

## **Co-operative Learning in Teaching English as L2**

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School of Modern Languages  
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English Philology  
Pro gradu -tutkielma  
Spring 2006  
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KUUSIVAARA, PÄIVI: Co-operative Learning in Teaching English as L2

Pro gradu -tutkielma, 69 sivua + liitteet (2 kpl)

Kevät 2006

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Tutkielman aiheena on yhteistoiminnallinen oppiminen ja sen soveltaminen vieraan kielen kouluopetuksessa. Tutkielman tavoitteena on pohtia sekä teoreettisesti, että käytännöllisesti, onko yhteistoiminnallinen oppiminen toimiva vieraan kielen opetustapa. Teoreettisessa tutkimuksessa vertailen yhteistoiminnallista oppimista kolmeen vieraan kielen oppimisteoriaan, käytännön toimivuutta tutkin opettajilta haastatteluissa saamieni vastausten perusteella.

Tutkimukseen on valittu kolme kielitieteellistä oppimisteoriaa; Noam Chomskyn *Universal Grammar approach*, Stephen Krashenin *Monitor Model*, sekä kasvatuspsykologiaan perustuva *Activity Theory*. Opettaja-haastattelut olivat muodoltaan teemahaastatteluja, joihin sain vastauksia kirjallisesti, sekä suullisesti sekä puhelimitse että kasvotusten. Tutkimukseen haastateltiin seitsemää opettajaa.

Teorioiden vertailussa suurimmiksi eroavaisuuksiksi nousivat käsitykset oppilaan yksilöllisyydestä, ja sen vaikutuksesta kielen oppimiseen. Soveltuvuuteen vaikutti myös käsitys oppimisesta ja oppimisprosessista. Vähiten yhtäläisyyksiä löytyi Chomskyn teorian ja yhteistoiminnallisen oppimisen väliltä, eniten taas *Activity Theoryn* ja yhteistoiminnallisen oppimisen väliltä.

Haastattelut osoittivat, että yhteistoiminnallinen oppiminen koetaan hankalaksi ja työlääksi opettajalle, etenkin aloitusvaiheessa. Sen uskotaan kuitenkin edistävän oppilaiden sosiaalisia taitoja. Opettajien näkemykset yhteistoiminnallisen oppimisen toimivuudesta tiedollisen oppimisen edistäjänä vaihtelivat huomattavasti sen mukaan, kuinka paljon he olivat ko. mallia käyttäneet. Myös käsitykset mallin soveltuvuudesta erilaisille oppilaille vaihtelivat merkittävästi.

Tutkimuksessa todetaan, että yhteistoiminnallinen oppimismalli on sovellettavissa vieraan kielen opetukseen, mutta sen käytännön toteuttaminen on vaativaa ja itse mallin oppiminen vaatii aikaa ja ponnisteluja. Mikäli oppimisen mieltää ennen kaikkea prosessina, jossa oppimaan oppiminen on erillisten asioiden oppimista tärkeämpää, on yhteistoiminnallinen oppimismalli tähän tarkoitukseen erittäin soveltuva.

Avainsanat: yhteistoiminnallinen oppiminen, oppimisprosessi, oppimisteoria, opetusmetodi, oppilaan yksilöllisyys, opettaja-haastattelu

**Table of contents:**

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
1.1. Research tasks	6
1.2. Earlier studies	7
<b>2. Methods used</b>	<b>9</b>
2.1. Study questions	9
2.2. Concepts and terminology	10
2.3. Analysis of theories	11
2.4. Teacher interviews	11
2.5. Conclusion	14
<b>3. Materials studied</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>4. Second language learning theories</b>	<b>17</b>
4.1. The UG approach	18
4.2. Keashen's Monitor model and Input hypothesis	20
4.3. The Activity theory	24
<b>5. Learner as an individual</b>	<b>26</b>
5.1. Motivation	26
5.2. Attitude	27
5.3. Aptitude	28
5.4. Age	29
5.5. Extroversion vs. introversion	29
<b>6. Co-operative learning</b>	<b>30</b>
6.1. History of co-operative learning	30
6.2. Co-operative learning in Finland	32
6.3. Basic principles	33
6.4. Teaching methods	35
6.5. Motivation and co-operative learning	38
6.6. Co-operative learning in L2 teaching	39
6.7. Problems and criticism	44
<b>7. Analysis of theories</b>	<b>47</b>
7.1. The Universal Grammar approach and co-operative learning	47
7.2. The Monitor model and co-operative learning	48
7.3. The Activity theory and co-operative learning	49
7.4. Learner as an individual and co-operative learning	51
<b>8. Teacher interviews</b>	<b>53</b>
8.1. Arranging the interviews	53
8.2. Findings from the interviews	54
8.2.1. Background information	54
8.2.2. Average lessons	55

8.2.3. <i>Teaching methods</i>	56
8.2.4. <i>Learning theories</i>	58
8.2.5. <i>Learner as an individual</i>	58
8.2.6. <i>Co-operative learning</i>	59
8.2.7. <i>The relationship between theory and practise</i>	62
<b>9. Summary of findings</b>	<b>63</b>
9.1. Findings from the theories	63
9.2. Findings from the interviews	64
<b>10. Conclusion</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>11. Bibliography</b>	<b>69</b>
<b>12. Appendix</b>	<b>74</b>

## **1. Introduction**

What is the best way for a second language teacher to help his or her students with learning? How much can teachers influence their students' capacity of learning? And how do they know which is the most beneficial teaching method to use? These are some of the questions that began to swirl in my mind during my teacher study year in the University of Tampere 2004-2005. In order to become a good teacher I need to be able to understand the process of learning in addition to mastering various teaching methods. Hence I became interested in cooperative learning, which was introduced to me and my fellow student colleagues during our teacher training period. According to cooperative learning and its supporters it enhances both the students' social and intellectual achievements. Some of the studies conducted appear to prove the superiority of co-operative learning to other more traditional learning theories and methods. However, it has not been accepted throughout the field of education, and it has been criticized by many as well, mostly due to the belief that co-operative learning indulges social outcomes at the expense of intellectual and academic achievements.

Cooperative learning has been studied by many educators, but it has gained less attention with linguists. This being a thesis on applied linguistics, I was at first puzzled with finding the universal nominator between applied linguistics and cooperative learning. After reading literature both in the fields of education and the field of applied linguistics, more accurately on second language acquisition, I eventually perceived a term which appeared frequently in both academic fields; motivation.

According to many L2 theories, the learner's motivation has a significant effect on the learning results. On the other hand, cooperative learning claims to increase students' motivation. Subsequently, cooperative learning should enhance positive learning results.

In my thesis I intend to study cooperative learning theory; its history, principles and methods. I will then conduct a comparative analysis between cooperative learning and some established L2 learning theories in order to discover the differences and similarities between the chosen theories.

I will also interview teachers of English to discover which elements they consider imperative to successful L2 learning. In analysing their responses I wish to discover whether their replies verify, or contradict the ideas presented in accepted theories.

### 1.1. Research tasks

I have divided this Pro Gradu thesis into four sections. Firstly, I will study some L2 learning theories presented in the literature of applied linguistics and Second Language Acquisition. In order not to make the study too exhaustive I have chosen to concentrate on three L2 learning theories, The Universal Grammar approach by Noam Chomsky, The Input theory by Stephen Krashen, and the activity theory by A. N. Leontiev.

Secondly, I will discuss co-operative learning in order to understand the theory behind it. First I will introduce its historical phases; I will introduce the philosophies and theories which co-operative learning is based on. Also a short review of the research done in co-operative learning will be presented. After this I will concentrate on the main principles which define co-operative learning and also give some practical examples to better exemplify some of these elements. The most prominent teaching methods will also be presented to give a more descriptive idea of co-operative learning. After this I will discuss the use of co-operative learning in L2 learning and teaching.

Thirdly, I will study how the SLA learning theories vary from the more overall educational co-operative learning theory in their view of L2 learning. Obviously I will also discuss the

similarities, should there be any, and raise the question whether co-operative learning can be used successfully for L2 learning in this light.

Finally, I will analyse answers received from interviewing teachers of English language for their personal opinions on L2 teaching and learning. I will concentrate on their ideas on L2 learning theories in general, but specifically I am interested in finding out their attitudes towards the use co-operative learning in L2 learning and L2 teaching. I am hoping to find what the teachers consider beneficial in using co-operative learning, and also what is considered difficult or even a disadvantage in L2 learning. Basically this part of the study should answer the applicability question as well, but from a subjective professional point of view.

In the light of these four stages of the study, the question I aim to answer is how applicable is co-operative learning theory for L2 learning in the light of SLA based L2 learning theories. The study questions will be discussed in chapter 2 in more detail.

## 1.2. Earlier studies

In the field of education, co-operative learning has been a much studied branch. Especially in the 1970s and 1980s studies were conducted to both attest the positive effects of co-operative learning, and to rebut its superiority to the more traditional teacher-cantered methods. Sharan calculated that during the 1990s alone more than 2000 studies were conducted (Sahlberg and Sharan 2001 b, 385). The calculation also pointed towards another interesting factor; co-operation had spread to numerous fields of education from comprehensive education. Most studies support the positive effects of co-operative learning, but there are some which criticise the idea of its superiority to traditional teaching.

An example of a study concerning both student motivation and academic achievement is one conducted by Shlomo Sharan and Ada Shaulov published in 1990. They observed sixth grade

students over a period of seven months. The study “focused directly on the assessment of pupils’ motivation to learn and its relation to academic achievement” (Sharan 1990, 173). The aim then, was to discover whether co-operative learning enhanced pupils’ motivation more than learning in a whole-class teacher-directed environment, and to what degree. In their study they came to the conclusion that working co-operatively enhances motivation, and students’ achievements were also higher. Sharan and Shaulov pointed out, however, that there are several variables which need to be considered, e.g. teachers’ knowledge of co-operative learning, and necessary instructions and training for the pupils to work in a group throughout the experiment.

Relatively few studies made of co-operative learning have been conducted in Finland. And even fewer are those considering L2 learning. Ritva-Liisa Rantavuori (1998) did her pro-gradu thesis on how the do-auxiliary can be taught in two ways, teacher directed and co-operative methods being the chosen ways. She studied students in the seventh grade in two different towns. Her study revealed that regarding academic achievement, i.e. learning the do-auxiliary, teacher-directed method was more successful.

## **2. Methods used**

In this chapter I will introduce the methods I have chosen for my study. I will discuss the study questions I aim to answer, i.e. the purpose of conducting this particular study. Before moving onto to explaining the methods I use in this study, some of the most important concepts and terminology used in this study are explained, namely I will specify how they are interpreted in this particular study. Then I will discuss the methods I have chosen to conduct the study.

### 2.1. Study questions

The purpose of this study is to discuss the possibilities to use co-operative learning in L2 learning and L2 teaching. However, in order to be able to discuss the topic, the materials used in the study need to be approached through exact questions. These questions, or themes, formulate the essence of this study; all material is chosen and discussed in such a way that they can be answered. The study questions are:

- (1) What is L2 learning? How is it related to L1 learning and learning per se?
- (2) What is the learner's role in L2 learning?
- (3) What are the guidelines the theory has to offer for L2 teaching?

The preceding three themes are the main focus of my discussion on the L2 learning theories in chapter 4. These themes are present in chapters 5 and 6 as well in which I will discuss individual differences in learners and co-operative learning. However, in chapter 6, co-operative learning will be discussed slightly more comprehensibly than just according to the three study questions. In chapter 7, the analysis of the theories, I will again narrow down the discussion to follow the three themes above. In chapter 8, the teacher interviews, I will have a slightly different approach which will be introduced in 2.4.

## 2.2. Concepts and terminology used

I will now introduce some of the terminology I will use frequently throughout this study. Some of these definitions are similar to those used in the literature of the field, but some require a more specific definition to explain what they refer to in this particular study.

SLA= Second language acquisition. According to Rod Ellis (1990) second language acquisition is the field of study of how people learn a language which is not their mother tongue is the target of the study.

L2. In this study I will follow the definition of many researchers (Ellis, Mitchell, Cook etc) in calling the target language as L2. L2 represents a language learned by a person, which is not his or her mother tongue. The language does not need to be second in order of learning; it can be the third, fourth and so on. In this study L2 is English, but I prefer to use the term L2 to English,

because only in the interviews is English taken as a deliberate target.

L2 learning. L2 learning is used to represent the actual target of SLA research. L2 learning differs from L2 acquisition by being intentional and, to some extent, formal, instead of natural learning.

Learning theory. Learning theory refers to a theoretical approach that explains how people learn L2.

Learning method. From learning theories educationalists have formed learning methods. These methods are practical ways of learning L2.

Co-operative learning. The term co-operative learning is a theory of learning. It is important to make the distinction between co-operative learning as a theory from co-operative learning methods, which will be introduced separately.

### 2.3. Analysis of the theories

As I read literature on SLA and on co-operative learning, I discovered ideas of learning which were very different from one another, but also ideas and perspectives that were almost identical. Therefore, for the third part of my study, chapter 7, the analysis of the theories, I chose a comparative analysis as a method. Chapter 7 is divided into 4 sections, of which section 7.1. is a comparison between The Universal Grammar approach, 7.2. a comparison between The Monitor model and co-operative learning, and section 7.3. a comparison between The Activity theory and co-operative learning. Section 7.4. consists of a comparison between the learners' individuals differences presented in chapter 5 between the ideas of the individual in co-operative learning.

### 2.4. Teacher interviews

The fourth part of my study consists of teacher interviews. As L2 learning is often considered a rather formal phenomenon which takes place in a school environment, I felt it would be essential for my study to include the opinions of L2 teachers. Moreover, teaching occurs in a practical and constantly changing environment. Therefore I wanted to include the experiences of the teachers to this study. This is not to say that L2 learning theories and the practice of teaching are completely separate, far from it. In my opinion, however, it is vital to acknowledge both theory and practise, and be aware of the possible contradictions between the two.

The aim of the interviews is primarily the same as the analysis of the theories; to discover whether co-operative learning is applicable in L2 learning and teaching. The main purpose was to discover the ways teachers use co-operative learning, and how they consider it affects the learning on L2. In addition I was interested in the ways teachers apprehend L2 learning and how it can be most

efficiently promoted in teaching. According to these ideas and the ideas I received by reading literature I formulated a questionnaire which was sent to teachers of L2. The questionnaire consists of the following themes:

- (1) Background information: I asked the teachers of their experience as a teacher, their years of experience and the number of schools they have worked in.
- (2) Average lessons: The idea was to discover the amount of time the teachers use with different kinds of classroom organization, e.g. teacher-centred learning and pair work.
- (3) Teaching methods: The idea was to find out the methods the interviewees use or have used, but more so the strengths and weaknesses of the methods. This was a section where I expected to discover differences between the teachers.
- (4) Learning theories: This part was designed to bring up the possible contradictions between L2 learning theories and the actual practise of teaching. More accurately, the aim was to discover how consciously and to what extent, if at all, the teachers exploit L2 learning theories.
- (5) Learner as an individual: Because I have included the individual differences of a learner as an important part of the discussion in the other parts of the study, I felt it was necessary to include the teachers' opinions on the matter as well.
- (6) Co-operative learning: This section was constructed in a way that would reveal the ways the teachers use or have used co-operative learning. More importantly, I wanted to discover how they feel it affects learning, and how it can or can not be used in L2 learning and teaching.
- (7) Learning vs. practise: Finally I was interested in the ideas the teachers have on L2 learning theories. In this section I was not so much interested in the ways the

teachers use theories in their own work, but on their overall ideas of the usability of theories in their profession.

As I started to arrange for the interviews, the first problem was choosing the interviewees. As one of the goals was to discover the actual way co-operative learning is used in L2 classrooms, I wanted to interview teachers who I knew use it systematically. And since the aim of the study was not to discover whether co-operative learning is used by L2 teachers, the intentional use of these teachers does not have a falsifying effect on the results. I sent out a preliminary inquiry of the interview to forty teachers, of which four used co-operative learning according to my knowledge. I was hoping to receive about ten assenting replies, but unfortunately only received three. Finally I managed to get four more interviewees. Two of the seven interviewees use co-operative learning systematically, and the other five were more or less familiar with it. The interviewees consist of six females and one male, ranging from 4 to 24 years of experience in teaching. The teachers are from 4 different towns, all from the southern parts of Finland. The interviews were conducted in three different ways: three replied in writing, two were interviewed on the phone, and two were interviewed in person. All were given the opportunity to reply in which ever way they felt most convenient. The questionnaires were sent out at least a week beforehand.

As the sample of my study consists of seven interviews, it was clear I could not come up with numeric generalisations of the phenomenon, nor was it the intention. As the aim was to discover and discuss subjective ideas, opinions and experiences, the most appropriate approach was qualitative analysis. The data received from the interviews was clustered according to similarities and differences following the order of the questionnaire. In clustering the data I followed the guidelines in *Laadullinen tutkimus ja sisällönanalyysi* (Tuomi et al 2002, 110-115). After this it was possible to analyse and discuss the data according to the following questions:

- (1) How do the teachers organize their lessons in terms of time consuming and methods they use?
- (2) What is the significance of L2 learning theories to the teachers in relation to their view of their professional skills?
- (3) What is the teachers' impression on co-operative learning and of its usability in L2 learning and teaching?

## 2.5. Conclusion

According to the analyses of the theories and of the interviews, I will conclude a summary of my findings. First I will discuss the theories and interviews separately, but in the conclusion the intention is to integrate the findings from the theories to the findings from the interviews. My purpose is to provide my topic with an answer which includes both aspects; the theoretical and practical.

### **3. *Materials studied***

In this chapter I will discuss and explain the materials I have chosen for this study.

The primary sources of this thesis consist of the responses received from the teacher interviews. Using teacher interviews as part of my study material was fairly evident from the beginning. As I aim to discuss the possibilities of co-operative learning in L2 learning and teaching, I believe it would be rather impossible to exclude such an important factor as teachers from the study. After discussing the topic with various L2 teachers, I came across very different, and perhaps more importantly, very determined opinions on co-operative learning. Therefore I felt it would be more productive for the study to use qualitative research methods in the interviews than, for example, quantitatively discover how extensively co-operative learning is used by L2 teachers.

The secondary sources used in this thesis are mostly literature written in the fields of both applied linguistics, namely SLA, and education. I have chosen some principal works in order to familiarize myself with the topic more thoroughly, but also literature which is more specifically written on the area of SLA the study focuses on, L2 learning and learning theories. In addition I have attempted to include literature which is reasonably current. The theories I have chosen to discuss in my study are rather different from one another. The UG approach by Noam Chomsky is included in this study even though it is not primarily a theory of L2 learning. However, it is probably one the most prominent theories of L1 learning, and as it provides ideas for L2 learning as well I felt it would be interesting to include it in the study. Stephen Krashen was chosen for the study partly due the same reason as Noam Chomsky, in other words, he too is a noted language learning theorist. However, Krashen's monitor model is concerned with L2 learning, and was therefore different from the UG approach, and appropriate for the study. Finally, I chose the activity theory as the third L2 learning theory. I came

across with it as I read of L. S. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. As the theory emphasises the activity of the learner, I presumed it would provide an interesting comparison to the UG approach.

Coincidentally, it appeared to have similar ideas of learning as co-operative learning, which further increased my interest in the theory.

The second part of my study is concerned with co-operative learning. There was plenty of literature on co-operative learning available, but unfortunately there is very little literature written in and hardly any studies made in Finland. However, since the study does not concentrate solely on Finland, but more on universal possibilities, I did not find this a problem. However, it was difficult to find material on the use of co-operative learning in L2 learning and teaching. An article by Arja Kujansivu (2001) which I found very useful to my study describes the use of co-operative learning in L2 teaching. As I was searching for previous studies on the use of co-operative learning in L2 learning and teaching conducted in Finland, I came across a Pro Gradu thesis from 1998 by Ritva-Liisa Rantavuori.

#### **4. Second language learning theories**

“We can only pursue a better understanding of L2 learning in an organized and productive way if our efforts are guided by some form of theory”. (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 2) The actual experience of L2 learning is very much practical, but in order to understand L2 learning better, we need theories. One might argue the necessity of this understanding, but according to Mitchell and Myles there are at least two basic reasons for that. Firstly, they claim, it is important to understand more about language learning, because it is related to other human learning and therefore improves our understanding of the human mind. Secondly, a good theory will be beneficial for those involved in the learning process, for the learners of L2 and the teachers as well by providing them with a better understanding both failures and successes in L2 learning. A good theory should consist of the following elements presented in M. H. Long’s article “The least a second language acquisition theory needs to explain” (Long 1990, 649-66) cited in Mitchell and Myles.:

- (1) clear and explicit statements of the ground the theory is supposed to cover, and the claims which it is making
- (2) systematic procedures for confirming/disconfirming the theory, through data gathering and interpretation;
- (3) not only descriptions of L2 phenomena, but attempts to explain why they are so, and to propose mechanisms for change;
- (4) last but not least, engagement with other theories in the field, and serious attempts to account for at least some of the phenomena which are ‘common ground’ in ongoing public discussion.

In this chapter I will discuss three L2 learning theories. I will briefly introduce each theory from an overall perspective, but the main focus is on the theories' ideas on L2 learning as a phenomenon, the role of the learner, the role of the surroundings, and the implications of the theory to L2 teaching.

#### 4.1. The Universal Grammar approach

The strongest linguistic influence on second language acquisition in recent years has been the Universal Grammar approach, which was formulated by Noam Chomsky. Universal grammar is “the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages...the essence of human language” (Chomsky 1976, 26). This linguistic theory is not primarily interested in SLA research, but more so in the knowledge of language. However, the approach is very interesting to SLA researchers, because “Universal Grammar is the black box responsible for language acquisition. It is the mechanism in the mind which allows children to construct a grammar out of the raw language materials supplied by their parents.” (Cook 1997, 262, cited in Mitchell and Myles 1998, 42).

According to Chomsky all languages consist of a set of principles and parameters. Principles are parallel and universal, but parameters vary according to language. An example of a language principle is *structure dependency*, which means that “language is organized in such a way that it crucially depends on the structural relationships between elements in a sentence” (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 49). Or, as Cook points out: “abstract principles... permit or prohibit certain structures from occurring in all human languages” (Cook 2001, 181). A parameter, conversely, is what separates a language from others. The rules which tell us how the different elements in a specific language are in relation to one another are the parameters, and that is why all languages have their distinctive features. Chomsky says

“a language is not, then, a system of rules, but a set of specifications for parameters in an invariant system of principles of Universal Grammar” (Chomsky 1995, 388, cited in Mitchell et al. 1998, 53).

According to the approach, the ability to learn languages is innate, in other words, all human beings have ability to learn languages. Chomsky says that a language is far too difficult a system to learn so effortlessly for children if they did not have an innate system of language learning in them. There is also a great motive for children to learn a language, in other words, to actualize this innate possibility; the need to communicate. The ability alone is not sufficient for a child to actually become a skilful user of L1. “Learning in the UG model is a straightforward matter of getting language input. Input is the evidence on which learners base their knowledge of language. It can be either positive or negative” (Cook 2001, 182). Cook continues by saying that many linguists believe positive evidence alone is required for L1 learning.

L2 learning however is not as simple due to the already existing L1. The learner no longer has a similar need to learn in order to communicate. When discussing UG approach as a SLA theory, one should bear in mind that SLA is not the primary object of UG. However, it does provide an idea of how L2 learning takes place. In many ways L2 learning is considered similar to L1 learning. The learners of L2 go through similar systematic stages of learning as do children learning their L1 (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 71). This raises the question whether the access to UG changes as the learner grows older. The question itself alongside with the four hypotheses it has produced are more interesting than the actual answer. According Robert Bley-Vroman, the question itself is rather unanswerable, but the ideas raised from it have had a great impact on the understanding of L2 learning (Bley-Vroman 1998, 1-8). In short, the four hypotheses evolved from the UG access-question are (Mitchell et al 1998, 61-62):

- (1) There is no access to the UG, which suggest that L2 learning is based on other cognitive problem solving skills.

- (2) There is full access to UG, which suggests that L1 and L2 acquisitions are more or less similar.
- (3) If there is indirect access to UG, L2 is then acquired via L1 and its parameters.
- (4) Finally, some aspects of UG are still available, but some are only available via L1, i.e. some principles might be available, whereas the parameters more likely are not.

The approach is mainly focused on syntax, and therefore has some weaknesses in terms of explaining L2 learning. It fails to acknowledge social and psychological variables, which are inevitably present in L2 learning. Language learning and especially L2 learning does not occur in a vacuum. Mitchell and Myles also point out that the approach does not recognize the learner as an individual with varying characteristics, but as an ‘idealised receptacle for the UG blueprint’ (1998, 69). SLA has none the less gained significantly from UG due to its explicit statements of language acquisition, which undoubtedly have established a comprehensive foundation to understanding L2 learning.

*The minimalist programme*, revised from UG by Chomsky which suggests that learning a language can be reduced to the learning of the properties of vocabulary, in other words, vocabulary should not be considered as a list of separate items, but as items which dictate structures and how they can be used in a given language. From this approach, language teaching should therefore concentrate on these vocabulary items in a manner which specifies how they occur in structures (Cook 2001, 183-185).

#### 4.2. Krashen’s Monitor model and input hypothesis

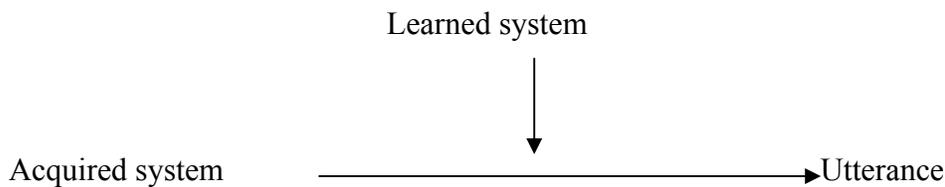
In the 1970s and 1980s *child directed speech* (CDS) was a target of active research. Language acquisition does not occur in a vacuum. A child requires utterances, which formulate to understandable messages. CDS was criticized by UG theorists for claiming that L1 acquisition could be the result of

input solely. However, the importance of input in L1 can hardly be completely omitted when considering children such as Genie (Yule 1996, 171-172). She had been deprived of almost all physical, emotional and social interaction. At thirteen she was found and taken into a hospital. At first she was unable to use language, but after a while she started to respond to speech. Her language capacity remained fairly low; nonetheless she was able to acquire a language after the critical period once she was exposed to it. In the following paragraphs I will discuss L2 learning and acquisition according to Stephen Krashen. Krashen believes input is essential for L2 learning, just as Genie's case proved input to be essential to L1 learning.

In the early 1980s Krashen (1981) formulated the *Monitor model* for L2 learning. Monitor theory divides language learning ability into two independent systems; *language acquisition* and *language learning*. It is necessary to understand the difference between these two in order to fully understand the L2 ability of learners. Language acquisition is subconscious, whereas language learning is a conscious activity. According to Krashen (1981, 2) language acquisition is more important than language learning. However, they are interrelated. Acquisition “requires meaningful interaction in the target language” and the importance is “not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding” (Krashen 1981, 1). Krashen formulated an *input hypothesis* to explain language acquisition. In its most developed form it claims that exposing a learner to comprehensible input is not only necessary, but also sufficient for L2 acquisition to take place (Mitchell et al. 1998, 126-7). Moreover, if the input is understood, and there is a sufficient amount of it, all the grammar required will be provided. This would then also propose that the only required input is positive evidence, which is partially the case in the UG approach as well. His proposal has been criticized for having little empirical evidence, and for being anything but easily testable. Also the idea of comprehensible input being sufficient has been questioned due to many cases of L2 learners, whose

language production is deficient despite substantial meaning-oriented input, even if their understanding of L2 is very good.

The conscious learning can only operate as a monitor for acquired knowledge of L2, hence the name monitor theory. Language learning is best enhanced by error correction and knowledge of rules and forms. According to Krashen, the distinction between acquisition and learning is not his; it has been studied by Lawler and Selinker in 1971 and Corder in 1967 (Krashen 1981, 2). However, the specific interrelation between these two is what distinguishes the monitor theory from these previous ideas. The interrelation is illustrated in the figure below (Krashen 1981, 2):



According to Krashen, a knowledge learnt about a language can never be converted into acquired knowledge. Learnt knowledge can only be used to monitor acquired knowledge, it can be used to check the information already acquired in a language production situation. Language learning provides the learner with a tool to produce more accurate utterances.

The monitor theory and the UG approach share similar ideas about language acquisition. However, Krashen, as opposed to Chomsky, acknowledges the significance of the learner's individuality. I will now discuss the ways Krashen believes individual differences in a learner influence L2 acquisition and L2 learning.

In terms of the conscious L2 learning, Krashen says there are different types of monitor user; *the over user*, *the under user* and *the optimal use* (Krashen 1981, 12-18). The over users are self-

conscious and very much aware of the correct forms and rules, but due to constant awareness of rules they tend to be very hesitant users of L2. The under users, on the contrary, are outgoing and often fairly fluent and courageous in using L2, but they may not have a conscious knowledge of grammatical rules, or at least do not consciously use them to monitor their utterances. The optimal users are aware of the correct forms and monitor their utterances, but that does not interfere with their fluency or courage to use L2.

Krashen acknowledges the differences in the learners' language aptitude and attitude as well. Language aptitude refers to the ability to learn L2 and can be measured by tests (Krashen 1981, 19-39). Language attitude refers to variables which affect language learning. Krashen claims they are not interrelated, i.e. a student can have high aptitude and low attitude, or low aptitude and high attitude, or high or low both. Krashen discusses language aptitude according to MLAT, a test to measure language aptitude. The test and language aptitude will be discussed chapter 5. According to Krashen, attitude affects both language acquisition and language learning. Attitudinal factors are *personality factors, empathy, and motivation*, both integrative and instrumental. Personality factors, such as self-confidence and an outgoing personality are issues that affect most clearly to output, i.e. have an effect on language learning. However, they can affect language acquisition as well. Krashen suggests that a person with low self-esteem may be less prone to acquire input as he or she is less open to influences (1981, 23). Empathy exposes the learner to input. The ability to relate to speakers of the target language helps the learner to acquire the input. Motivation has an important role in language acquisition and language learning. The two types of motivation will be discussed in more detail in chapter 5.

For L2 teaching Krashen's model presents fairly straightforward guidelines. L2 teaching should consist of elements which enhance language acquisition, in other words, 'maximizing comprehensible input' (Krashen 1981, 9). In a classroom situation the best activities are based on listening. In addition to sufficient input, the learner should receive error correction and rules of forms to

be able to improve accuracy in an output situation. One attitudinal aspect directly related to classroom situations is the attitude toward the classroom and the teacher, which “may relate to both language acquisition and learning” (1981, 23).

#### 4. 3. Activity theory

L. S. Vygotsky (1896-1934) was the founder of *socio-cultural theory*. According to Vygotsky, a child's development is a direct result of her/his culture. For Vygotsky, development applied primarily to mental development, such as thought, language, reasoning processes and mental functions. However, he observed that these abilities developed through social interactions. The theory derived from socio-cultural psychology, and presented here is called *The Activity theory* (The History of Activity Theory). After Vygotsky's death another Russian psychologist A. N. Leontiev (1903-79), who both continued and reacted against Vygotsky's ideas, became the principal leader of the theory. Activity theory includes the notion that an activity is carried out within a social context, i.e. learning is seen first social and then individual. SLA researchers became increasingly interested with the idea in the 1990s (The history of activity theory). However, socio-cultural theorists do not give a specific description of language as a formal system. They tend to focus on fragments of language in their empirical studies and not on language as a complex and extensive system (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 160). As far as SLA is concerned, socio-cultural theory still has left many questions unanswered.

The activity theory proposes that language learning is similar to learning per se (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 162). The emphasis is not on the learned item or subject, but in the processes of learning. As language is considered a tool for thought (Mitchell et al 1998, 161), the cognitive activities that are being stimulated from solving a problem are most important to L2 learning as well. Problem solving requires intellectual activity. It is precisely the activity of the learner and the process of thought

that are essential to learning. According to A. A. Leontiev, a Russian psycholinguist, language is the means mediating intellectual activity in thought (Leontiev 1981, 64). Even though the theory emphasises the importance and even sufficiency of intellectual activity and problem solving capacity, Vygotsky points out that “Improvement of one function of consciousness or one aspect of its activity can affect the development of another only to the extent that there are elements common to both functions or activities” (Vygotsky 1978, 83).

Even though fundamentally members of a social construction of some kind, all learners are individuals and “active constructors of their own learning environment” (Mitchell et al. 1998, 162). The key issue in the activity theory is the activity of the student, who strives towards a goal. For a L2 learner, the goal is to learn a language. Moreover, a student also has an object, namely a reason to reach the goal. The object varies according to the individual; from passing an exam to moving to a country where L2 is spoken. Objects motivate activity, which then transforms into actions taken to achieve the goal. Leontiev says that there is a system of motives in every individual (Leontiev 1981, 18).

Since learning is a social phenomenon, the use of language is therefore very often a social phenomenon as well. Therefore social interaction and communication are considered beneficial to L2 learning and should be exploited in L2 teaching. Social psychology has regulated a set of rules in organizing the most efficient forms of organizations for group-activities and communications. These rules are based on the personalities and roles of the learner, and are constructed to form heterogeneous groups to improve activity. However, Leontiev urges teachers not to solely confine to these rules, as they may have a long lasting effect on the learners perception of his or her own learning capacities (1981, 87). He does acknowledge the positive influence such group formation has on social integration. In addition to group organizing, it is important for the teacher to provide the learners with means to problem solving. Lessons should therefore be constructed of learning separate L2 items but of learning to learn L2. Moreover, the teacher has a significant role in motivating the learners’ activity.

## **5. Learner as an individual**

L2 learning theories aim to produce general statements which explain language learning. However, learning is not a collective phenomenon. The previous chapter discussed the influence of interacting with others to learning, but there are also several learner internal factors which undoubtedly have an effect on learning. This is precisely the element of learning which is not presented in the UG approach. However, Krashen does acknowledge the importance and consequence of the learners' individuality to the outcome of learning (Krashen 1981, 12). Similarly, the activity theory points out the importance of individuals in the outcome of learning (Leontiev 1981, 81). Therefore I have included a separate chapter which discusses the individual differences in learners which have an effect on learning. The themes I will discuss here are motivation, attitude, aptitude, age, and extrovert/introvert personality.

### 5.1. Motivation

Cook (2001, 114-118) presents two different types of motivation; *integrative motivation* and *instrumental motivation*. Integrative motivation reflects interest in the language itself and the culture it represents, whereas instrumental motivation sees learning the language as a device to reach a goal, for example a good grade or a future career. Both types of motivation are prone to increase success in L2 learning. For teaching purposes motivation is also crucial. Ideally students would already have integrative motivation towards L2, but this is hardly ever the case with all students. Therefore it is important to include elements concerning the students' world to classroom activities. Introducing aspects of instrumental motivation, e.g. future career, can be beneficial. Whether *long-term motivation* (integrative) increases success in L2 learning more than *short-term motivation* (Instrumental) is under

debate, but what is commonly agreed is the significance of motivation to success. Furthermore, success causes high motivation, which ideally results into a positive circle.

## 5.2. Attitude

Behind a student's motivation there is an image of the language and the culture it represents. This image can be very influential in terms of the student's *attitude* towards L2. Cook presents a division of attitudes by Lambert (1981) into two different types of bilingualism; *additive bilingualism* and *subtractive bilingualism* (Cook 2001, 119). In additive bilingualism learners feel they gain from learning L2 and do not have to give up anything they already know. In subtractive bilingualism, on the contrary, learners are unwilling to learn L2, because they believe it decreases the knowledge they have achieved before. Evidently additive bilingualism is the idea with which successful L2 learning can occur. Cook (2001, 120) has also cited another model of attitudes is the acculturation theory developed by Berry (Berry, 1998, 84-101). The theory suggests that attitudes towards another culture, and therefore L2, can be drawn from these two questions:

- (1) Is it considered to be of value to maintain cultural identity and characteristics?
- (2) Is it considered to be of value to maintain relationships with other groups?

According to the model, both questions can be answered either 'yes' or 'no'. For L2 learning, the most beneficial way is to answer 'yes' to both questions. It is important not to diminish L1 and its culture, but also to be willing to adopt knowledge of L2 and its culture. And even though the model is mainly used for learners with active contact to L2, namely learners who live in the country, the importance of learners' attitudes are important in classroom situated L2 learning as well. Cook suggest that another way to enhance positive attitudes to L2 learning would be to introduce celebrities who have successively learned L2 without it having a negative influence on their L1 (Cook 2001, 122). From the

teaching point of view Krashen points out an important factor of attitude. He says “attitude towards classroom and teacher may relate to both acquisition and learning” (1981, 23).

### 5.3. Aptitude

Some people appear to learn L2 with less effort than others. *Language aptitude* is a term used in connection with L2 learning with students in a classroom learning situation. Aptitude means the ability to learn L2 in a classroom situation. *The Modern Languages Aptitude Test* created in the early 1980s was designed to test language aptitude in a certain kind of classroom situation. Different types of methods in teaching favour different types of aptitude. In 1981 Carroll, cited in Cook (2001, 124), presented four factors predicting student's success:

- (1) Phonemic coding ability
- (2) Grammatical sensitivity
- (3) Inductive language learning ability
- (4) Rote learning

These factors are the kind of elements used in teaching based on audiolingual methods. A slightly deeper language processing skills are required in Peter Skehan's factors (Skehan 1989, 35):

- (1) Phonemic coding ability
- (2) Language analytic ability
- (3) Memory

The usability of aptitude tests in teaching is somewhat problematic. The tests can be helpful in terms of detecting difficulties in L2 learning, and also challenging the most gifted students. However, one should bear in mind that aptitude is not the only element in successful L2 learning, and therefore it should not be emphasised as an incomparable factor.

#### 5.4. Age

The age of the learner was briefly discussed earlier. The notion of critical period is more a characteristic of L1 learning, but the popular belief is that children are also better at L2 learning.

However, several studies have been made and the results are anything but congruent. There is some variation in the different elements of language, for example Ramsey and Wright (1974), cited in Cook (2001, 134), claim that pronunciation is best learned at an early age, preferably under the age of six.

Their statement was based on a study conducted among immigrant children. Cummins (1981), cited in Cook (2001, 134), on the other hand claimed that in a teaching situation older children are better at L2 learning, including at pronunciation. Cook (2001, 132-136) summarizes the numerous statements by saying that due to more developed cognitive skills adults have the capacity to start more quickly, but children tend to be able to reach a higher level of L2 given sufficient amount of time.

#### 5.5. Extroversion vs. introversion

Finally a short discussion on students' personality in terms of extroversion

/introversion. An extrovert person who is sociable and outgoing is considered to be a better L2 learner by some researchers. Rossier (1975), cited in Cook (2001, 138), discovered a connection between oral fluency and extroversion. According to Krashen (1981, 31) the difference between an outgoing learner personality and a self-conscious learner is interrelated to the use of the monitor. He does not, however, suggest that there is difference in the learning or acquisition ability, but in the output and utterance fluency. Therefore, introversion is hardly an obstacle to L2 learning, apart from some potential reluctance towards oral presentation. Extroversion and introversion are more likely to influence the preferred learning method than the actual learning ability.

## 6. Co-operative learning

John Dewey, a philosopher of the early twentieth century, believed that learning should be an active and dynamic process. Children should be provided with an environment which encourages their natural interests and allows social interaction and working together. While interacting, children receive feedback from their peers and learn appropriate social behaviour. At the time Dewey's ideas were quite revolutionary, but they had an enormous impact on the field of education as a whole, but they are also an important foundation to the theory of co-operative learning (Gillies and Ashman 2003, 1; S & S 2001, 10). In this chapter I will first study the historical steps which formed co-operative learning to what it is today, and also discuss its existence as a object of study in Finland. I will then proceed to discussing how an L2 learner can benefit from using co-operative learning as a learning strategy. I will also introduce some critique co-operative learning has received. From this more theoretical perspective I will turn to a more concrete explanations, in other words, discuss the teaching and learning methods which could be used in L2 classroom environment with various fields in L2 learning e.g. grammar or listening comprehension.

### 6.1. History of co-operative learning

As mentioned above, John Dewey was one of the major influences in group work becoming a target of interest in the field of education. Another theoretical approach to children learning in groups is Piaget's *Theory of soioi-cognitive conflict*, which emphasises the importance of the feedback children receive when working in groups (Gillies and Ashman 2003, 11-12). This then forces them to reflect their prior ideas to those received from others, which will then formulate new ideas and increase the students'

understanding of things. Reflecting and reevaluating things enhances their capacity of thinking, which does not only give a fuller understanding of the matter in question but provides them with better learning capacity. *The socio-constructive view* of Vygotsky is somewhat similar, as it proposes that interacting with others; children can perform things they could do on their own (Vygotsky 1978, 83). This requires for the group to be heterogeneous, where skills of different level can be best exploited. The effect of learning in a social context is that the interpersonal process becomes an intrapersonal progress (Gillies and Ashman 2003, 11).

There were some studies conducted in the first half of the twentieth century on group work, but it mainly focused on group dynamics, social outcomes, and not as much on the learning results, the academic outcomes. Some researchers have argued that the interest in the individual in the 1950s dissipated the interest in group dynamics. However, the interest returned in the 1970s and started a very rapidly emerging field of study (Gillies and Ashman 2003, 5). According to Shlomo Sharan (1990, 285) the research was published systematically and academically controlled only in the mid 1970s. Since then studies have been very extensive, and have had their major interests in the interpersonal and inter-group relations similar to the studies in the beginning of the century, but also in the progress of the improvement of students' academic results. Slavin analysed sixty studies which were conducted between 1972 and 1987. He came to the conclusion that in order for co-operative learning to effectively improve learning, the group must have a collective goal towards which they are all striving for, and must also have individual accountability in their group's performance (Gillies and Ashman 2003, 7). These two elements then became necessary for co-operative learning methods. In the 1990s two major areas of interest concerning co-operative learning were the effect of interaction on learning and studying which cognitive methods students use while studying co-operatively (Gillies and Ashman 2003, 9). Since the 1970s researchers have studied the effectiveness of co-operative learning in comparison to a traditional whole class environment. More recently the studies have concentrated on

the various possibilities to use co-operative learning. The main interest is no more to investigate if the method is successful, but to gain more information how it could be used in vary different kinds of learning environment, in other words for students of different levels of age, level of education and different social background (S & S 2001b, 385-386).

## 6.2. Co-operative learning in Finland

In Finland co-operative learning is a much less studied field of education. It arrived to Finland in the beginning of the 1990s and gained popularity in the mid 1990s. However, it did not receive that much interest in universities. There has not been a single PhD thesis written about co-operative learning in Finland. The fact that there is little research data from Finland available, and that there is not very much literature written in Finnish are probable reasons to why the theoretical views of co-operative learning are not very well known among the professionals of education. Co-operative learning is fairly often mistakenly considered as merely a form of group work, and therefore often regarded as non effective or difficult (Sahlberg and Sharan 2001a).

In 1989 Professor Viljo Kohonen brought the idea of co-operative learning with him from the United States. He initiated the applying of co-operative learning to the educational system in Finland, more accurately in Tampere. In the spring of 1990 TIIMI-projekti was launched in Tampereen normaalikoulu. TIIMI-projekti was designed to integrate teaching in the school through co-operative teaching, and it was a part of a European Learning to learn-project (Folland and Hiisivuori 1994, 3-4). The project had two major goals:

- (1) To improve students' working skills emphasising initiative, responsibility, learning to learn, and pair and group work.

- (2) To integrate subjects for a more wholesome contents, and to improve co-operation between teachers of different subjects.

The project was conducted over a three-year period. It was voluntary for the teachers to participate, and 25 teachers of 56 participated. They were educated before the project began and throughout the project. Folland and Hiisivuori concluded that the actual results of the project were only starting to show after three years. The teachers had during that time managed to internalize the ideas of co-operative learning and had become skilful users of the methods. During the period the students had learned how to become more competent learners (Folland and Hiisivuori 1994, 35). The project demonstrated the holistic characteristic of co-operative learning; the support of teachers' peer groups was considered very important as well the ability to apply co-operative learning into the curriculum.

### 6.3. Basic principles

Slavin came to the conclusion in his 1989 study of former studies that in order for co-operative learning method to be truly efficient in terms of results, it requires some principles (Gillies and Ashman 2003, 7). These principles are collective throughout the different methods used in co-operative learning. The principles are *simultaneous interaction*, *congruent participation*, *positive interdependence*, and *individual accountability*. Kagan and Kagan (2001, 39-42) give the following definitions for the four principles.

*Simultaneous interaction* is a counter reaction to consecutive interaction. If in a classroom situation every pupil has their turn to share their ideas, the amount of time each pupil will have for his or her thoughts is very limited. If this sharing is done in pairs or in small groups, every pupil will have more time for expression and most importantly, everyone is active. It is more important

to be active for a longer period of time than to interact simultaneously with the whole group. Also, once each member of a small group has shared his or her ideas the groups can be mixed.

*Congruent participation* assures that simultaneous interaction operates as it is intended to. Even in a small group the time given to, or taken by, each individual can vary immensely. Therefore it is important to be very specific in the instructions given to the group. In the example of sharing experiences on a given topic, the instruction should not be indefinite, in other words “the group discusses the following topics”. Each member of the group needs to be included in the instruction: “Each member gives opinions on the topic”.

The most essential principle of co-operative learning is *positive interdependence*. Students must understand that they can not succeed without other members of the group. In order for any member of the group to do well in a given exercise, he or she must learn to co-operate and strive towards a joined goal as a group. The group is also only as successful as its weakest member. Therefore it is in the group’s best interest to be as helpful and encouraging towards others as possible. This interdependence is positive namely because it encourages each member to work hard for the group and also realise the possibility for other members to work at their highest capacity.

In order for the less enthusiastic students to gain from the efforts of others, the fourth principle, *individual accountability*, ensures that no member can take advantage of others hard work. In practice individual responsibility could go as follows:

The group has four members. Each individual studies a separate section of a new text. He or she then teaches it to the other members. When the text is being taught to everyone, each member will answer to the teachers question on any given part of the text. Therefore it is vital for them to learn from their group members. And also, due to group pressure, it is necessary for everyone to teach their part well. Individual responsibility can also controlled by individual tests and/or evaluation.

#### 6.4. Teaching methods

The most general misinterpretation of co-operative learning is that it is a teaching method which brings variety into the more standard methods. More over, a method called jigsaw method is interpreted as a synonym for co-operative learning. Co-operative learning provides a theory for numerous teaching methods, and one of them is called the jigsaw method. The methods presented here are “most widely adopted by educators and which have stimulated considerable research” (Knight and Morton Bohlmeier 1990, 2). These methods are *circles of learning*, *jigsaw method*, *STAD*, and *group investigation*.

*The circle of learning* was first called *learning together*, but it gained its current form in 1984 when Johnson and Johnson gave 18 specific steps for guidelines (Cited in Knight and Morton Bohlmeier 1990, 2). Groups of no more than six students are structured in circles; each member has a specified role in the group to ensure activity from everyone. The teacher is present at all time, but is more of an observer of the groups’ working skills, rather that the provider of information. The teacher should be consulted only if the group as a whole can not come up with a solution to a problem. Group performance is evaluated and praised. However, each member is aware that their personal contribution is also evaluated.

*The jigsaw method* is one of the best known methods of co-operative learning (S&S 2001a, 18). Each member of the group specialises in a specific area of the given exercise, at which point the group is divided. New learning groups are then formed by students who have the same topic. These counterpart groups then work co-operatively discussing and learning their part of the exercise (Knight and Morton Bohlmeier 1990, 3). After this the students return to their original groups and share their knowledge to the other members of the group. Clarke (2001, 85-86) points out that there are

many variables of the jigsaw method which differ in details. However, they all share the following four general stages:

- (1) Introduction: The teacher introduces the topic which is then divided between the members in each homegroup.
- (2) Detailed research: Students form specialising groups where they thoroughly study their own topic.
- (3) Reporting and adapting: Students return to their homegroups. Each member reports his or her findings to the others. The others are not merely passive recipients, but each specific area of the topic should be discussed in the homegroup to insure everyone understands the main ideas.
- (4) Combining and evaluation: The teacher gives the groups an exercise where they need to be able to apply the new information, which will be evaluated. The group will evaluate their performance as a group as well.

Clarke mentions the risk of artificial interdependence in the jigsaw method which can only be eliminated by ensuring the students belief in the importance of their own efforts, as well as in the efforts of their group members (Clarke 2001, 100).

*Student Teams –Achievements Divisions*, or *STAD*, is the most studied co-operative teaching method. It is a very flexible method; it has been used in many subjects, e.g. mathematics, science, social studies, and in all the levels of education; from elementary school to high-school and vocational school (Slavin 2001, 50-51). Students work in groups of four or five. A new theme is introduced to everyone by the teacher and then the groups are given exercises on the topic. The group must work together and ensure that every member of the group acquires the subject matter. After a sufficient amount of time is given for the groups to learn and practice, a test is held. The test is done individually, this way the teacher can affirm individual accountability. Each group is, however,

evaluated on the basis of the total score of all its members. This provides a basis for the groups' accomplishments. Even though the groups compete against each other, the idea is not to combine the plain scores of the groups', but their improvements. This provides an opportunity even for the weakest member to gain the most scores for his or her team by improving his or her own accomplishments (Knight and Morton Bohlmeier 1990, 4). According to Slavin (1990, 261-283) a survey of 22 studies of STAD showed that in 17 cases the method improved learning results remarkably, and in the remaining 5 studies there were no considerable differences. However, there was no explanation provided for the five studies which did not show improvement in results. At least there was no decreasing of results in any of these studies. Slavin (1990, 270) has also studied the influence of STAD-methods in students' self-esteem and classroom satisfaction. He claims that STAD has improved these important elements greatly.

*Group investigation* is a method directed to students who are already familiar with cooperative learning and are accustomed to working in groups. Group investigation consists of four principal elements; investigation, interaction, interpretation, and intrinsic motivation (S&S 1992). These four elements are combined in the six stages of group investigation (Sharan, Y. and Sharan, S. 1992, 159-171)).

- (1) The whole class decides how the target of the study is divided between the groups, and then study groups are formed.
- (2) Each group draw up a study plan.
- (3) Groups proceed according to their plan and conduct the study.
- (4) Each group prepares a presentation of their results.
- (5) Groups present their findings to the rest of the class.
- (6) The teacher and the students evaluate the project of study.

The teacher's role in group investigation is the originator of the project. The topic is carefully chosen by the teacher. It should be multilateral; no one right answer can be found. It should raise genuine interest among the students. During the study the teacher is a coordinator. He or she helps with the study, but does not provide answers, only means to achieve the goal. Group investigation appears to be rather time consuming, but it activates the students very well. In addition to learning the actual subject matter, the students learn how to look for information from various sources instead of merely asking the teacher for the correct answer, should there be one.

#### 6.5. Motivation and co-operative learning

David W. Johnson and Roger T. Johnson (1994) created a theory of social interdependence to explain how co-operative learning increases motivation from the perspective of social interdependence, and more over, how it enhances learning (McWhaw et al. 2003, 74). Motivation originates from the Latin word *to move*, so motivation can therefore be described as the accelerator which promotes us to achieve desired goals. Johnson and Johnson (2003, 137) give four propositions that should be considered in order to understand motivation:

- (1) Motivation is aimed at achieving goals.
- (2) Motivation is powered by emotions.
- (3) Motivation has interpersonal and social origins.
- (4) Social interdependence provides the context in which motivation takes place.

Literature on motivation often concentrates on achieving goals, and many of these goals are academic, either directly, or the academic goals are instrumental. Goals concerning school and learning are often

‘imposed’, i.e. goals which are given by someone else, often an authority. These imposed goals are somewhat problematic in terms of motivation, since

“motivation to achieve a goal is related directly to the sense of ownership a person has for the goal”(Johnson and Johnson 2003, 138). This is, then, a task for teachers to increase motivation even though the goals are, at least to some extent, imposed.

Motivation is social, and as Johnson and Johnson (2003, 140) suggest that “motivated behaviour, goals, their outcomes, and the evaluations of success and failure do not occur in a social vacuum, but rather in a social setting”. The goals are usually related to other people’s goals, either positively or negatively. Positively related goals are joined goals, and negatively related goals are competitive. Interdependence can also be negative or positive, and similarly to motivation, positive means co-operation and negative competition. Social interdependence can be summarised as “the way in which interdependence is structured determines how individuals interact, and the interaction pattern determines the outcomes of the situation” (Johnson et al. 2003, 143). Johnson and Johnson also claim that “students’ motivation to enquire, reason, learn and apply is increased when educators ensure that classrooms and schools are dominated by co-operative rather than competitive or individualistic learning” (2003, 168), and it ensures a high level of positive motivation by most students most of the time (171).

#### 6.6. Co-operative learning in L2 teaching

The emphasis on language teaching and what is important in L2 learning have changed tremendously in the course of time. The modern idea of L2 ability consists of not so much the knowledge of L2, but the ability to use it. The curricula emphasise the importance of communicational competence (Kujansivu 2001, 199). In the current curricula learning strategies are mentioned as an important part of

language learning. These strategies include searching for knowledge in various ways and self-evaluation through which the student can then improve his or her learning skills (Opetushallitus 2004). I will now discuss the use of co-operative learning in L2 learning and teaching.

Ghazi Ghaith conducted a study among Lebanese L2 students of English. Ghaith studied the proclaimed positive effects of co-operative learning by aiming to answer the following three questions (Ghaith 2003, 455):

- (1) Is the Learning Together CL model more effective than whole-class instruction in promoting the EFL reading achievement of multilingual Lebanese learners?
- (2) Is the Learning Together CL model more effective than whole-class instruction in promoting the academic self-esteem of multilingual Lebanese EFL learners?
- (3) Is the Learning Together CL model more effective than whole-class instruction in decreasing the feelings of school alienation of multilingual Lebanese EFL learners?

According to Ghaith the results of the study support the statement that co-operative learning is a more successful way of learning than whole-class instructions. However, in terms of academic self-esteem and decreasing school alienation, Ghaith did not detect any significant differences.

Before actually using any teaching methods in the classroom, it is important to introduce co-operative learning to the students by degrees. A good starting point is seating arrangement. In L2 classroom situations it is important to have eye contact in conversations and therefore it is preferable to place students opposite one another instead of next to each other. Another important point is to change pairs and groups often enough so that the students learn to work and discuss with everyone instead of just their best friend. Working with different kind of people is important as such, but especially in the oral exercises of L2. The learning situation is much more authentic when students learn how to communicate with as many students as possible.

Since communicational skills are now considered important in L2 teaching, it is important for every student to feel comfortable to participate in the classroom. Perhaps then it is especially important in L2 classrooms to concentrate on creating an environment, where mistakes and the embarrassment of failure are not a matter of concern. Speaking out in a small group is less intimidating than speaking out with the whole class listening. Changing partners and groups gradually provides the student with the confidence to speak with everyone. Continuous group- or pair-working provides the student with plenty of opportunities to use the language, much more than in a teacher-centred classroom.

One aspect of co-operative learning emphasised by Kujansivu (2001) to be beneficial to L2 learning in particular, are self-evaluation and -reflection. It encourages the learner to consider his or her strengths and weaknesses as an L2 learner, consider possible learning strategies and review their own progress. She states that there are many different ways of realizing self-evaluating, and it requires some consideration in order to be beneficial. It is perhaps best to start with ready-made forms, where the student can choose the best alternative. However, these forms do not require a more thorough consideration from the student. Therefore, after the students are familiar with the idea of self-evaluating, more complex questions challenge the students to a more profound study of their learning strategies and efforts ( Kujansivu 2001, 209). Kujansivu points out that even though self-evaluation is based on the student's self-reflection, it should be done in collaboration with the teacher. This prevents the student from being too harsh or too indifferent towards his or her achievement and goals. Neither way leads to desirable results.

Kujansivu states that co-operative learning can be applied to all areas of L2 learning; it is usable in grammar, oral skills as well as in listening comprehension exercises. She points out that it is not unusual for teachers to use co-operative learning for some individual area of L2 learning occasionally. The most important thing to understand for a teacher is to see co-operative learning as a

comprehensive practice, and not just as a separate and occasional method. This, according to Kujansivu, is one of the most frequent misunderstandings among educators who are not fully familiar with the idea of co-operative learning. Moreover, using co-operative learning sporadically is not sufficient to promote its advantages, due to which it is considered as a less successful way of learning regarding achievement by some (Kujansivu 2001). According to Kujansivu, the amount of learning is not as important as the quality of what has been learnt. Therefore, the time spent to learn co-operative ways is worthwhile; co-operative learning enhances learning strategies which will improve the quality of learning.

L2 learning in a classroom situation consists of different elements of the language. These are grammar, vocabulary, writing, listening, and oral skills. As has been mentioned before, co-operative learning is an idea behind various methods which can be applied to different types of situation. In the following I will give examples of how co-operative learning can be used in L2 teaching presented by Kujansivu (2001, 211-219).

*Grammar* is probably the most easily applicable field of L2 teaching for co-operative learning. The teacher presents a new topic by giving the groups example sentences. The group will start by trying to understand the meaning of the sentences. After this they are given questions and clues which will help them to understand and accommodate the new grammatical aspect. This is called *problem-based learning*, or *task-based approach*. Task-based approach is used merely in co-operative learning. William Littlewood suggests that it “has achieved something of the status of a new orthodoxy: teachers in a wide range of settings are being told by curriculum leaders that this is how they should teach, and publishers almost everywhere are describing their new methods as task-based” (Littlewood 2004, 319). The idea of task-based learning is to activate the students into discovering the phenomenon in question themselves instead of receiving ready answers from the teacher. In a co-operative learning situation task-based learning is done in groups. The problem is discussed in the group and the teacher is

consulted primarily when the group wants to check their assumption. If the group has problems, the teacher aims to ask more questions which will help in revealing the problem. Providing ready answers is the final solution. After this the group will practise using the new grammar. Kujansivu states that an effective exercise is for each group to create their own examples. These examples can then be exchanged with another group. The examples written by students are often more interesting to them than examples given by the teacher (Kujansivu 2001, 213).

*Vocabulary* can be learned in groups by asking them to choose a certain amount of words, e.g. ten to fifteen, from the list of new words in a text. These words should be learned very carefully. During the next lesson each group quizzes the agreed words. It can be done either orally or in writing. According to Kujansivu it is more motivating to study the words if it is a fellow student who asks the questions. This obviously consists of the assumption that group control is an efficient motivator. She claims that giving the students the freedom to choose the words is not a problem; in her experience the students have the ability to choose the most essential words once they become accustomed to doing it.

*Writing* freeform texts is easily applied to co-operative learning. The groups can produce a collective product, or write their own stories. If the assignment is to produce a story within the group, it is possible for the less skilful writer to participate with ideas he or she might not be capable of producing in L2 without the help of the group. Conversely, a student with better skills in L2 might not be as imaginative in producing freeform text.

Another way to use co-operative learning in writing is pair or group evaluating. Each student writes his or her own text and exchange ready productions with partners. It is advisable to start the evaluation among pairs and later expand it to group-evaluating. The idea is to comment on the text first orally and perhaps later even by grades. This pair-evaluating is a skill that needs practising and specific guidance. Students are advised to compliment what is good in the text, and suggest what could be improved. They must be prepared to state arguments for their comments (Kujansivu 2001, 217).

*Listening comprehension* might appear to be the least obvious area of using co-operative learning. The listening exercise is first done independently, but Kujansivu (2001, 215) suggests that it is beneficial to discuss the answers within the group. Students can then give each others useful hints on how they managed to find the correct answers. After the discussion the texts is listened once more, and after that the teacher shows the correct answers.

“The cooperative learning setting also provides for frequent use of the language. The fact that students are in small group settings allows for much greater opportunities for language use than the traditional classroom” (Chafe 1998, 8). This is one of the most beneficial aspects of co-operative learning; the way it provides more opportunities to practising *oral skills*.

Even though necessary, the more frequent amount of opportunities is not the only benefit co-operative learning has to offer for practising oral skills. Kujansivu gives an example of reading a text in a group. Every one takes turns in reading and the others pay attention to pronunciation and correct the possible mistakes. After this the text is read again either in the group or in pairs if it is a dialogue. This time the importance should be in trying to make the text sound livelier, i.e. it should be acted instead of merely read.

## 6.7. Problems and criticism

Co-operative learning has received criticism beginning from the 1970s when it first gained popularity among educators. More than thirty years later and after numerous studies it is still strongly criticised. Perhaps the two main concerns are that co-operative learning promotes social skills at the expense of academic achievement, and that gifted students are neglected for the benefit of less gifted students.

Ritva-Liisa Rantavuori's pro-gradu thesis of learning the do-auxiliary supports the idea that co-operative learning is often preferred by students, but it questions its superiority in academic

achievement (1998). The grammatical element was taught in two different schools and two different ways of teaching were used; co-operative and teacher-directed. According to her study, the academic achievement was higher in the classroom where teacher-directed method was used. The study consisted of a pre-test and a post-test, which were held one month between them. The results show that the co-operative group had higher scores in the pre-test. Between the tests the do-auxiliary was taught to both groups, after which both groups did the same test once more. Both groups improved their scores from the pre-test, but the teacher-directed group improved slightly more. Rantavuori draws the conclusion that a teacher-directed method is more effective in grammar teaching. However, the difference in the results was very small, the difference was almost significant. The result is hardly sufficient to prove that co-operative learning results in lower academic achievements, but in the light of this study, it does not provide higher scores either.

One of the most obvious benefits of co-operative learning in L2 classrooms is the amount of opportunities it provides the students for practising their oral skills. Chafe (1998) points out that this might lead to the learning of incorrect grammatical forms and pronunciation, as the other learners may not be familiar with the correct forms either. Therefore peer evaluation and correction is not of much use. This requires special attention from the teachers.

In 1997 Ramsay and Richards conducted a study of gifted students and their responses to co-operative learning. According to the results of the study gifted students were less willing to continue to use co-operative learning compared to other students. The students felt they were not progressing in their studies in a desirable way, and felt co-operative learning was not suitable for them (cited in S & S 2001b, 390). Chafe (1998, 10) raises the same question of “students who are higher achievers. If students are placed in heterogeneous groups, will this hold back the stronger students who need to explain things to the weaker students, or will it simply strengthen their own knowledge?”

Chafe is rather convinced that co-operative learning is an effective way of teaching, but acknowledges its problems regarding the amount of information a teacher is required to govern, because “if cooperative learning is to be successful, teachers need to be aware of what research has shown to work” (1998, 10). She continues by saying that “They need to be convinced that it is worth the effort”. It is hardly surprising that teachers might find co-operative learning too overwhelming. Moreover, since the studies claim that co-operative learning is effective and does work if the teacher is proficient enough, it builds up unnecessary pressure for the teacher. Should the experiment produce undesired results, accusing the teacher of incompetence can not be the only solution and explanation.

If a teacher has thoroughly familiarised with co-operative learning and manages various teaching methods, problems or difficulties can still occur with co-operative learning. If a teacher is working in a school which does not use co-operative learning, he or she has no peer support, which is said to be important by Folland and Hiisivuori. It might confuse the students if co-operative learning ways are expected during some lessons but not during the others (Folland and Hiisivuori 1994, 6). Obviously this does not imply that co-operative learning can not be used in a school where it is not established by all the teachers. However, it does suggest that it is one more factor more which possibly makes it slightly more complicated. TIIMI-projekti was a perfect example of the vast amount of ground work necessary for co-operative learning. Whether or not it is truly worth all the effort is, at least to some extent, a matter of an opinion, but the executers of TIIMI-projekti seem to be of the opinion that it was worth the effort (Folland and Hiisivuori 1994, 37).

## **7. Analysis of the theories**

In this chapter I will discuss the results of my analysis of the L2 theories compare to co-operative learning. In each paragraph I will discuss the elements that appear consistent between the L2 theory and co-operative learning. After this I will discuss the distinguishing features between the theories. In this section I will follow the same order in paragraphs as in section four. I will include the analysis of the individuality factors presented in chapter 5 in comparison to co-operative learning as a part of this chapter.

### **7.1. The Universal Grammar approach and co-operative learning**

Firstly, it is important to bare in mind that The UG approach is not primarily a L2 theory. It is more a theory of acquisition than of learning, but it provides an interesting perspective to learning and to other L2 theories. However, the minimalist programme provides a suggestion on how language should be taught. It concentrates on input, namely on vocabulary and how words and phrases occur in the structures (Cook 2001, 183-185). The idea of input as the main source of language learning is inconsistent with the ideas of learner as an active participant.

Perhaps the most significant difference between the UG approach and co-operative learning is that the UG approach completely ignores the significance of individual variation in learners. Moreover, the idea that people are ideal recipients for the UG is strange to co-operative learning (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 69). Interaction and participation, both essential to co-operative learning are ignored in the UG approach.

It is reasonably obvious that the UG approach and co-operative learning do not have a mutual basis in their ideas of learning. However, it can be beneficial to compare ideas even as different as these two. Neither is flawless and both could benefit from one another. For example, if the UG approach is accurate and there truly is a linguistic blueprint installed to everyone, how can co-operative learning exploit it to make it a usable element in L2 learning and teaching? On the other hand, if the proclaimed benefits to academic achievement of co-operative learning are valid, perhaps the idea of language learning in a vacuum needs to be reconsidered.

## 7.2. The Monitor model and co-operative learning

Krashen's theory is based on the same input as the UG approach. The monitor theory clearly distinguishes language learning from language acquisition (Krashen 1981). More importantly, learned knowledge of language can never reach the level of acquired knowledge of language. Learned knowledge can not be transformed into acquired knowledge. Therefore, in order to become fluent in L2, the student must be exposed to language input as much as possible; through input all the necessary knowledge of L2 is provided (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 126-127). Language acquisition, then, appears to be a rather passive occurrence for the learner according to the Monitor theory.

The theory does consist of an element which requires activity from the learner. The other half of the theory is language learning which is intentional and conscious. Learned language can only operate as a guideline for the acquired knowledge in order for the learner to be able to produce more accurate output (Krashen 1981, 2). For language learning error correction, or negative evidence, and specific rules are most efficient. These tools of language learning are given to the learner, i.e. the learner does not actively search or formulate the rules. The activity occurs only in the using of the learned knowledge (Krashen 1981, 9).

The monitor theory does, however, acknowledge the individual differences in learners. These differences appear in the way the learned knowledge is used, and it is the way a student uses the learned system that makes him or her skilful L2 user. The over user, the under user and the optimal user of the monitor may have the same acquired and learned knowledge of L2, but their language ability is a question of personal factors (Krashen 1981, 12-18).

There appears to be some concurrent elements between Krashen's L2 theory and co-operation. Both consider learners' individuality a factor which an important aspect of learning. Moreover, the idea of an active learner is apparent in both as well. However, co-operative learning considers the activity to be the most important element in learning. Krashen does not deny the importance of activity to learning. However, the idea of learning and acquisition as separate, even though interrelated, decreases the importance of activity to Krashen. The input hypothesis of language acquisition appears to have no similar elements with co-operative learning.

### 7.3. The Activity theory and co-operative learning

More similarities are found in the comparison between activity theory and co-operative learning. The basic idea of the activity theory is that L2 learning is similar to learning per se (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 162). Learning is a product of cognitive activity. Successful learning requires decrease of these cognitive activities. According to co-operative learning, active participation is necessary in order to truly learn. Co-operative learning justifies its superiority due to encouraging students to use complex problem solving processes and activating their cognitive skills. The activity theory claims that activating cognitive abilities is more crucial to learning than striving towards understanding a specific and individual problem (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 162). Therefore, things such as negative evidence

are not central to learning. Both theories emphasize the importance of the process of learning, i.e. learning how to learn.

The activity theory also emphasises the importance of goals as motivators (Leontiev 1981, 18). As in co-operative learning, striving towards a goal motivates the student to work actively. Activity and motivation create a positive cycle. In addition, according to co-operative learning, results achieved due to this cycle motivate and activate the student even more (Johnson and Johnson 2003, 74).

Both co-operative learning and the activity theory agree that learning is not an isolated event. The activity theory states that learning is first social and only then individual. Subsequently, co-operative learning claims that a group of students acquire knowledge more efficiently than an individual student. The social aspects of learning do not, however, obliterate the students' responsibility of his or her learning. One of the basic principles of co-operative learning is individual accountability (Kagan and Kagan 2001, 42). Similarly, according to the activity theory, all learners are fundamentally responsible of their own learning (Mitchell and Myles 1998, 162).

Co-operative learning puts emphasis on the heterogeneity of groups. It is claimed to be the best way to enhance reassure the learning of the most gifted learners, as well as the learning of the less gifted learners (Knight and Morton Bohlmeier 1990, ). The absoluteness in using heterogeneous groups is, however, questioned by the activity theory (Leontiev 1981, 87). According to it there is a possibility that the roles of the individuals in the group become stigmatized, and therefore it can actually have a negative impact on learning. Mostly this is a problem with the less-gifted learners.

#### 7.4. Learner as an individual and co-operative learning

Individual features are discussed, at least to some extent, in Krashen's monitor theory, and the activity theory. I will now, however, discuss the individual features presented in chapter 5 in more detail in comparison with co-operative learning.

Cook considers motivation a very important element of learning (2001). He divides motivation into integrative and instrumental motivation. Johnson and Johnson (2003, 138) use the terms positive and negative motivation. Positive and integrative motivations appear to have similar aspects, as do negative and instrumental. Cook and Johnson and Johnson agree that school environment is more likely to promote instrumental/negative motivation in terms of grades and competition between students. Johnson and Johnson (2003, 168) suggest that co-operative learning environment enhances positive motivation by diminishing individual competition. Cook on the other hand does not provide a suggestion to change instrumental motivation into integrative motivation. In fact, he is not completely convinced that integrative motivation would generate better L2 learning results (Cook 2001, 114-118). However, he does agree that motivation is a significant factor in learning. Subsequently, he states that success, then, causes high motivation. Similarly, social interdependence theory is mostly based on the idea that motivation is the key factor in enhancing achievement, and on the other hand, social interdependence then again increases motivation.

Attitude towards the L2 is also seen important by Cook (2001, 119-123). Co-operative learning can not influence the attitudes towards L2 or its culture, but since it is claimed to be a more encouraging and inspiring way of learning, it should have a positive effect on attitude in general.

Language aptitude is considered a meaningful aspect of L2 learning possibilities by Krashen (1981, 19-39) and Skehan (1989, 35), to name a few. As co-operative learning is not a L2 learning theory, it does not concentrate on language aptitude. Moreover, co-operative learning appears

to claim that such a factor is not significant. As it promotes the idea of learning to learn very important, aptitude should not be very significant. However, since co-operative learning groups should be heterogeneous, acknowledging higher or lower learning aptitude would be useful for the teacher when he or she is organising the groups.

Co-operative learning is allegedly suitable for students of all age. SLA research provides varying ideas of how the learners' age affects their learning. Perhaps co-operative learning could benefit from these different ideas of L2 learning when choosing the most suitable teaching method.

Whether the learner is an introvert or an extrovert, co-operative learning is claimed to be applicable to all students. L2 learning theories suggest that this type of personality difference mostly affects the students' willingness to produce output, especially orally (Krashen 1981, 31). One might argue, then, that co-operative learning is not suitable for introvert L2 learners, since it emphasises active participation from the students. However, co-operative learning claims to create an environment where it is safe for all students to express themselves (Knight and Morton Bohlmeier 1990, 4). If this is accurate, it would then annul the ideas of the significance of the introvert/extrovert aspect.

## **8. Teacher interviews**

Although co-operative learning is far from being a new idea in the field of education, it is still fairly unknown among teachers in Finland. Most have come across it at some point, but usually their knowledge is rather superficial. I decided to interview teachers of English on their attitudes and experiences on co-operative learning. My interest in the subject grew as a result of casual conversations with L2 teachers during which I discovered the opinions were not only very different from one another, but also very firm. In addition to co-operative learning, I asked the teachers about their points of view on L2 theories per se, and whether they consider them useful in practical teaching situations. In the interviews I was looking for subjective views of teaching and learning as a comparison to the general and objective theories.

### 8.1. Arranging the interviews

The most challenging part of this thesis was arranging the interviews. I wanted to interview five to ten teachers, and was convinced that it would not be a problem to find interviewees. However, it turned out to be very difficult to persuade teachers to participate. Most of the teachers who answered invoked lack of time as a reason. The majority of the teachers did not reply to my request at all. Finally I managed to find seven teachers for the interviews. I was very pleased to get teachers from different schools and towns to get a more varying picture. I was aiming to interview both teachers who I knew were systematic and experienced users of co-operative learning, and teachers who most likely were not so familiar with it. As I only interviewed seven teachers, the results from interviews are hardly a trustworthy basis for generalisations, neither is that the intention. The intention of the interviews was to

collect data with authentic experiences. The interviewees are all fairly experienced teachers, and therefore I believe their opinions and experiences are certainly worth discussing.

## 8.2. Findings from the interviews

In this chapter I will discuss the findings from the interviews. I will follow the order of the questionnaire, and discuss the elements found from the answers. The teachers are divided into two groups; group **1** and group **2**, where group **1** refers to the teachers who use co-operative learning systematically, and group **2** the remaining five teachers. Furthermore, I will use letters in referring to a specific teacher, the letters being the seven first alphabets. The interviewees are, then, called **1a, 1b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, and 2g.**

teacher →	<b>1a</b>	<b>1b</b>	<b>2c</b>	<b>2d</b>	<b>2e</b>	<b>2f</b>	<b>2g</b>
co-op.							
+	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>					
--			<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>

### 8.2.1. Background information

Six of the seven interviewees were female, which is no surprise given the gender distribution of L2 teachers in Finland, the vast majority being female. All the teachers taught in upper levels of comprehensive school. Their experience as a teacher varied from seven to twenty-four years. Two of the teachers had taught in only one school, and the others had experiences from a few different schools,

six being the largest amount. I did not include teaching periods which were less than a whole school year.

### *8.2.2. Average lessons*

Asking the teachers to describe their average lesson of forty five minutes caused the same answer in all the teachers; there really is no such thing as an average lesson. However, they all tried to formulate an example of their average lesson. I was interested in finding out how big a part of their lessons could be described in the following ways; teacher-directed learning, independent work, pair work, group work. The teachers were also asked to give an example of a situation where each is most commonly used.

It is noteworthy that only one of the teachers, **2d**, used independent work as a method in their lessons apart from tests, regardless of their stand on co-operative learning. Teacher **2d** uses it with grammar practises. All the teachers had elements of teacher directed learning in their lessons. However, there were differences in the situations it was used. Teaching grammar was the most common situation, also some teachers preferred to check homework in a teacher directed way. In the co-operative learning classrooms teacher directness was mostly used to give instructions.

Pair work was another element used by all the interviewees. It appeared that all the individual work is now done more or less in pairs in the classrooms where co-operative learning is not used as such. Some teachers allowed the students to choose their partners, but others felt that with given partners the work was more efficient and useful. Pair work was used in all the areas of language teaching.

Group works was used by all the teachers, but there were some noticeable differences between group **1** and group **2**. The co-operative classrooms operated in groups almost fifty per cent of the lesson and used it in all the areas of language teaching, the other teachers used group work only as a

variety. It was usually a method for larger projects. Games and other less formal activities were done in groups. The average group size was three to four students. All the teachers preferred even numbers in groups.

The teachers had fairly fixed ways of using these different ways of teaching. All teachers but one felt that there is usually a way that is most suitable for any given area of language teaching. The exception was teacher **1b**. According to her every method is applicable to all the language learning areas; it is a matter of imagination and effort to bring variation to classrooms. In figure 1 the amount of time used by every teacher can be seen. The most striking differences are in the use of individual work and group-work between the two groups.

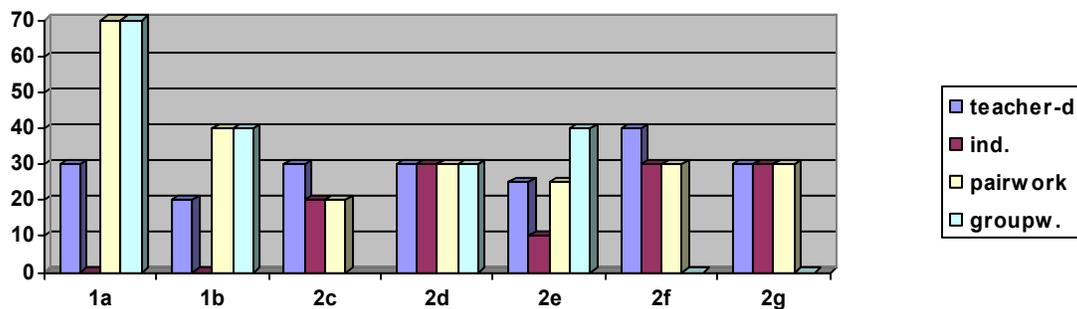


Figure 1

### 8.2.3. Teaching methods

The next part of the interview dealt with teaching methods. I wanted to know whether the teachers used any methods consciously, and if so, what were the advantages and disadvantages of the methods. The teachers mentioned *audiolingual style*, *communicative style*, *problem based learning*, *suggestopedia*, and *drama pedagogy*. However, it is noteworthy that all of them agreed that they were seldom consciously aware of the theoretical arguments behind choosing a method.

Audiolingual style stresses the importance of spoken language. However, the spoken language is very controlled, and consists of phrases which are repeated. The method uses *drilling* as practice. Drilling refers to mechanical repetition. New words and structures are usually introduced in a short dialogue (Cook 2001, 206). The interviewees used the method fairly little, but new words and pronunciation is sometimes practised in this way. The teachers felt that even though it emphasises spoken language, it does not enhance communicative skills.

Communicative style, controversially, encourages students to produce speech instead of repeating formal statements. All the teachers used this method, and most of them stated that it is a requirement of the curriculum to emphasise communicative skills in teaching. The teachers felt it is important for students to gain confidence to communicate, and that is possible only if a sufficient amount of practice is done. The method provides more opportunities for students to participate. According to the teachers, communicative style does include some problems. A few of the teachers, **2d**, **2g**, **1a**, and **1b** stated that communicative style can be overused. By this they mean the possible negative effect concentrating too much on communicativeness has on writing skills.

Problem based learning was used quite a bit by all but teacher **2d**. Teacher **2g** uses it, but very seldom. According to her it is too demanding for students who are not very skilful. Most of the other teachers agreed that the least capable students find problem based learning very difficult, if not impossible. The interviewees mention that in problem based learning giving the instructions is crucial. It is also important to have the courage to trust the students' abilities. According to the teachers who use problem based learning it is the best way to activate students, which provides more efficient learning.

Suggestopedia (e.g. listening to music to avoid students' block) was mentioned only by one teacher and drama pedagogy by two. Both styles are used to inspire the students and to provide the lessons with more liberal and varying teaching methods.

#### *8.2.4. L2 learning theories*

All teachers had studied some learning theories, but for most of them it was during their university studies. They mentioned behaviourism, cognitive theories, constructivist theories and co-operative learning. Only teacher **1a** uses the theoretical knowledge as a basis for all her teaching. Teachers **1b** and **2f** were more consciously aware of the theories at the beginning of their career. All the others said they do not exploit the theories consciously. Two of these three teachers, **1a**, **1b**, and **2f** are the ones who teach in co-operative classrooms. In other words, their choice of using co-operative learning is based on its theory, and the theory is a guideline through their teaching.

The interviewees agreed that a teacher does benefit from understanding learning theories. They gave several good ideas on how to use the theories:

- (1) A good teacher needs to understand what learning consists of. Knowledge in the subject it self is far from being adequate. One must have pedagogical knowledge.
- (2) Even if a theory is old it does not have to be out dated. A new idea is not always necessarily better than an old one.
- (3) Theories should be used as a tool for self-evaluation and reflection. Every teacher should examine the methods she or he uses. However, self-reflection does not necessarily have to lead to change.

#### *8.2.5. Learner as an individual*

I asked the interviewees to consider the following features in a student: attitude, aptitude, and motivation. The importance of learning environment was discussed in this section as well. By far the

most important feature, according to all the teachers, is integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation was seen important in school environment, and it became even more significant in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

All the teachers feel that students usually have a positive attitude towards English language and the culture it represents. They believe it is important to address the students with topics that are of their interests. Some of the teachers argue that the significance of attitude can be clearly detected in comparison to Swedish. The same student can have a completely different, usually negative, attitude toward Swedish, and very often they get lower marks in Swedish.

The teachers appear to have two different ideas on the importance of language aptitude. A few of the teachers argue that aptitude does not have a significant role in L2 learning in the upper levels of comprehensive school. Obviously some students appear to learn the language more easily than others, but with hard work and motivation aptitude is not required to succeed in L2. However, the other half of the interviewees feel aptitude is required in order to achieve good results. According to them, attitude and motivation are important, but students with high motivation and positive attitude only manage to reach a certain level, after which aptitude is needed. One of the teachers, **1a**, says that lack of language aptitude can even decrease motivation if hard work does not provide the desired results.

#### *8.2.6. Co-operative learning*

All teachers but **2f** were familiar with co-operative learning, at least to some extent. Two, **1a** and **1b** used it actively and systematically in their teaching and the others had only tried it at some point. Co-operative learning was used only in one school, namely in the school where the two interviewees using it work. The other teachers were not aware of it being used by any teacher in their schools, present or former.

All the teachers apart from **2f** stated the learning of social skills as a definite benefit of co-operative learning. Social skills are important in school environment, but more importantly, the students will need them in their future. Of the teachers who do not actively use it, **2c**, says that it enhances general learning skills, as the students are not given ready answers, but are forced to search for it. **2c** and **2g** believe that forcing students to learn responsibility of their learning and of others is very recommendable. In addition to these, teachers **1a** and **1b** claim that it has had a positive effect on good class discipline.

There were some interesting answers when the advantages were compared to the disadvantages. As opposed to teachers **1a** and **1b**, **2g** has had experiences of co-operative learning with negative influence on good class discipline. There is coherence between the teachers from group **1** and group **2**. All feel that co-operative learning is not easy to start. It requires a lot of work from the teacher to specialize in the model. It takes some time to familiarize the students to the model as well. However, teachers **1a** and **1b** claim that once the ground work is done, the actual classroom situations become more pleasant. The teacher has more time to work personally with a small group as she or he is not tied to teaching the whole class.

All the teachers were unanimous in stating that co-operative learning is useful for practising oral skills. Reading texts and learning vocabulary was believed suitable as well. However, grammar was considered too demanding for the students to learn in groups. The two active co-operative learning teachers were, on the other hand, convinced that there is no such area of L2 learning that co-operative learning is not suitable for. In figure 2 the opinion of each teacher on whether co-operative learning can be used in a certain L2 area is illustrated.

	<b>1a</b>	<b>1b</b>	<b>2c</b>	<b>2d</b>	<b>2e</b>	<b>2g</b>
grammar	+	+	--	--	--	--
oral skills	+	+	+	+	+	+
writing	+	+	0	0	0	0
listening	+	+	0	0	+	0
vocabulary	+	+	+	+	0	0
reading	+	+	+	0	+	+

+ = is suitable    -- = is not suitable    0 = no opinion or experience

Figure 2

Some of the teachers were not convinced on the model's use of heterogeneous groups. Teachers **2c** and **2g** were concerned that the weakest students might feel uncomfortable. Teacher **2g** was concerned that the most skilful learners would become frustrated in having to wait for the weaker ones. **2c**, however felt co-operative learning provides a challenge for the gifted learners. **2c** and **2g** were sceptical of managing to activate the free-loaders to pull in their weight. There was a clear difference in the ideas of who benefits from co-operative learning, and who does not. Teachers **1a** and **1b** argue that it is a fit model for all types of learners, because it provides all with the possibility to use their strengths. On the other hand, the group can help with the weaknesses. They do not see any problems with talented, nor with weak students. All the teachers in Group **2** believe co-operative learning is best suited for average students and in fairly homogenous groups. Moreover, they see co-operative learning more suitable for extroverts. Teacher **1a** agrees that the model is easier for extroverts in the beginning,

but introverts gain more from the model, as small groups provide a safer surrounding to participate in comparison to a whole-class situation.

### *8.2.7. The relationship between theory and practise*

The teachers acknowledge the importance of theories in their profession. It is a guideline to understand learning per se, but also an aid to recognize problems, such as learning difficulties. The capacity to help students with learning difficulties is the most important reason for understanding L2 learning for teachers **2d**, **2f**, and **2g**. Theories can operate as a touchstone for the teacher to evaluate her own accustomed ways. Almost all of the interviewees think it is important to reconsider one's ideas of teaching and critically examine the past. This is not to say that after such an examination everything needs to be altered; a teacher should recognize and appreciate his or her strengths as well.

As was mentioned in section 8.2.4., only **1a** considers herself a conscious user of L2 theories. However, all the teachers acknowledge the importance of at least a basic knowledge in L2 theories. As has been mentioned before, learning does not occur in a vacuum. The same applies to teaching. It is a social situation, and most of the teachers state that in the actual teaching situation, learning occurs according to the student, not according to a theory. Teacher **2c** says the most crucial skill for a teacher is the ability to react quickly. She says that perhaps there is a subconscious idea of a theory in the background, but as **2g** points out, the actual classroom situation is far from an ideal learning occurrence. All the others agree that especially in the upper level of comprehensive school knowledge of L2 learning theory is far from being sufficient. The students require more overall education. **1a** mentions, however, that the ability to react to situation is a lot easier when one has good knowledge provided by theories.

## **9. Summary of findings**

In this chapter I will briefly summarize the findings from my analysis. This chapter is divided in two sections, first of which discusses the comparison between L2 learning theories and co-operative learning and tries to provide an answer to the questions of the applicability of co-operative learning in L2 learning and teaching. Section 9.2 discusses the most important findings from the teacher interviews in terms of the questions presented in 2.4.

### 9.1. Findings from the theories

The analysis of the L2 learning theories and co-operative learning revealed that there are quite a few similarities between the theories. More specifically, all but one, the UG, approach shares at least some similar ideas of learning. The basic ideas of UG and co-operative learning are very different; UG provides very specific ideas on language itself, whereas co-operative learning is concerned with the process of learning. One might argue that comparing these two ideas of learning that have completely different targets and purpose is not rational or meaningful. However, they both are ideas of learning. In my opinion the most interesting findings from this analysis was the thoroughly opposite ideas of the learners' role. Therefore one can argue that if the UG approach is considered the way L2 learning occurs, co-operative learning has nothing to offer.

Krashen's ideas of L2 learning derive from the UG approach, but he criticizes the lack of learners' individuality's significance to the outcome of learning. He emphasises the role of motivation and attitude in both language acquisition and learning. As co-operative learning is suggested to enhance both elements, it should be beneficial to L2 acquisition and learning. Moreover, the personality factors

Krashen mentions, outgoing personality and self-esteem, are both said to be gained from using co-operative learning. However, Krashen considers the learner more as a receiver than an active participant, as opposed to co-operative learning. The input hypothesis which is most important in language acquisition places the learner in to a passive role. Moreover, if language acquisition is more crucial than language learning, maximizing the amount of comprehensible input alongside with error correction should then form the core of L2 teaching. In view of these elements it is fair to say that there are rather significant differences in the ideas of learning between co-operative learning and the monitor model. Therefore co-operative learning is not suitable for L2 learning and teaching from the monitor model's point of view.

The activity theory has very similar ideas with co-operative learning. Perhaps this is due to the fact the activity theory does not make a distinction between language learning and learning as such. Moreover, both have their foundation in socio-cultural psychology. Both co-operative learning and the activity theory emphasize the process of learning, and the skill of learning to learn. The activity of the learner is crucial, as is the acknowledgement of learner as an individual. Learning is seen as a social occurrence. The only difference in the ideas on learning between the activity theory and co-operative learning appears to be the advantage/disadvantage-idea of heterogeneous groups. If L2 learning is seen in the ways of the activity theory, co-operative learning is very suitable and efficient model of L2 learning and L2 teaching.

## 9.2. Findings from the interviews

From the interviews I hoped to find opinions and experiences from teachers of English on the usability of co-operative learning in teaching English in the upper levels of comprehensive school. I was also

interested in their general ideas of learning and theories of learning, and in their distribution of time during their lessons.

The amount of time teachers spent on different working methods clearly divides the teachers into two groups. Group 1 uses group work more than group 2, but whereas group 2 uses independent work to some extent, group 1 does not use it at all. However, there was no real difference in the amount of time used in teacher-directed activities between the groups, which I found rather surprising.

Everyone agreed that it is important for a teacher to be aware of learning theories and reflect their own work through them regularly. Theories are perhaps present subconsciously in their teaching, but most importantly the teachers rely on their personality and their ability to react to any given situation. Basically, teaching is a social and practical profession where theories can operate as a basis but not as fundamental directions that can not be departed from.

For the questions concerning co-operative learning, the answers varied between the groups, but not as significantly as one might have expected. The most distinguishing differences were in the ideas of when co-operative learning is applicable. Teachers in group 2 all agreed it can not be applied to teaching grammar, whereas the teachers in group 1 said it is completely usable to all areas of language teaching. Everyone believes small groups provide better opportunities for practising oral skills in comparison to whole-class situation. All the interviewees agreed that co-operative learning is laborious to start, but other disadvantages were seen only by the teachers in group 2. Group 2 had concerns with some student types in using co-operative learning; mostly they were worried that it is not sufficient for the less gifted students.

## **10. Conclusion**

The purpose of this study has been to discuss the use of co-operative learning in L2 learning and teaching. The study was conducted in four stages; in the first part I discussed three theories of L2 in terms of their idea of L2 learning, the role of the learner, and the implications the theory provides for L2 teaching. In addition to the theories I discussed the individual differences in learners in a separate chapter. The second part of the study consists of co-operative learning. In the third part the L2 theories and the individual varieties of a learner are compared with co-operative learning. Finally, in the fourth part I discuss findings from teacher interviews on learning, learning theories and co-operative learning.

The reason for including the comparative analysis of the theories was to discover the applicability of co-operative learning in L2 learning and L2 teaching from a theoretical perspective. From the analysis I discovered no similarities between the UG approach and co-operative learning. There were, on the other hand, some similarities between the monitor model and co-operative learning. However, the contradiction in perceiving the learners' role as an active participant or as a passive recipient is quite significant. The activity theory which is based on socio-cultural psychology shares many ideas of learning with co-operative learning. Both consider learning as a process. The process in itself is more important for learning than any learned item. From a theoretical point of view the applicability of co-operative learning to L2 learning depends on what the view is on learning, i.e. if L2 learning is considered to be, more than anything, a process of learning which requires active participation and practising, co-operative learning provides a suitable and well-designed model for L2 learning and teaching.

Since the study is about L2 learning and L2 teaching, I felt it would not only be interesting but necessary to find out the ideas of L2 teachers. Earlier studies and literature provided and

interesting comparison to the ideas received from the teachers. As I reviewed some of the studies conducted of the achievements in using co-operative learning, they portray an image according to which its superiority is undeniable. The amount of studies conducted is very large, and one can hardly ignore the results. Nonetheless, these studies were all included in books which fairly obviously were promoting co-operative learning. Their solution to co-operative experiences that have not resulted in success is perhaps too easy. Teachers' inadequacy or insufficient amount of time is the most common. Ritva-Liisa Rantavuori conducted her Pro Gradu study on the teaching of the do-auxiliary. Her findings do not support the excellence of co-operative learning. Moreover, as co-operative learning has been known in Finland for a decade, its popularity could be expected to be larger given the positive influence it is proclaimed to have on learning. Perhaps this is the reason I had heard very contradicting opinions of the model. The results from the interviews gave some interesting ideas on co-operative learning. The model is not seen as problematic by its active users, but those who do not use the model appear to have fairly unanimous opinions on the problems.

The idea that most clearly comes across from the interviews is that co-operative learning is seen difficult to start, difficult to obtain and difficult to govern. These appear to be major problems with co-operative learning.

The remaining question is the reason for many teachers' somewhat negative attitude towards co-operative learning. If co-operative learning is applicable to L2 learning and teaching from a theoretical point of view, and highly recommended by those who actively use it, the challenge is, then, to make it more approachable.

In conclusion I believe that co-operative learning is usable in L2 learning and L2 teaching, but it requires a lot of work from the teacher, and possibly and preferably from the whole educational system as school in Finland is fairly grade-centred. Moreover, to launch co-operative learning as a general model in a school, a project similar to TIIMI (Folland et al 1994) would be very

helpful. The model is hardly flawless, but it appears to provide elements necessary in today's society, namely the artistry of learning to learn and social interaction skills.

For further study it would be interesting to focus the study on a certain area of language skills. As grammar was the area least suitable to teach in the co-operative model according to group 1, and not very suitable according to Rantavuori (1998), and yet perhaps the most suitable area according to Kujansivu (2001, 212), it might be an interesting subject of further study.

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## 12. Appendix

Liite1.

Kysely Pro Gradu tutkielmaa varten  
Tampereen yliopisto  
Kieli- ja käännöstieteiden laitos

Päivi Kuusivaara  
Birger Jaarlin katu 4 a 13  
13100 Hämeenlinna  
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050-374 4449

Tämän kyselyn tarkoituksena on saada aktiivisesti työssä toimivien opettajien subjektiivisia näkemyksiä ja kokemuksia oppimis- sekä opetusteorioista, sekä niiden käytännössä toteuttamisen mahdollisuuksista ja ongelmista. Toisin sanoen toivon saavani vastauksissa mielipiteitä, oikeita vastauksia ei ole olemassakaan. Suurimpaan osaan kysymyksistä voi vastata hyvinkin lyhyesti, mutta osa kysymyksistä on luonteeltaan hieman laajempia vastauksia vaativia.  
Kiitos osallistumisesta!

### 1. Taustatiedot

- a) Sukupuoli
- b) Kuinka monta vuotta olet toiminut englannin opettajana?
- c) Kuinka monessa eri oppilaitoksessa olet toiminut (vähintään yhden lukuvuoden) opettajana?

### 2. Ajattele omaa keskimääräistä oppituntiasi (45 min). Kuinka suuri osa, jos lainkaan, tunnistasi toteutuu seuraavien työtapojen mukaisesti:

- a) opettajajohtoisesti koko luokan seuratussa
- b) itsenäisessä työssä opettajan kierrellessä, ja jossa oppilaalla mahdollisuus kysyä opettajalta neuvoa
- c) parityöskentelyssä
- d) pienryhmätyöskentelyssä

Anna tyypillinen tilanne-esimerkki jokaisesta käyttämästäsi työtavasta.

3. Pohdi hyödynnätkö tietoisesti opetuksessa joitakin oppimis- ja opetusmetodeja? Mitä metodeja olet käyttänyt? Kerro jokaisesta käyttämästäsi tavasta yksi hyvä ja huono puoli.
4. Opetusstrategiat perustuvat oppimisteorioihin.. Pohdi seuraavissa kysymyksissä omia käytäntöjäsi opetusta suunnitellessa.
  - a) Mihin oppimisteorioihin olet itse tutustunut?
  - b) Kuinka paljon tietoisesti hyödynnät oppimisteorioita opetustasi suunnitellessa?
  - c) Kuinka paljon, jos lainkaan, oppimisteorioiden tunteminen ja ymmärtäminen mielestäsi vaikuttaa opettajan mahdollisuuksiin toimia opettajana tehokkaammin oppimistuloksia ajatellen?
5. Jokainen oppilas on yksilö niin persoonaltaan kuin oppimistavoiltaan ja – taidoiltaan. Pohdi seuraavien asioiden merkittävyyttä oppimistuloksiin, ja valitse mielestäsi merkittävin asia.
  - a) oppilaan asenne opittavaan kieleen ja sen edustamaan kulttuuriin
  - b) sisäinen motivaatio (halu oppia asia)
  - c) ulkoinen motivaatio (arvosanat, kilpailu)
  - d) lahjakkuus
6. Yhteistoiminnallinen oppiminen. Jos et ole koskaan tutustunut yhteistoiminnalliseen oppimiseen, jätä vastaamatta seuraaviin kysymyksiin. Jos olet jossain määrin tutustunut yhteistoiminnallisuuteen, mutta et ole sitä käyttänyt, vastaa kysymyksiin mahdollisuuksien mukaan.
  - a) Onko yhteistoiminnallinen oppiminen sinulle periaatteiltaan tuttu?
  - b) Käytetäänkö mallia nykyisessä koulussasi tai käytettiin sitä jossain entisessä koulussasi?
  - c) Oletko itse käyttänyt sitä opetuksessasi?

- d) Mitkä ovat mielestäsi mallin vahvuudet? Mitä oppimisen osa-alueita (sosiaaliset taidot, akateemiset tiedot jne.) yt-malli mielestäsi parhaiten tukee?
  - e) Mitkä ovat mallin heikkoudet tai mahdolliset ongelmat?
  - f) Mihin kielenoppimisen osa-alueeseen yt-malli mielestäsi soveltuu parhaiten? Missä sitä on mielestäsi hankalin/mahdoton käyttää?
  - g) Minkä tyyppinen oppilas mielestäsi hyötyy eniten yhteistoiminnallisesta oppimistavasta? Entä vähiten?
7. Mieti omaa suhdettasi oppimis- ja opetusteorioiden, sekä käytännön opetustyösi välillä. Kerro lyhyesti omin sanoin, mitä asioita koet ongelmallisiksi, tai mitkä seikat helpottavat ja edistävät omaa työtäsi.

## Liite 2.

Haastateltava	Sukupuoli	Paikkakunta	Kokemus vuosina	Haastattelutapa ja päivämäärä
<b>1a :</b>	N	Tampere	24	kasvotusten 9. 3. 2006
<b>1b</b>	N	Tampere	11	kasvotusten 9. 3. 2006
<b>2c</b>	N	Vesilahti	15	puhelimessa 14. 3. 2006
<b>2d</b>	N	Hämeenlinna	22	kirjallisesti 10. 3. 2006
<b>2e</b>	M	Hämeenlinna	7	kirjallisesti 27. 4. 2006
<b>2f</b>	N	Hämeenlinna	4	kirjallisesti 10.3. 2006
<b>2g</b>	N	Riihimäki	7	puhelimitse 17. 3. 2006