so spontaneously to choose English -like names to their characters. Still one of the pupils insisted on having another kind of name i.e. Huihua. I saw this as positive resistance while it revealed that I had not thought through the question of the identities in advance. As the pupils saw it, there was really no need for the characters to be native English speakers of European origin.

Huihua : Tää ei ainakaan osaa englantia viä ihan kunnolla.(At least this one doesn't speak English so well yet.)
 (transcript Oct. 1st, 2004, Huihua).

The implied starting point of the dialogues was that the characters would be native English speakers. This was questioned by one of the pupils that had two characters that she played with – the younger one was not able to speak "proper English" yet.

In some instances where each pair was supposed to be naming some things in their houses, things lost , or served for dinner the teacher made a round in the classroom and asked each pair what they would want or need for their dialogue. These alternatives made the dialogues personal and gave the pupils the chance to create an imaginary space and play of their own. As shown in next excerpt the teacher was not always up to these by-ways:

Ace: Ope. Entäs, jos nää menee uima-altaaseen?
 T: Uima-allasvaihtoehtoo ei oteta nyt huomioon, vaan ihan tavallisesti
 kylppäriin.
 Ace: Nää menee sitte hyppii sinne. Vai mitä?
 Ken: Niin kai.
 T: Ja se ei o muutenkaan...
 Ace: Roger Rabbit. (transcript Oct. 4th, 2004 dialogue making)

Relationships between the pupils

I found two kinds of attitudes towards classmates in the play situation. Some interacted in a supportive way towards certain pupils but gave discouraging feedback to others. Quite obviously the pupils had the most positive relationship with the pair they worked with. Girls and boys had difficulty at times to work together (Tina - Rita and Carl - Key) but not always (Ken with Alice and Alex). When made to play with girls a pair of boys took the role of entertainer – extra jokes and making fun of the materials that the girls had in their house.(recording Sept. 20th , 2004, Tina –Rita and Carl – Key, transcript Oct. 4th, 2004 Ken and Alice - Alex).

There were pupils that worked as a support to their pair in different ways. Ken showed his support when working with John and Tiger by making sure the group stayd on task at least part of the time. He also checked the meanings and the correct forms of the phrases in a dialogue with Alex and Alice. (transcript Sept. 22nd, 2004, John and Tiger host Ken and Ace, Sept. 27th, 2004 Alex and Alice host Ken).

Tina went further in supporting her pair: she many times said the phrases for her pair who then repeated them. This pair had an especially close relationship and thus the support seemed very natural and it was propably easy for the supported pupil to take in the teaching of her friend.

Huihua was a dictionary for Emily when they adventured outside the dialogue suggested in dialogue making. Once Emily also provided some extra vocabulary for the dialogue. She did not always know the answers but this way the girls could make a dialogue in mixture of Finnish and English far more elaborate than that of the other pairs. On September the 1st their dialogue had the following exchange:

H: I petaan bed.

E: I autan.

H: But she pitää mennä iltapalalle –night food. Eikö se niin ollut.

E: Yes

E: Toi kissa ois hukannut ton lautasen tonne.

H: Miten sanottiin miksi? Se oli niin helppo, mut mä unohdin.

E: What.

H: What you is pyörtyi?

(laughs)

E: Miksi sinä pyörtyi?

H: Hei joo, toi kuulostaa vähä oudolta: miksi sinä pyörtyi.

E: Miksi sinä pyörtyi.

H+E: (Play with previous question) :

H: I no pyörtyi.

(transcript Sept. 1st, 2004, Huihua and Emily)

The negative attitudes were shown in the special situations. The visiting sessions, which were two, showed that even if the work in pairs with a friend went well as both parties had a positive

attitude towards the other and his or her work the positiveness was not necessarily there when the pair was made to meet another pair. Especially the flaws seen in the structure of the house or the furniture was subject to mocking.

The visits were actually the first time the pupils saw each others' houses and were introduced to them as the language task. The teacher did not take into account that the visits could not be a pure dialogue exercise but here new factors came into play. The new situation may have been so confusing that as a result the visit of the first lesson was conducted mostly in Finnish. Only the intervention of the teacher got the pupils to talk some English, too.

Teacher's choices

Teacher Journal 14th of October, 2004:

Returned to the big question: what is learning supposed to mean? I found myself returning to the narrow idea of it as learning the language contents when foreign language learning is in question. I, however, realize that the Finnish National Curriculum states that all subjects include the goals of learning to learn, cooperate and work creatively. What a sphere of possibilities. Especially if the content learning goals of the project seem to be least achieved :)

The teacher control is obvious in that the choice of the technique of role-play with characters was the teacher's choice. I thought that rather than taking a role himself the pupil would feel freer in talking through the character. Actually this kind of distancing was not really necessary because of the topics. They were not at all about sensitive issues but ordinary daily chores. The role-play gave anyway the pupils the chance to identify with older characters, and in this context it made more sense to take up activities like household chores and living by themselves (not as a nuclear family).

Furthermore, the basic structure of the house was delineated by teacher initiative. One pair did make personal choices in building extra areas and not sharing the same functions of space as the standard living-room, kitchen, bedroom and bathroom combination.

The topics of the realized project were all choices of the teacher even if my intention was to leave the latter part of the project open for student topics. One spontaneous idea from a pupil was scheduled in the project plan early on but the changes during the process schedule because of teacher's illness one week didn't leave time for this topic. I was eager to realise pupil initiatives but on after thought I had doubts that the suggested topic "cleaning the house" would create discussion in English – it would seem to require mostly action in the house.

While creating the dialogues we spoke Finnish – the suggested parts of the dialogue were translated into English by pupils or by the teacher. The first sessions saw more of the question and answer –form dialogue in teacher asking for the English equivalent of the suggested Finnish phrase or word. This provided some English language use but mostly the teacher finally gave the words in English.

Some pupils, especially Ace, were active in suggesting their own solutions even without teacher invitation. When creating a dialoque for evening chores in the bathroom in October 4th (during the last class before the final dialogues) the teacher filled most of the time for discussion. Part of the exchange went as follows:

T: Entäs sitten kun te pesette kasvonne, niin mitäs se pestä on?

H: Shower.

T: Niin te tiesitte mikä take a shower on. Se on suihku. Ja bathtub on kylpyamme, ja take a bath on kylpeä. Mutta entäs kun pesette? Mikä on pestä? ...Wash -se on jo täällä wash basin (on transparency) -niin jos pesee kasvot niin se on face, mutta sitte vois pestä myös jalat, tai jonkun muun osan minkä tietää englanniks - face, feet, tai vaikka belly button -voi vaikka napansa päättää pestä -tässä voi hassutellakin vähän. Mutta mites sitte sanotaan kun pestään hampaat?

Ace: Entäs selkä?

T: Back – back (writing down on OHP).

The pupil's suggestions were sometimes modified by the teacher that had a preconception of the characters' properties, like age in the following:

T: (...) Mitäs muuta. (Finnish name = Tiger) keksis vielä mitä on hukassa. Onks näistä jokin semmoinen mikä sopis teillekin. Mikä ois hukassa. John?

John: Tärkeä paperi.

T: OK. Tärkeä paperi. Oikein hyvä. Tai vihkokin vois olla -te ootte koululaisia. Tärkeä paperi. Mikäs on tärkeä englanniks? -Important. Teidän ei tarvitse tietää näitä. Sitä varten täällä niitää kerätään että käytetään kaikki teidän tiedot ja nää mun tiedot. Important. Mikäs paperi on? Sano vaan.

John: Paper.

T: Paper. Hyvä..

(transcript of dialogue creating Sept. 1st, 2004, teacher and John)

The excerpt of the dialogue shows that the teacher senses that the pupils feel that too much is expected of them if they are to know the vocabulary already in advance. This was expressed by two pairs looking at each other and one pupil sighing.

Rapport

The Compact Oxford English Dictionary (2003) defines rapport as a noun that means "a close and harmonious relationship in which there is common understanding". Random House Dictionary (1987) says it is "an especially harmonious and sympathetic connection".

The project was realized in the beginning of the semester, so there was relatively little time for the teacher and the pupils to get to know each other. Individual differences in character and attitude are to be expected to play a role, too.

Teacher was initially unclear about the goals and was not explicit about the ones she had .

Both the teacher and the pupils were insecure. Pupils did not know the way of working from beforehand and this resulted in pupil feeling insecure. As Buskist and Saville note creating rapport is a process (2001: 1). There is a crucial first encounter but one would think that a lot can be done even if the start was not perfect. When I thought about my start with the class that was to adventure with me to a research project I found that my start reflected the insecurity I felt in front of the "unexplored territory". I was enthusiastic but did not know where the project would go in detail. In this sense the

teachers "knowing her stuff" was imperfect. From the start I did talk about the fact that the working method was new to me, and that the weeks of work ahead of us would possibly mean learning by trial and error .

However, since everything about the project was new both to the teacher and the pupils would have required that all parts and activities had been carefully explained. When this did not always happen, some tasks proved too difficult or just unclear to some pupils. This created insecurity in these pupils. Getting to create rapport means here then new building of trust. That can be done via making the routine practices like giving homework, and explaining the activities, clearer.

5.2. Creativity

Lampinen and Luff (1989) discuss the characteristics of a creative teacher. These characteristics can be applied to the creative student, too, in that the creative person shows less concern for organization and content, but high interest in the interacting participants of events, high sensitivity, has breath of vision, is resourceful, flexible, willing to try new things, embraces diversity and uniqueness . (Lampinen and Luff 1989, already in Torrance 1964)

Lampinen and Luff connect creativity in language classroom with play where the students stay interested when the play activity gives them the possibility for individual use of information. Thus, different learners can take a role appropriate to their personality and language capacity at that moment. While play is where affect and intellect are linked it integrates the capacities of the brain so that something new can come out of an outline presented (Lampinen and Luff 1989: 91, Mäkinen 2002: 178).

There were several examples of creativity. Some pairs created situations that were consistent with the characters living in each house: Ken and Ace, young men interested in sports and watching tv,

watch icehockey world championships. Ace watched a horror movie and acted out the feeling of being afraid of a scary event in the film.(transcript Sept 9th 2004, Ken and Ace).

Emily and Huihua showed creativity in many ways. They coined words according to their language capacity, like aamupuuro = morning puuro (transcript Sept 6th, 2004 , Emily). They changed the characters of the girls and the pets living in their household, so that the girls took the form of the dogs and vice versa (transcript Sept. 6th , 2004 Emily and Huihua).

The limitations of the English language capacity seemed to have an effect very different from the above describe in some pupils: they spoke hardly any English without a specific request from the teacher and even some recapitulation of what the theme was, and the language support for talking about the theme. This happened even if all the materials were on in an OPH transparency throughout the activity time.

5.3. Second language learning

Teacher and pupil perspectives revisited

What is considered significant in the class situation? The discrepancy between dialogue making and the dialogue created in the role play may have been due to different views that the participants had of the purpose of the role-play activity. Block (1996) studied the student and the teacher perspectives to different activities they recognized during the English lesson.

In Block's study the teacher did not lay out a plan where continuity of an activity over several lessons could have been seen and thus the initial activities would have clearer motivation (ibid.: 188-189). I see that in my project some pupils only gradually understood the overall process of the activity. This understanding could be lost also in between classes so that judging by the dialogues the pupils made in one lesson one could not predict how the pair would get going and work during the next session. They would then either be satisfied with speaking Finnish off-task or ask the teacher or each

other what was expected of them in the task. Huihua-Emily, for example, talked about several topics which were about the characters' life in the house, during their first dialogues. Then they seemed to use as much English as they could. However, after finishing their last suggested dialogue on October the 4th they just joked in Finnish about something that did not have anything to do with the playing.(transcripts Sept.1st, Sept 6th and Oct.4th, 2004, Huihua and Emily).

The least recorded pair John and Tiger showed low interest in the play activities. There were many possible reasons for this (discussed elsewhere: John's "identity problem", the doll character not possible to identify with?). Their reluctant attitude came through in that they spoke English only when teacher reminded them of the task. They also joked about in Finnish when another pair was paying a visit to their house even though this other pair got them to speak English, too. In their feedback forms they wrote that all of the playing was boring, Tiger also that the tasks were easy, while John considered the playing difficult. They estimated very differently their speaking in English (John: some, Tiger quite a lot) and learning outcomes: John thought he only learned some words, Tiger marked that he learned some discussion skills, quite a lot of words and speaking. Of this pair John is clearly the more critical one. Resistance of this kind was expressed in Block's study as a student's critical account of the activities.(1996: 182-189.) Ellis discusses the possible factors that can explain individual differences in learning L2. The difference in attitude towards the task could be attributed to the previous negative learning experiences that have lessened the motivation to learn English in general, to absolute differences in language aptitude (that may result in low language proficiency), but also to poor learning strategies or lack of scaffolding in learning to use appropriate personalized learning strategies. (Ellis 1997: 73-78.)

Codeswitching and the place of role-play activity

The use of L1 in language classes has been looked at by Eldridge (1996) and Swain and Lapkin (2000) among others. They found that code-switching was mostly purposeful (Eldridge 1996: 303-311, Swain and Lapkin 2000: 268-275) Swain and Lapkin discuss code switching in immersion class situations and she has taken a closer look at what purpose these turns from L2 to L1 serve. They state that L1 has cognitive and social functions – only 12% of the L1 turns were not about the task. They found that L1 has a role as a tool that helps students to understand and make sense of the requirements and content of the task. L1 helps them to focus attention to language form, vocabulary use, and overall organization. As means of social interaction L1 helps to "establish the tone and nature of their collaboration". Swain and Lapkin conclude that "judicious use of the L1 can indeed support L2 learning and use". (ibid. 2000: 275?).

Why did my pupils speak Finnish? There are probably many reasons. Obviously, a pair like Alice and Alex were not in their minds ready to go on to playing before they had resolved the decorating of the house, so that they could "live" and move about in the house (transcript Sept 8th, 2004, Alex and Alice). Some pupils asked in the beginning of each play session what they were supposed to do, just after the dialogue creating with the entire class was finished (Alex-Alice, Huyhua-Emily, John-Tiger). Here the connection between the work with the teacher and the rest of the class was not comprehended as the introduction to the topic.

One could also think that the tasks were too demanding. Were the pupils ready to produce the language some of which was introduced to them for the first time only a few minutes earlier? Maybe the combinatory skills of using the English they already knew to fill the gaps that the dialogue creating left were not sufficient. Murphy mentions as one of the constructivist characteristics that the pupils can build upon their previous knowledge constructions (Murphy 1997:2). The old and the new knowledge need to be processed individually, and each student is different in both that previous

knowledge, and in skills of bringing it to use in a situation where new input is present for expected combined output.

Some pupils were not interested in talking about the topics given. Thus, the teacher initiated environment did not allow them to have control of their learning to the extent that they would have needed.

The pupils spoke very much Finnish in realizing the dialogues. In two dialogues that took about 7 minutes Ken and Ace used 25 and 31 English words altogether. Huihua and Emily used 102 English words on Sept. 1st, and less than a hundred English words in the rest of their recorded dialogues (varying from 66 to 75).

The pupils had too much time to talk in relation to what their capability for conversation in English was. The guided dialogue would be over in 1 or 2 minutes for most pairs. An exception was the pair Emily and Huy-hua. They invented more dialogue and used the English they could in realizing it.

Most pairs took the suggested structures and vocabulary –and applied them either word for word as such or made their own vocabulary choices in the structures suggested in dialogue creating with the teacher.

In all, the pupils spoke very much Finnish during the play-time. This changed when they got a scaffolded version to perform through: this time they spoke almost entirely English. The use of L1 is not problematic, per se. However, the choice of L1 raises some questions about the use of this drama technique. Firstly, what kind of play in English would be so meaningful to all pupils that they would aim at playing it? Secondly, how to use the drama method? At what phase and for which purpose would it be useful? Should this kind of activity be introduced in the beginning of term as activating and motivating exercise? On the other hand it might be more beneficial in the end of the

term, then used as recapitulation of already learned, and as such possible positive feedback of the English learned? These questions will be discussed in chapter 6.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The research project was action research and as such had the goal of developing my teaching. This goal was achieved in that I got experience in using a new drama technique. However, the project raised also very basic questions having to do with teaching in general, like, how to plan a lesson and how to interact with the pupils to create rapport. I think that becoming more conscious of what goes on in the lesson – especially realizing what exact verbal interaction is going on, makes it easier to both plan the lessons specifically using the play house but also work with other techniques in teaching a second language.

The research project also strengthened my belief that distancing myself from the practice in looking and listening to it via the recorded data will be necessary for a continuous professional development. Thus, this thesis is only the first report on my teaching experiences. In the future it would be interesting to be able to do action research together with another teacher and get a partly outsider perspective to my teaching.

It seems that the key to meaningful activity in language classroom is giving a space where highly individualized processes are allowed and encouraged. Some pupils took this space even in this project. The field materials show that the pupils had capacity to create meaningful dialogues in their mother tongue. For some it meant developing structure and the contents of the house in stead of speaking about the topic teacher had suggested and the group had developed. Some made the English dialogues and then went on to talk in Finnish about things not connected to the play situation at all. Pairs Huihua and Emily, and Key and Ace developed the dialogue in Finnish but after a while also started to talk about other things.

With the method used the teacher could only partially support their production of these dialogues in English. In the future the pairs could suggest more dialogic content which is especially

interesting to their play – this would require a creation of each session over at least two lessons so that the teacher can write supporting materials in between the lessons.

Some pupils were more ready to use their knowledge of English: the vocabulary and structures learned this far. The others had internalized the goal of "getting it right" that implies the behaviorist idea of learning as the right response to the stimulus given.

I do not think I can conclude the following according to the findings in my field materials but this is the understanding that I had as a hunch prior the study, and it was strengthened by the experience that the project gave me. To encourage pupils to use all their capacity the role play situation requires :1) a relaxed, accepting atmosphere = rapport between pupils and between the teacher and the pupil. 2) Sharing the understanding of constructivist theory of knowledge. This means, for instance, that the pupils see that there are numerous right answers and that the teacher is their resource person in looking for the answers. 3) Clearer structure of the teaching. Teacher needs to suggest clear guidelines, even possible structures and phrases for the dialogues, which can be rehearsed in advance but emphasizing that the primary initiative for the contents of the dialogue should come from the pupils.

I did not formulate questions about the contents of the play sessions. As seen in the sections with dialogue examples (in chapters 4. and 5.), the pupils chose to depart from the given topic to go where their imagination lead them. For me the tension between my goal of teaching certain items and my ideal of the pupil having much of the control in creating the dialogue himself is one of the focal points of the analysis of what the teaching/learning environment at its best could be. There has to be a negotiation between these goals: a supportive setting creating a space for creative action. This far the realization is still to be developed. Rapport entailing trust and reliance on teacher support on the part of the pupils is an essential ingredient in productive role play situations.

As the central point for to get all pupils motivated to participate willingly is taking into consideration the interests of the working pair there would obviously be quite a lot of new language

materials both structural and vocabulary needed to realize this kind of individualized play. Thus, it would be well motivated to use the play in the end of the term when they have had other means of acquiring the L2. Then it would be partly recapitulation of the quite recently learned . In the beginning of the term there would be longer a lapse of time from the previous at least in class language input.

In conclusion, the project presented the role play exercise as the main activity during the lesson. In future I would include role play in the lesson plan but building up the session during several lessons in which the content and structures of the play can be rehearsed in tune with the national curriculum with certain areas of vocabulary and structures taken as goals for language content learning with other methods than the drama method, too. Reading and listening exercises on the themes would introduce and strengthen the learning that in the project was based on teacher lead dialogue making, play dialogue creating, and the recapitulation of the dialogue as homework reading.

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