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Title: Voices of pedagogical development: an introduction

Year: 2015

Version:

Please cite the original version:

1 Voices of pedagogical development: an introduction

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1. Introduction

This volume is a collection of articles that demonstrate the longstanding tradition of pedagogical development work at the University of Jyväskylä Language Centre. The teacher-researchers who present their work in these articles share their ideas and development results while advancing their thinking by writing about the work they are doing. The chapters thus represent a spectrum of voices and perspectives and show different stages of pedagogical thinking and perception.

The Language Centre system in Finland dates back to the mid-1970s when a system of language teaching units was established in many Finnish universities. Some years later, these units were then set up as autonomous institutes whose responsibility was, and still is, to offer language and communication courses to all university students. All university degrees in Finland include compulsory language credits in a student's L1 (written and/or spoken academic communication), in the second national language (Swedish or Finnish depending on the language of the degree) plus in at least one foreign language. Many students also take optional courses in various languages and communication studies.

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In 2015, the University of Jyväskylä Language Centre is a mid-size autonomous institution with about 90 employees. The Centre offers courses in 14 languages to about 12,000 students. Moreover, it is a multilingual, multicultural and multidisciplinary expert organisation that supports the internationalisation of the university.

The operations of the Centre can be divided into three dimensions: academic language teaching, support for teaching and research, and pedagogic and strategic development (Table 1). Internationalisation is the principle underpinning all three of the dimensions. It incorporates the internationalisation of the students and staff as well as structures for supporting the university's international staff (e.g. through Finnish language courses that support learning a language at work).

Table 1.   The operations of the Language Centre

Language Centre		
Languages, communication, and internationalisation		
Academic language teaching	Support for teaching and research	Pedagogic and strategic development
• Degree students (BA, MA) • International students	• PhD students • Staff training	• Research and development projects and initiatives
Internationalisation (including translation and proofreading services)		

To be successful in these demanding and extensive operations, the Centre has to set clear goals for its operations. In the continuing discussions among the staff, the following goals have been identified to support the Centre in its role:

- embed aspects of future working life skills, including digital literacies and a sense of global citizenship;

- promote active participation in disciplinary discourses and support the development of academic literacies;

- offer modern approaches to learning in pedagogy and content;

- ensure good working conditions for the staff.

Achieving these goals requires dynamic pedagogical development that is grounded in theory as well as concerned with ways of working and development at the Centre. Embedded in the goals is the idea that the future is not predetermined nor is it something that just happens. Instead, we, as practitioners, make it happen. We become, in essence, designers of the future.

2. New directions for educating the academic experts of the future

The drivers for change in higher education language teaching come in many forms. For our work, the following perspectives are not just relevant but essential: societal, organisational, pedagogical and individual.

The societal and organisational perspectives deal with the expectations laid out in policy documents as well as the changing demands of society. These expectations and demands are related to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the contemporary world. The labour market, for instance, is in a state of flux: a growing number of jobs are knowledge-intensive and require the capacity to operate in different languages and to use a range of technologies in order to navigate the expanding sea of information. In addition, legislation on university degrees increasingly emphasises language and communication competence while at the same time cutting down on the time for students to comply with their subject-study requirements.

The pedagogical perspective, in turn, deals with objectives and ideals such as multilingual interaction and the development of academic expertise. However, in practice, multilingual interaction is often reduced to English only, and language and communication studies are isolated from the subject studies. Thus, language and communication competence is not always understood as

an element of academic expertise. In this respect, there is a need to shift the focus from teaching to learning and from teaching students to educating future academic professionals.

Finally, the individual perspective takes into account the personal goals and challenges of both teachers and students. One of the key challenges is that of epistemic practices: information overload and the fast pace of working increases the demands on literacy skills and knowledge work. Students need to cope with academic texts in foreign languages from the very beginning of their studies – often without much systematic support. Moreover, students are expected to work in flexible ways that require a self-directed approach. The complexity increases even further when one considers how students' backgrounds differ in terms of education, nationality, goals and learning cultures. Moreover, teachers need to stay up to date on the changing content of various disciplines while not being experts in any of them.

3.   A culture of teaching development and research

To be able to deal with these changing conditions, a research-based approach to work has been a central feature of the working culture at the Language Centre. Since 1994, the whole staff has been engaged in systematic action research. This research has been one of the key tools for quality management, continuous development and proactive measures. Over the years, the focus areas and the approaches have varied, but the 20-year period of action research came to a natural conclusion with the final cycle in 2012–2014. A need had been identified for a more dynamic way of working as well as for a more sustainable impact of the development findings and outcomes. This ending, however, was the beginning of a new developmental mechanism to initiate a large-scale transformation of the compulsory language and communication courses.

In an attempt to emphasise the importance of pedagogical development, 2014 was declared to be the Year of Teaching. During the year different ongoing

development initiatives were brought to a close and their implications and results were discussed in staff meetings and pedagogical sessions. This was also when all of the more than 500 courses in the Language Centre curriculum were re-evaluated for accuracy in outcomes and assessment, as well as to see whether they still had a valid role in the curriculum.

4. Voices of pedagogical development: an overview

4.1. Expanding perspectives

The book is structured in three parts. In part one, the four chapters aim at **expanding perspectives** on the multilayered and multivoiced reality of pedagogical development in higher education. The chapters are situated within different theoretical and empirical domains, but also echo the multiple voices of practitioners at the Centre.

In Chapter 2, **Carolan** and **Kyppö** focus on how process writing is taught in a particular online environment. In the context of an academic writing course in English, they describe the potential and pitfalls of the process approach. They offer both student and teacher perspectives on the writing process.

In Chapter 3, **Kokkonen** and **Almonkari** address the role of interpersonal communication competence in modern working life and higher education from a pedagogical perspective. They give a comprehensive overview of the research in the area and argue that interpersonal communication competence is at the core of being an expert in contemporary networked society. They seek to expand the scope of the current discussion in a pedagogical direction.

In Chapter 4, **Kyppö** examines how a less commonly taught language, Slovak, is handled in an online teaching environment. She provides an extensive theoretical background – from sociocontructivism and agency to motivation and language learning awareness – for the design of an online course. These

concepts are then used as the basis for an investigation of student learning within the course.

In Chapter 5, **Natri** and **Räsänen** describe the process of developing a conceptual framework for multilingual and multicultural academic and professional communication competence. They present MAGICC, a Europe-wide project in which language practitioners worked together to expand the current assessment practices and the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).

4.2.   Enhancing practices

Part two consists of five chapters that look into **enhancing practices** by engaging teachers, students and other cooperating partners in reflection and development. New practices are co-designed with students and other partners and it is important to ensure that their voices are heard at all stages of the process. This way it is also possible to ensure that the development reflects current needs and demands.

In Chapter 6, **Károly** explores the notion of assessment for learning from the perspective of feedback practices. She reports the results of a survey that aimed to reveal students' previous experiences of feedback as well as their views and preferences regarding feedback. The results emphasise the importance of aligning feedback practices in terms of why and how.

In Chapter 7, **Westerholm** and **Räsänen** report the participant voices of a staff development programme in intercultural university pedagogy. They portray the challenges posed by increasing internationalisation for teaching and describe how the programme aims at responding to these challenges.

In Chapter 8, **Tuomi** and **Jauhojärvi-Koskelo** focus on enabling full participation of university students with disabilities. As a backdrop for the development work, they describe the results of a survey targeted at the language centre staff that aimed at finding out what kind of knowledge and resources teachers needed regarding barrier-free education. Based on the results, the working group for

barrier-free language centre designed, among other things, a website to provide useful resources for both teachers and students.

In Chapter 9, **Laakkonen** examines the role of digital literacy as part of pedagogical design. The main concept is the Personal Learning Environment (PLE), which is operationalised in a language course where students are allowed and encouraged to use digital tools that both feel natural and best support their learning.

In Chapter 10, **Seppälä** focuses on learner agency and investigates how it is enabled and expressed on a higher education language course. The chapter contributes to the discussion of how to develop learner agency and empower university students to meet the demands of today's society and working life.

4.3.   Exploring perceptions

Finally, the five chapters in part three aim at **exploring perceptions** of language, language learning, and literature. The chapters tackle three central questions of language teaching: what we teach, how we teach it and why we teach it.

In Chapter 11, **Eloranta** and **Jalkanen** examine the perceptions of language and language learning in university students' descriptions of learning Finnish as a second language. In the middle of growing pressures for internationalisation, there is an immense need to understand when, where and for which purposes learners need Finnish. This chapter takes a step in that direction by examining the learning paths of three international students who studied Finnish on a one-term elementary course.

In Chapter 12, **Jokinen** and **Vaarala** explore how literature and language are perceived and re-conceptualised as a social practice on a modern Finnish literature course targeted at students studying Finnish in universities across Europe. The teaching experiment reported in the chapter illuminates how blogging can broaden learners' conceptions of literature and strengthen their language proficiency.

In Chapter 13, **Saaristo** analyses students' views on grammar and its role in formal language learning. He reports the results of a questionnaire which aimed, among other things, to provide a pedagogical basis and a point of departure for the use of grammar in teaching and to help bridge the potential gap between the teacher's and students' understandings.

In Chapter 14, **Kyppö**, **Natri**, **Pietarinen** and **Saaristo** and introduce a pilot course that aims at the enhancement of students' skills in multilingual and multicultural communication. The course design provides a space for exploring, enhancing and expanding one's conception of language competence in multilingual and multicultural settings.

In Chapter 15, **Takala** investigates why students decide to study Japanese and anchors her exploration in the theory of motivation. The results of her survey illuminate the motivational aspects behind students' language choices. This final chapter of the book contributes to the notion that students' reasons for studying different languages vary greatly and the pedagogical challenge is to combine the diverse personal goals with the course design.

5.   A multiplicity of voices forms the basis for promoting expertise

The need to re-conceptualise language learning in higher education is clearer than ever: language learning must be seen as the development of a strategic capacity to work with other experts in multilingual, multicultural, multidisciplinary and multimodal contexts that are characterised by change and uncertainty.

In our larger development framework, we recognise the fact that many of the characteristics of the future academic professional belong to language and communication education. These characteristics include the notions of expertise, agency and co-configuration. Expertise is, in our view, always relational (see Edwards 2010) and deals with the ability to communicate and share one's

expertise with others and for different purposes through various media and in a range of contexts. In this light, expertise is seen as distributed across networks, negotiated with others around tasks, a resource for joint action, and mediated through languages, cultures, and technologies. Such a view places interaction and languages at the core of expertise.

Agency, in turn, is "understood as the breaking away from a given frame of action and the taking of initiatives to transform it" (Engeström 2005, cited in Virkkunen 2006: 43). Such a break is required of both students and teachers if pedagogical change is to happen. Co-configuration can be considered as one form of modern work (cf. Victor & Boynton 1998) and in which interaction is one of the central features. All this means that there is a growing need for both teachers and students to build an understanding of how expertise is constructed, manifested, negotiated, contested and re-constructed through languaging and across multiple spaces and timescales.

In this collection of articles we have only touched upon some of these elements. With these voices, visions and ideas, we have looked to convey an array of perspectives on teaching practice and thought. By doing so, we present diverse approaches and endeavours that may, on the surface, appear to be different but which on a deeper level share the same purpose; to better understand the context we work in and to use that increased understanding to make a difference and move us a few steps towards new practices and worlds of thinking. It is these worlds we want to open and offer for our students to further explore, expand and enhance.

We truly hope you will find our work thought-provoking, useful and enjoyable.

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