

“BUT SOMETIMES IT IS FUN AND SOMETIMES
BORING”:

Pupils who have learning disorders and their feelings towards English

Bachelor’s Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Vaikka oppimisvaikeuksia on tutkittu hyvinkin runsaasti erityisesti erityispedagogiikan alalla, on tutkimus jättänyt oppilaiden omat tunteet huomiotta, ja keskittynyt lähinnä oppimisvaikeuksien tunnistamiseen ja interventioon. Oppimisvaikeudet saattavat vaikuttaa merkittävästi oppilaiden tunteisiin tiettyjä oppiaineita kohtaan, mutta myös opettajilla, oppimateriaaleilla ja luokkatovereilla voi olla vaikutusta. Tunteiden tutkiminen on siis hyvin tärkeää, sillä opettajat voivat hyödyntää tuloksia opetuksen ja luokkatilanteiden kehittämisessä niin, että oppiminen olisi jokaiselle oppilaalle mahdollisimman mieluista kokemus.</p> <p>Tutkielman tarkoituksena on selvittää, millaisia tunteita oppilailla, joilla on oppimisvaikeuksia, on englantia kohtaan. Tutkimuksen aineisto koostuu kahden neljäsluokkalaisen piirustuksista ja haastatteluista. Piirustukset ja haastattelut toimivat tässä toisiaan tukevinä menetelminä, ja erityisesti piirtäminen sopii hyvin lapsille, sillä se auttaa ilmaisemaan hankaliltakin tuntuja tunteita. Sekä piirustukset että haastattelut analysoitiin sisällönanalyysin menetelmin.</p> <p>Tulokset osoittivat, että jopa vain kahden lapsen välillä voi olla hyvinkin erilaisia tunteita: ensimmäisen oppilaan tunteet olivat erittäin positiivisia, ja hän nautti suuresti englannin oppimisesta. Hän koki, että englannin oppiminen oli helppoa, rentoa, hyödyllistä ja mukavaa. Toisella oppilaalla taas oli enemmän negatiivisia ja sekavia tunteita englantia kohtaan: hänestä englannin opiskelu oli vaikeaa, ja useimmiten hän oli kovin levoton oppitunneilla. Tämä oppilas ei ollut aivan varma englannin hyödyllisyydestä, ja positiivisia tunteita hän liitti englannin käyttöön koulun ulkopuolella.</p> <p>Vaikka tulokset eivät olekaan yleistettävissä pienen otoksen vuoksi, ne kannustavat kuitenkin lisätutkimukseen. Erityisesti opettajien ja muiden ulkoisten tekijöiden vaikutusta oppilaiden tunteisiin pitäisi tutkia lisää, sillä ne olivat näkyvillä tässäkin tutkimuksessa, ja niihin opettajat voivat vaikuttaa.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

Learning disorders are a diverse group of problems that includes difficulties in, for example, reading, writing, mathematics, motor skills, foreign languages and attention skills. Learning disorders can have a major impact on learners' feelings towards school, teachers, peers, and themselves. These feelings naturally affect pupils' learning, and can therefore have long-ranging consequences. Although learning disorders can have such a big impact on learners' feelings, this area of research has been neglected. Previous research on learning disorders has mainly concentrated on diagnosing disorders and helping learners to cope with them. For example, Ikonen, Krogerus (2009) and Harwell (2008) have studied different ways of teaching pupils who have learning disorders. During the last few decades, learners' own perceptions have started to arouse interest among researchers, and, for example, Aro (2006) and Alanen (2003) have studied learners' views of foreign languages. Still, there are no studies that have examined the feelings of pupils who have learning disorders.

Today, it is more than likely that every teacher encounters learners who have different kinds of learning disorders. Therefore, it is increasingly important to be aware of these learners and their feelings. This study especially aims to increase teachers and fellow students' awareness and knowledge about pupils' feelings. Knowledge of feelings is important for teachers as they can use it to change and develop their teaching methods and materials accordingly to help all kinds of pupils to learn. Thus, the purpose of this case study is to focus on learners who have learning disorders and their feelings towards English.

First, I will describe learning disorders in general, their definition, different types of disorders and learning disorders from teachers' perspective. The problem of definition and different ways of classifying learning disorders are still a matter of debate among researchers, so the task of defining learning disorders is not an easy one. Learning disorders in general is a very broad subject and it is impossible to explain it sufficiently enough in this context, but they are explained to the extent that is relevant for this study. Second, I will introduce previous studies on learners' feelings. Third, I will describe the data of this study and methods of analysis. The data consists of two pupils' drawings and interviews, and the data was analyzed using the methods of content analysis. Fourth, I am going to explain the results, in other words, how the two pupils felt about English. Finally, I will draw some conclusions on learners' feelings, and what kinds of aspects might be behind those feelings.

2 LEARNING DISORDERS

In this chapter, I will first explain how learning disorders are defined, and present reasons for why I have chosen to use the term *learning disorder* in this study. After tackling the problem of definition, I will briefly introduce some of the most common types of learning disorders: dyslexia, dysphasia, attention disorders, mathematics disability and developmental coordination disorder. It is important to note that although the emphasis of this study is on English, and therefore on language learning, all kinds of learning disorders can affect language skills. Following the definition, learning disorders are discussed from teachers' point of view. Last, I will present some previous studies on pupils' feelings and perceptions, which have been studied by, for example, Aro (2006) and Alanen (2003).

2.1 Defining learning disorders

We all have different ways of learning new things. Some of us are, for example, visual learners, some auditory and some are kinesthetic learners. Our strengths and weaknesses may vary, but the most important thing is that by complimenting each learning style with a suitable teaching method, we all can learn. At school, some pupils have more problems finding the right ways of learning than others, and they may need more help and guidance. Except for the most severe cases, pupils who have learning disorders are just as able to learn as anybody else, but they simply need more help finding the most suitable methods (Moilanen, 2002). Learning disorders are a diverse group of learning problems that can affect, for example, reading, writing, mathematical skills, motor skills and attention. A learning disorder does not mean that a person is unintelligent, lazy or has no motivation. Moreover, it does not include, for example, deaf or blind learners, or learners who have other physical conditions. It means that the person receives and processes information in a different way than others, and usually, parents and teachers are able to help these pupils with carefully thought methods (Niilo Mäki Institute, 2013).

“No single problem has plagued the study of LDs [learning disabilities] more than the problem of definition” (Fletcher et al. 2007:25). Sure enough, the problem of definition has constantly raised discussion among researchers, and the subject will probably be debated in the future as well. Over time, different definitions have mirrored different attitudes towards learning disorders, and as new information about the disorders has been acquired, the definition has changed from dum kids to

children who have special needs. Through more accurate definitions, we have learned to understand learning disorders better. It is necessary to be aware of the different terms as the term one chooses to apply also has an effect on how disorders are categorized and diagnosed, and, therefore, on what kinds of methods of support are chosen. For example, *learning disorders*, *learning difficulties*, *learning disabilities* and *specific learning disabilities* are all terms that are widely in use, and they are often used interchangeably. Every local authority and organization has adopted their own definitions. For example, Pennington (2009:3) uses the term *learning disorders*, which he describes to be a broader term than *learning disabilities*. According to him, *learning disabilities* is a subcategory of *learning disorders* which can mean any disorder that has a neurodevelopmental background and that affects academic and/or social skills. Therefore, *learning disorders* include such conditions as autism spectrum disorder and attention deficit disorder. These are, on the other hand, not included in *learning disabilities* which only constitute of disorders such as dyslexia and mathematics disorder. Fletcher et al. (2007) discuss learning disabilities in their book, and they seem to agree that *learning disabilities* is a subcategory, as they have suggested that the term *learning disabilities* only constitutes of reading, language and mathematics disorders. Niilo Mäki Institute's web page (2013), on the other hand, uses *learning disabilities* and *learning disorders* interchangeably. Figure 1 further summarizes Pennington's definition of learning disorders, and this definition is also used in this study.

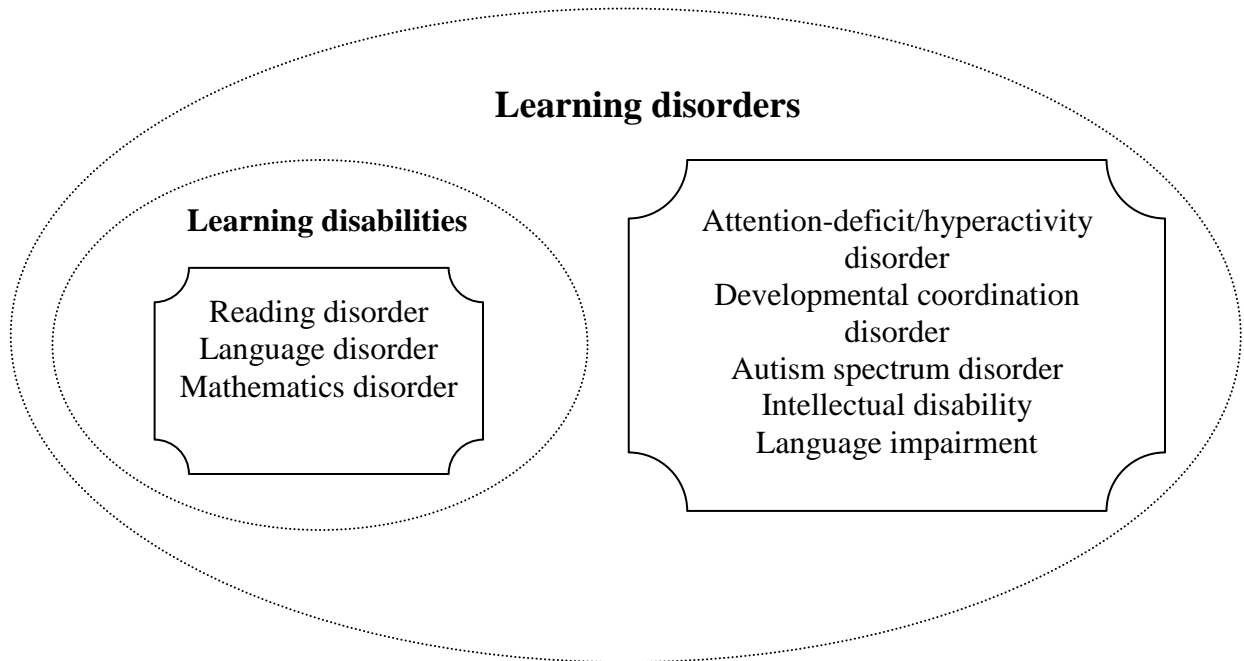


Figure 1. Pennington's (2009) definition of learning disorders and learning disabilities.

In this paper, I will use the term *learning disorders* because of its inclusiveness. The aim is to use the broadest term possible as the main emphasis of this study is on learning disorders in general: it is not important to categorize these pupils into groups based on what kind of a learning disorder they have.

Learning disorders are quite common. The prevalence can vary greatly depending on the source but, for example, Niilo Mäki Institute (2013) states that about 5-10 % of children have some kind of special difficulties in learning. It is important to note that learning disorders cannot be seen as strictly defined problems that always appear exactly the same in every pupil: they are complex and diverse combinations of different kinds of difficulties and strengths. Furthermore, it can sometimes be challenging to separate learning disorders from, for example, some illnesses or psychological issues, or simply with a lack of motivation. Identifying learning disorders can be tricky, and for it to be successful, cooperation between the pupil, parents, teachers and other professionals is essential.

2.2 Different kinds of learning disorders

In addition to the problem of definition, there is also some disagreement on how to categorize learning disorders. For example, Fletcher et al. (2007:9) have used seven different groups of disorders in their definition: listening comprehension, oral expression, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, written expression, mathematics calculation and mathematics reasoning. They do not include, for example, attention disorders in their division. On the other hand, Niilo Mäki Institute (2013) and Ahonen, Siiskonen & Aro (2004) have applied a different kind of division where they take attention and motoric disorders into account: they all consider that learning disorders consist of reading, mathematics, attention, language and motoric disorders. Furthermore, Pennington (2009) uses the widest division, which is also illustrated in Figure 1. It does not only include reading, language and mathematics disorders but also autism spectrum disorder, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, developmental coordination disorder, intellectual disability and language impairment. Although I am using Pennington's (2009) term *learning disorders* in this paper, I will not explain in detail all the different types of disorders he has included. Instead, I will only describe the ones that are most commonly included in most definitions of *learning disorders*: dyslexia, dysphasia, mathematics disorder, ADD/ADHD and developmental coordination disorders.

A reading disability, or *dyslexia*, means that a person has special problems in reading and writing. Dyslexia does not refer to a separate disorder but can be used to describe various combinations of different problems. Difficulties in reading, writing and understanding words and processing phonological information are usually the main problems in dyslexia. It is important to note, though, that dyslexia can appear in multiple different ways with every pupil. Dyslexia is quite a common disability, and its prevalence is about 5 % of the population (Niilo Mäki Institute, 2013). Dyslexia does not necessarily affect learning in every subject: it can only come up in language classes, for example, and only in some areas of language such as reading and pronunciation (Moilanen, 2002:16). As with other learning disorders as well, it is quite usual that children who have dyslexia also have other learning disorders, or as Moilanen (2002:16) points out, problems in, for example, time management, study skills and organizing skills in general. The most efficient way of helping pupils with dyslexia is to practice language skills in general, and Moilanen (2002:26) notes that teachers, and also parents, can try to activate all senses and both hemispheres by using diverse teaching methods. In language classes, children who have dyslexia can have problems with all the different aspects of language: listening, pronunciation, reading, writing, grammar and vocabulary. These children might need more time with homework and exams, and teachers should take this into account.

A language disability, or *dysphasia*, refers to difficulties in language development. According to Niilo Mäki Institute (2013), the prevalence of dysphasia varies from 1 to 7 %, depending on how dysphasia is defined. Children who have dysphasia often have problems with speaking and understanding speech and language, and especially phonology, vocabulary and grammar are usually difficult for these children in both their mother language and in foreign languages (Niilo Mäki Institute, 2013). Difficulties do not appear the same way in all dysphatic children, and the spectrum of problems can be very diverse. Marttinen et al. (2004:25-29) present a commonly used categorization by Rapin and Allen (1988) that illustrates the diversity of problems in dysphasia. According to their definition, language disorders can be divided into six categories: 1) Problems with phonology and syntax, 2) problems with vocabulary, 3) problems with controlling speech motorics, 4) problems with recognizing words, 5) semantic and pragmatic problems and 6) problems with controlling the phonological system. The lines between these categories are not strict, and dysphatic pupils can also have difficulties outside the categories.

It is clear that dysphatic pupils struggle in language classes more than their peers. Especially in English, where the sound-letter correspondence is so different from Finnish, learning to speak and listen can be very demanding. Diagnosing dysphasia is often a challenge as many other conditions and learning disorders may affect language development, and as pupils often have other learning disorders as well. For example, dysphasia and dyslexia can sometimes be impossible to separate (Marttinen et al., 2004:23). The difference between dysphasia and dyslexia is that dysphasia relates more to problems with understanding language contexts and meanings, and dyslexic pupils have problems with learning the basic reading and writing skills. Furthermore, dysphasia is often visible in everyday language use, which is not the case in dyslexia (Marttinen et al., 2004:23). Teachers should particularly pay attention to clear and well-structured communication, lessons and environment. Furthermore, many children benefit from speech therapy.

Although the focus of this study is on language learning, it is important to note that also attention disorders, mathematics disorders and developmental coordination disorders can have a significant effect on language learning in an indirect way. For example, attention disorders very often appear together with other learning disorders (Pennington, 2009:155). Attention disorders can make it difficult for a child to concentrate in language classes, and therefore, may disturb the learning process. Attention disorders are quite common, and usually the estimated prevalence is about 4-10 % (Niilo Mäki Institute, 2013). The three main qualities of attention disorders are inattention, hyperactivity and impulsive behavior, and the problems usually have an effect on various areas in life, for example, learning, feelings and social interaction. The difference between the terms ADD and ADHD is that ADD stands for attention-deficit disorder which only includes problems with attention, and ADHD stands for attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder which means that the learner has problems with both attention and hyperactivity.

According to Niilo Mäki Institute (2013), the prevalence of mathematics disabilities vary from 3 to 7 %. Mathematics disabilities mean that a child has persistent problems with learning the basic calculations. In English classes, children who have mathematics disabilities might not only struggle with page and task numbers and different task types that require mathematic skills but also with learning the English names for numbers, and problem solving (Fletcher et al., 2007:207).

Developmental coordination disorders mean that a child has difficulties in motoric movements. These disorders are not only visible in physical education classes but also in everyday life. Niilo Mäki Institute (2013) points out that developmental coordination disorders can affect either gross motor skills, for example, running and riding a bicycle or fine motor skills, for example, holding a pen and sewing a button, or sometimes both. The child's movements can in general seem slow and somewhat rough. The prevalence of the disorder is about 5 %. In language classes, pupils who have developmental coordination disorders can have problems with holding a pen or staying still. They can also struggle with organizing and combining information that comes through many different senses (Aro et al. 2004:177).

2.3 Learning disorders and teaching

For teachers, different kinds of learners do not only offer several challenges but also opportunities to develop creative teaching methods, which can often be beneficial for all kinds of pupils. As Moilanen (2002:27) points out, most of us are kinesthetic learners and, therefore, using kinesthetic teaching methods helps all kinds of pupils to learn better. Overall, clear, concrete and well-organized teaching is effective for all learners. Furthermore, learners can benefit from lessons where they are able to use their imagination, music, rhythm and pictures to learn. Fletcher et al. (2007), Ahonen et al. (2004) and Moilanen (2002) all emphasize the importance of applying versatile teaching methods, and also advise parents to work tightly together with teachers and other professionals to help the pupils. It is important to support children who have learning disorders from early on, and cooperation between school and parents has proved to be a successful way of support. In some cases, especially with attention disorders, combining guidance and medication can also help (Niilo Mäki Institute, 2013).

2.4 Previous studies on learning disorders and learners' feelings

Learning disorders have been studied quite a lot, for example, in special education and pedagogics, where the focus has mainly been on identifying disorders and finding suitable teaching methods. For example, Lerner (2012) has studied learning disorders and different teaching strategies. Some research

has also been done in the field of applied linguistics and these studies have focused on how the disorders are visible in foreign or second language learning. Learners' own feelings and perceptions on learning have received little attention. In applied linguistics, learners' feelings are a fairly new research subject as they only began to arouse interest in the 1980s (Aro, 2006:53). This changed the way researchers saw learners: instead of being passive receivers of information, learners were now understood to have different learning strategies, motivations and attitudes. Despite this new view of pupils, there still lie some prejudices towards researching learners' feelings: many studies have focused on adults or young people, and children's feelings have been set aside (Aro, 2006:55). It seems as though researchers have thought that children do not have enough to say about learning languages, which, as Aro (2006:56) points out, seems a bit absurd, especially here in Finland. After all, most children here begin to study their first foreign language at the age of nine at the latest.

Aro (2006:53-74) has studied pupils' opinions and thoughts about English from a dialogical perspective. She first interviewed seven pupils when they were in third grade and again when they were fifth-graders. From a dialogical perspective, pupils' perceptions are seen as a combination of situational and stable information. Aro studied different voices that were heard from pupils' perceptions, for example, their parents' voice or commonly accepted opinions. The results of the study showed that pupils reflect other people's opinions when they are asked to state their perceptions, and especially their parents' and teachers' opinions were visible in their answers. She also observed that the children invoked adults less when they became older.

Alanen (2003:55-85) has studied learners' beliefs about foreign language learning from a sociocultural perspective, and she interviewed 16 Finnish children twice between the ages of 7 and 9. The focus of her study was on the development of learners' beliefs, and how these beliefs were expressed in pair interviews. What she found out was that children drew on other people's utterances in the interviews, for example, their parents and friends'. Furthermore, Alanen noticed that the pupils' beliefs developed from other-regulation towards self-regulation between the interviews. This means that the children began to refer to themselves instead of others when they became older, as Aro (2006) also found out in her study. As Alanen interviewed the children in pairs, she also noticed that beliefs seemed to be socially co-constructed: the children modified their views to match their pairs' view, and they formed their answers together.

Niilo Mäki Institute (2013) is currently doing research on learning disorders and learners' feelings. Their study focuses on how children feel about learning disorders, and one of the main purposes is to help children who have learning disorders to feel better about themselves, and help them integrate learning disorders as a part of their identity. It is evident that learners' own feelings and perceptions of learning have begun to attract attention during the recent years, and researchers have realized the importance of this kind of knowledge.

In conclusion, learning disorders have not been studied from the perspective of learners' feelings, and previous studies have mainly concentrated on identification and intervention. However, two previous studies that were introduced here have taken learners' perspective into account. First, Aro (2006:53-74) studied the different voices that were heard from pupils' answers when they were asked about perceptions. While the present study focuses on learners' feelings, Aro concentrated on how adults affect children's opinions. Second, Alanen (2003:55-85) studied learners' beliefs about language learning, and noted that children refer to other people, too, not just adults. These two studies have both focused on learners and beliefs and thoughts but neither researched pupils' *feelings*. Furthermore, these studies do not take learning disorders into consideration. Niilo Mäki Institute (2013), however, is interested in how children feel about their learning disorders and how the disorders affect their overall well-being. In the present study, the perspective is again slightly different: it does not focus on how learners feel about learning disorders but how they feel about English.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

3.1 Research question

The research question of this study is *What kinds of feelings do children who have learning disorders have towards English?* In this study, *feelings* are seen as emotions learners have, and they are later further divided into positive, negative and mixed feelings. My goal is to understand the feelings of these children better, and to broaden both my own and my fellow students' understanding of pupils' feelings. As future teachers, we need this kind of knowledge. Today, it is quite likely that every teacher

has a chance to teach children who have learning disorders, and these children's feelings might have a significant impact on their learning.

3.2 Data

The data of this qualitative case study consists of drawings and interviews that were collected at a primary school in a small Finnish town. The two pupils who participated in the study were fourth graders, and they were studying in a small group that was especially aimed for pupils who have different kinds of learning disorders. What type of learning disorder the pupils had was not relevant as the focus of this study is on all kinds of learning disorders, not just on a certain type of disorder. I decided to choose fourth graders as I wanted to examine how pupils feel about English when they have just started English lessons. Instead of choosing third graders for this study, I chose pupils that were one year older as they already have more experience in learning English, and they have had time to form a wider picture of themselves as learners of English than third graders. The data was collected in January 2013. A pilot interview was conducted earlier in January, and the interview questions were revised accordingly.

First, all the pupils who had their parents' permission to participate in the study drew a picture of their feelings towards English during their art class. The situation in class was more relaxed than it probably would have been in an interview setting, which is why a normal class room situation was chosen. The pupils were asked to draw a picture of any feelings and situations that came to their minds when they heard the word *Englanti* (*English*). The pupils were allowed to draw either one or multiple pictures on the same piece of paper. Some pupils also wanted to write something. There was no time limit so the pupils could spend as much time as they needed but all of them were finished in about 15-20 minutes. I then chose three drawings based on the relevance of the content. This means that I left out drawings that had fewer feelings to analyze, and those that did not meet the instructions. One of the three pupils participated in the pilot interview which was not included in the data because there were some major changes made into the interview questions. The purpose of using drawings in this study was that drawing is a good way of expressing feelings, especially for small children, even though they might have trouble expressing their feelings through language. According to Aarnos (2010:178), drawings are a good way of gathering data, especially when, for example, difficult feelings and memories are

concerned. She also points out that they work well with interviews as these two methods can support each other, and therefore deepen the understanding of the subject.

Second, the participants were interviewed. The first interview lasted for 12 minutes and the other one was 17 minutes long. Both pupils were first asked to tell about the drawings. Next, they were asked about their feelings towards English in a semi-structured interview, where both participants were asked the same questions. A semi-structured interview gives participants a chance to describe their feelings in their own words, which, for example, a structured interview does not allow (Eskola, Vastamäki, 2010:28). The interview topics were pupils' general opinions, thoughts and memories about English, teachers, English classes and teaching materials, perceptions of the usefulness of learning English and pupils' performance. The purpose of the interviews was to give the children a chance to explain the drawings, and to clarify them. They were also used to further understand the children's feelings, which would have been more difficult if I had used, for example, questionnaires. The language of the interviews was Finnish because it is the pupils' native language. The interview questions can be found in the appendix.

3.3 Methods of analysis

The interviews were first transcribed and then analyzed using the methods of content analysis. Content analysis is a way of collecting the most relevant and interesting findings from data and arranging the findings systematically into a compact form (Tuomi & Sarajärvi, 2009:103). In this study, what was said was more important than how it was said, which is why content analysis was more suitable than, for example, discourse analysis. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009:108-120) present the method called *data-based content analysis*, which is used in this study as it concentrates on the data itself. Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009) also introduce two other methods of content analysis, but they focus on analysis through theories, which is not the aim here. There are three stages in data-based content analysis: 1) reducing the data, 2) clustering the data and 3) abstracting it. Applying these stages, the transcribed interviews were first reduced to the extent that was relevant for this study by selecting the most important parts of the interview. Next, all the relevant material was divided into three categories: positive, negative and possible mixed feelings. Last, I named the exact feelings that were visible in the material, for example, happiness, nervousness, confusion etc. Similarly, the drawings were also

analyzed with the methods of content analysis.

4 PUPILS' FEELINGS TOWARDS ENGLISH

Here, I will introduce the results of this study, or in other words, how the two pupils felt about English. Overall, the first participant, who I will call Mari, had very positive feelings towards English. She found English fun and easy to learn. The second participant, however, who is called Outi in this study, had more negative emotions towards English. She struggled with English and experienced feelings of restlessness during English classes. I organized my analysis around five pairs of opposite adjectives that were found in the drawings and in the interviews. Positive feelings included easy, fun, laid-back and useful, and negative feelings included the opposite adjectives difficult, boring, stressful and useless. Next, I will examine the pupils' feelings in more detail.

4.1 Case 1: Mari

Mari had clearly more positive than negative feelings towards English, and these feelings were evident in both her drawing and in the interview. Mari's drawing (see Picture 1) portrays a smiling girl who is



Picture 1. Mari's drawing on how she feels about English.

sitting behind her desk, and she also has a thought bubble with a yellow smiling face in it. The girl is raising her hand and saying “Hallo!” Mari also drew two books with headings “Book” and “Story book”, and a pencil and an eraser. There are no other people in the picture.

4.1.1 Positive feelings

Mari's drawing portrays a very positive image of English. Smiling faces in two places, both on the girl's face and in the thought bubble, are clear examples of positive emotions. Based on the drawing alone, it is relatively safe to assume that Mari enjoys English. The girl in the picture is also raising her hand which could implicate that Mari likes to be active in English classes. Books and writing supplies could mean that she enjoys reading and writing. Mari confirmed these assumptions by stating that she enjoys reading the school book at home with her friends. When asked to describe why she thought the lesson in the drawing was fun, Mari explained that they do fun things in English classes, and that she particularly likes to play during the lessons. Another factor behind her positive feelings could be the class itself; Mari mentioned that she likes the group, as demonstrated in the following example:

Example 1

Interviewer: osaatsä sanoa, että kun tässä [kuvassa] on aika iloinen tää tyttö, niin, millanen tunti se on, et mikä tekee siitä kivan tunnin?

Mari: no, öö, me tehään aina siellä kaikkia kivoja, niinku leikitään ja tälleen enkun kielellä ni sitten meillä on niin kiva ryhmä siellä, tai kiva luokka, ni sitten, mulla on kiva olla siellä

Interviewer: could you tell me, the girl in this [picture] is quite happy, so, what kind of a lesson is it, what makes it a fun lesson?

Mari: well, umm, we always do nice, like we play and stuff in English and we have a nice group there, or a nice class, so then, it is nice to be there

Mari did not seem to have any difficulties with language learning: during the interview, Mari repeatedly expressed that English was fairly easy for her, as illustrated in Example 2. She had attended to an English-speaking daycare where she had begun to learn the language.

Example 2

Interviewer: no, eli sanoisitsä että sä tykkäät opiskella enkkuu?

Mari: joo

Interviewer: joo. No osaatko sä sanoa et minkä takia?

Mari: no se on silleen aika helppoo kun mä olin tota... englanninkielisessä päiväkodissa ni sieltä mä opin sitä

ni sit se on hauskaa

Interviewer: well, would you say that you like to study English?

Mari: yeah

Interviewer: yeah. Well, can you say why?

Mari: well it's quite easy because I was like... in an English daycare and I learned it from there so that's why it's fun

The fact that English is easy seemed to be one of the most important reasons for why Mari likes English since she mentioned it multiple times during the interview. For example, she explained that she does not really need help with her homework as everything is relatively easy. Mari also thought that difficult issues, such as vocabulary, were only difficult when she had not practiced them sufficiently enough.

In addition, Mari considered English as useful for her. She wanted to learn English, not only because she thought it was fun but also because she thought that she would need it in the future, for instance, when traveling abroad. Moreover, she reported that she enjoys learning new things and a new language.

Example 3

Interviewer: jos voisit jättää sen [englannin] pois ni jättäisitkö?

Mari: en.

Interviewer: minkä takia?

Mari: no siellä on kiva olla ja oppii kummiskin uutta tai oppii kieltä

Interviewer: no mitä hyötyä sun mielestä enkusta sit on sulle?

Mari: no et mä voin esimerkiksi silleen puhua jossain muissa maissa sitä ja tälleen

Interviewer: kuinka paljon sä sitten haluaisit opiskella enkkua tulevaisuudessa?

Mari: no kyl mä aika paljon sitä haluisin lukee

Interviewer: if you could leave it [English] out, would you do it?

Mari: no.

Interviewer: why not?

Mari: well it is nice to be there and I am learning new things, or a new language

Interviewer: well how is English beneficial for you, then?

Mari: well I can, for example, like talk it in some other countries and stuff

Interviewer: how much English would you like to study in the future, then?

Mari: well I would like to study it quite a lot

When asked to describe English with three words, Mari came up with happy, fun and a relaxed atmosphere. These were the adjectives that indeed seemed to describe her feelings the most as she kept repeating them through the interview. Furthermore, these three adjectives seem to be evident in the drawing, too, as the girl in it appears to feel exactly like that: happy and relaxed.

Example 4

Interviewer: osaatko keksiä kolme sellaista sanaa joilla kuvaisit englantia?

Mari: mmm... no ainakin... ai siis mitenkä?

Interviewer: ihan vaan jotain sanoja joilla kuvaisit englantia, millaista enkun opiskelu on?

Mari: öö... sellanen iloinen ja siellä on kivaa ja sitten.... silleen aika rento tunnelma on siellä

Interviewer: can you come up with three words you would use to describe English?

Mari: mmm... well at least... how exactly?

Interviewer: just some words you would use to describe English, what is it like to learn English?

Mari: umm... happy and it is fun there and then... like there's quite a relaxed atmosphere there

4.1.2 Negative feelings

There are no negative feelings visible in Mari's drawing. Also the interview was very positive, and she recalled no negative memories of English:

Example 5

Interviewer: entäs osaatko sä sitten kertoo jonkun semmosen ei-niin-kivan muiston, jonkun vähän ikävän muiston englannin kielestä? liittyyks sulla mitään ikävää enkun kieleen?

Mari: no ei ehkä silleen

Interviewer: kaikki on ollu mukavaa?

Mari: niin.

Interviewer: so could you then tell me a not-so-nice memory, a memory about English that is a little unpleasant? is there anything unpleasant about English?

Mari: well, no, I don't think so.

Interviewer: everything has been nice?

Mari: yes.

4.2 Case 2: Outi

Outi's drawing and interview were characterized by a great deal of mixed feelings towards English. Her drawing (Picture 2) portrays a smiling girl sitting in front of her desk, thinking “nyt on kiva tunti” (“*this is a fun lesson*”). Outi also wanted to describe her feelings in a written form: “Jos on sana: Time taple, se on suomeksi lukujärjestys niin kirjaimet vaihtuu ja se on outoa. Mutta joskus se on kivaa ja joskus tylsää” (“*If there is a word: Time taple, it is lukujärjestys in Finnish and the letters change and that is weird. But sometimes it is fun and sometimes boring*”). There are no other people in Outi's

drawing, either.



Picture 2. Outi's drawing on her feelings towards English.

4.2.1 Positive feelings

Outi had some positive feelings towards English, and they were especially related to situations outside of her usual class room. Her positive memory about English was from remedial education, which she attended once a week. What was particularly pleasing about remedial education was that there was a more relaxed atmosphere there than in her usual English classes.

Example 6

Interviewer: osaatko kertoa jonkun englanttiin liittyvän mukavan muiston? Se voi olla täällä koulussa tai sitten kotona tai jossain muualla.

Outi: no tukiopetuksessa mä oon käyny ni siellä on kans sitten rento tunnelma et siellä pelataan muistipelejä ja sit voi ehkä läksyjäkin tehdä siellä ja se on ihan mukavaa

Interviewer: could you tell me a nice memory of English? It can be something from school or home or somewhere else.

Outi: well I have been going to remedial education and there is also a relaxed atmosphere there, we play memory games and then we can maybe do homework there too and that is quite nice

Also using English outside of school was more laid-back for Outi than using English at classes. She mentioned songs as an example of this phenomenon.

Example 7

Interviewer: no millasia tunteita sussa herää kun sä käytät enkkua [koulun ulkopuolella], et tuleeks ehkä sellanen vähän ylpee olo et osaat käyttää sitä?

Outi: joo ja se on sit taas sellanen rento fiilis

Interviewer: et se on rennompi vähän ku sit täällä koulussa?

Outi: joo. ja sit ku rupee just laulaa jotain laulua täällä koulussa ni sit se aina muuttuu vähän tuolla koulussa ja se on sit kotona semmonen rento laulu

Interviewer: well what kinds of feelings do you have when you use English [outside of school], so are you maybe a bit proud to be able to use it?

Outi: yeah and it is again a kind of a relaxed feeling

Interviewer: so it is more laid-back than here at school?

Outi: yeah. and when I start singing a song here at school, it always changes a bit there at school and then at home it is a kind of a laid-back song

What was especially interesting about Outi's drawing was that she had drawn a girl sitting in a class and thinking it is a nice one, when in the interview, her positive feelings were mostly connected to situations outside of her usual classroom.

4.2.2 Negative feelings

Outi expressed having quite many difficulties in English. Firstly, she described some of these difficulties in written form in her drawing, and the major issue there appeared to be a problem with reading. Secondly, she reported that the easiness of English depends greatly on the class and what the teacher had planned, and also if she had some issues, for example, arguments at home:

Example 8

Interviewer: mikä on sun mielestä semmonen kiva tunti?

Outi: no se aina vähän riippuu et jos on vaikka kotona tullu riita ni sit se ei oikein ala kulkee hyvin

Interviewer: what kind of a class if a fun class?

Outi: well it always depends on that, for example, if there has been an argument at home then it will not go well

Many times during the interview, Outi explained feeling restless and somewhat stressed during English classes. She mentioned that, for instance, other pupils affect her concentration. When asked about an unpleasant memory of English, Outi described a particularly restless class room situation:

Example 9

Interviewer: entäs osaatko sanoa sitten jonkun ikävän muiston?

Outi: no sillan kun on oikein levoton päivä ja sitten mun vieressä istuu se Aapo meidän tosta luokasta ni se on kans ihan tosi levoton ja tuntuu niinku joskus että se jotenkin niinku imee sinne mukaan että pitäis niinku hypiä siinä penkillä ja

Interviewer: so could you tell me an unpleasant memory?

Outi: well when it is a really restless day and Aapo from our class sits next to me and he is also very restless and it sometimes feels like he kind of pulls me with him so that I should like jump on the chair and

4.2.3 Mixed feelings

Outi apparently experiences a great deal of mixed feelings about English, and these feelings were evident in both her drawing and in the interview. In the drawing, the text “mutta joskus se on kivaa ja joskus tylsää” (“*but sometimes it is fun and sometimes boring*”) demonstrates how her feelings can go from one end to another. Moreover, Outi explained her drawing in the interview and stated that her feelings depend on the lesson: sometimes she feels a bit restless in classes and, consequently, does not enjoy English that much. On the other hand, English can be fun when she does really well, for example, if she receives an excellent grade from a test:

Example 10

Interviewer: puhutaan ensin tästä kuvasta. voitko sä kertoa miks sä piirsit just näin? miks sulle tuli ne mieleen?

Outi: no mä vähän meinasin et siellä enkun tunnilla ni mä oon siellä aika levoton joskus mutta sitten jos on vaikka testistä tullu numero kymmenen ni sitten se on ihan mukavaa

Interviewer: eli se riippuu ihan tunnista [miten kivaa englanti on]?

Outi: joo.

Interviewer: let's first talk about this picture. could you tell me why you drew these things? Why did these things come to your mind?

Outi: well I meant that I am sometimes a bit restless in English classes but then if I get a ten from a test, then it is quite nice

Interviewer: so it depends on the class [how nice English is]?

Outi: yeah.

In addition, as indicated in the following examples, Outi seemed somewhat confused whether English is useful or not: on one hand, she said that she wants to continue studying English, and that English helps her to learn new words. Furthermore, Outi stated that she likes her English teacher, and that, eventually, learning English might encourage her to study other foreign languages, as well. On the other hand, Outi reported that she does not want to study English that much in the future. Outi also referred to her teacher when asked to explain why she wants to study English, which is in agreement with both Aro (2006) and Alanen's (2003) results that were explained in chapter 2.4.

Example 11

Interviewer: entäs onko sulla semmonen olo et sä haluat opiskella englantia? et jos sä voisit jättää sen pois ni jättäisitkö?

Outi: no sekin taas riippuu vähän päivästä et kyllä mä nyt ehkä en jättäis sitä pois

Interviewer: osaatsä sanoo miks?

Outi: no se opettajakin on semmonen et se on ihan mukava ja

Interviewer: mitä hyötyä sun mielestä enkusta sitten on?

Outi: no jos oppii englantia ni siinä oppii vähän muitakin sanoja ja sit voi jopa joskus siirtyä siihen saksaan tai ruotsiin

Interviewer: and do you feel that you want to study English? so that if you could leave it out, would you?

Outi: well that, too, depends on a day so yeah maybe I would not leave it out now

Interviewer: can you say why?

Outi: well the teacher is like quite nice and

Interviewer: what benefits does English have for you, then?

Outi: well if I learn English, I can learn a bit of other words, too, and then I could even begin studying German or Swedish one day

Example 12

Interviewer: kuinka paljon sä haluat opiskella enkkua tulevaisuudessa?

Outi: no en hirveen paljon mut silleen siitä väliltä... että mä yrittäisin nyt silleen vaan parantaa, se ois se mun päätös

Interviewer: how much English do you want to study in the future?

Outi: well not too much but like somewhere in between... I will now just try to get better at it, that is my decision

4.3 Similarities and differences between the two pupils

It is evident that Mari and Outi had very different kinds of feelings towards English. Although they drew similar kinds of smiling girls in their drawings, the interviews and other issues in the drawings

revealed that their feelings differed quite remarkably. Mari felt very positively about English, and she thought English is fun, easy, useful for her and laid-back. Outi also had some positive feelings towards English, but she, on the contrary, mainly experienced these feelings outside of the classroom: in remedial education and at home. Also the negative feelings differed between the pupils: Mari did not recall any negative memories of English, for example, and she did not have any major difficulties with English. Outi, however, felt that English is quite difficult and that her restlessness during classes affects her learning. No mixed feelings were visible in Mari's drawing or in the interview, but Outi seemed to feel slightly confused about many issues related to English. Her feelings towards English depended on the day, and they could go from one end to another.

5 CONCLUSIONS

In the following section, I will draw some conclusions on the results of the present study. First, I will discuss the relation between the research question and the results. Second, the previous studies introduced in the chapter 2.4 are compared with the present study, and, last, I will suggest some improvements for this study and also make recommendations for further research.

The research question of this study, *what kinds of feelings do children who have learning disorders have towards English*, aimed at increasing teachers and fellow students' awareness of learners' feelings. The goal was to expand the knowledge of feelings as this knowledge can be used to change and develop different teaching materials and methods accordingly to help pupils to learn better. As the results of this study showed, pupils with learning disorders can have a wide range of feelings involved in their learning, and that should be taken into consideration by teachers. Overall, it is not safe to assume that every learner has the same kinds of feelings. Moreover, Outi's interview especially illustrated how much teachers can affect their pupils' feelings, which is why teachers should be interested in studying these feelings and modifying their teaching methods.

As stated before, there are always many different kinds of feelings present in one class, as there was in the results of this study, as well. There are also various reasons for why pupils have these exact feelings. Mari's positive feelings could be the consequence of her long past with English: she had attended to an English-speaking daycare. She might also have a high aptitude, a natural skill to learn

languages, and a great deal of positive learning experiences that result in high motivation, and through that, in positive feelings. As can be seen from Mari's interview and drawing, learning disorders do not necessarily mean that the learner has negative feelings towards learning. On the other hand, it cannot be assumed without further examination that Outi's negative feelings were the consequence of learning disorders. Certainly, it can be concluded from both the drawing and the interview that Outi has some kind of difficulties with reading that also affect her learning in English classes. Teachers, materials, other pupils and situations outside of school, however, seemed to have as much effect on both positive and negative feelings as learning disorders did.

Although the previous studies introduced in the chapter 2.4 concentrated on perspectives that were not the matter of interest in this study, their conclusions were still evident in the present study, too. Aro (2006) studied pupils' opinions and thoughts about English from a dialogical perspective. She especially concentrated on different voices, for example, their teachers and parents', that were heard from the pupils' answers. Quite similarly, Alanen (2003) studied learners' beliefs about foreign language learning from a sociocultural perspective. She focused particularly on the development of the beliefs, and what she found out was that pupils' beliefs developed from other-regulation towards self-regulation over two years. Some of Aro (2006) and Alanen's (2003) conclusions can also be seen in this study: for example, Outi refers to her teacher as the reason why she wants to study English, and to her classmate Aapo, when she talks about how hard it is to concentrate in classes. Other people's voices were not that visible in the present study but the other people's effect can still be seen there.

Naturally, there are some improvements that could be taken into consideration in the future with similar studies. First of all, I was rather nervous during the interviews, which resulted in some questions being easy to simply answer "yes" or "no". Furthermore, I forgot to ask for clarification when it might have been needed. Interviewing skills are particularly important for researchers who interview children as children can be more nervous than adults because the situation is more likely to be new for them. They might also try to answer according to interviewer's expectations or according to what they think is the right answer. Second, as with any kind of a study, the objectivity of these results can be challenged, and especially with picture analysis, the conclusions can rarely be truly objective. That is why it is advisable to, for example, work with another researcher to increase the objectivity of the results. Third, the present study could not take all the different kinds of learning disorders into account due to the

limitations of a Bachelor's Thesis. Further research is needed in order to examine the feelings of pupils with learning disorders as a whole.

It is obvious that more data is needed in order to be able to generalize these kinds of results, and perhaps a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods could be a potential option for further research. Joining interviews and questionnaires could bring a great deal of useful data, and provide generalizations. Furthermore, as stated before, further studies should include all the different kinds of learning disorders. In the future, it would also be quite interesting to study how learners' feelings actually affect their learning as this point of view has not been researched yet. Niilo Mäki Institute's current study of learning disorders and learners' self-image and well-being is also a topic that, so far, has been uncovered. It is evident that learners' feelings are becoming increasingly interesting, and they should be, as they can have long-ranging consequences on learning. Also, as can be seen in the present study as well as in the previous studies, teachers are usually in a key position when trying to affect the learners' feelings, and that is why teachers especially should take pupils' feelings into consideration.

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APPENDIX 1: THE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Kerro kuvasta! Miksi piirsit juuri nämä asiat? Miltä tuntui piirtää? Miksi?
2. Millainen tunti tuossa kuvassa on menossa? + muita kysymyksiä kuvasta

3. Mikä on lempiaineesi koulussa? Entä inhokkiaineesi?
4. Pidätkö englannin opiskelusta? Miksi/miksi et?
5. Millaista enkun opiskelu on? Keksitkö kolme adjektiivia?
6. Kerro jokin englantiin liittyvä mukava ja ikävä muisto!

7. Mikä englannin kielessä on helppoa? Entä vaikeaa?
8. Miten opit englantia parhaiten (jos ei tule mieleen, niin esimerkkinä kuuntelu, puhuminen, kirjoittaminen, lukeminen, sanaston harjoittelu, kielen käyttäminen koulun ulkopuolella, läksyjen tekeminen)
9. Miltä sinusta tuntuu puhua/kuunnella/kirjoittaa/lukea englantia? Entä harjoitella sanoja?
10. Käytätkö englantia koulun ulkopuolella? Millaisissa tilanteissa? Millaisia tunteita sinussa herää enkun käyttäminen muualla kuin koulussa?
11. Miten teet läksyjä? Miten luet kokeisiin?
12. Muistatko viimeisimmän arvosanasi englannista? Olitko siihen tyytyväinen? Oliko sinulla joku tavoite arvosanalle?

13. Millainen englannin opettajasi on?
14. Mitä mieltä kaverisi ovat englannin opiskelusta? Ovatko kaverisi hyviä englannissa?
15. Mitä mieltä vanhempasi ovat englannin opiskelusta? Saatko kotona apua jos tarvitset?
16. Opiskelet englantia puolikkaan ryhmän kanssa. Mitä mieltä olet siitä?

17. Millaisia kirjoja käytätte englannin tunneilla? Mitä mieltä olet niistä? Mitä muita materiaaleja käytätte tunneilla?
18. Mitä yleensä teette englannin tunneilla? Mitä mieltä olet siitä? Haluaisitko jotain enemmän/vähemmän? Mitkä ovat suosikkitehtäviäsi?

19. Haluatko opiskella englantia? Miksi/miksi et? Jos voisit jättää englannin pois, jättäisitkö?
20. Mitä hyötyä englannista on sinulle?
21. Oletko tyytyväinen omaan menestykseen englannin kielessä?
22. Kuinka paljon haluaisit opiskella englantia tulevaisuudessa?