

# Action-based teaching in primary school English language education in Finland

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Toiminnallisuus ja toiminnalliset opetusmenetelmät ovat yleisiä termejä tämän päivän pedagogisessa kirjallisuudessa. Vuonna 2016 voimaan astuvissa Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteissa (2014) toiminnallisuus ja toiminnalliset työtavat mainitaan kielten opetuksessa käytettävänä opetusmenetelminä. Toiminnallisuutta ei kuitenkaan ole paljoa tutkittu kielenopetuksen kontekstissa eikä termille ole laadittu yksiselitteistä ja kattavaa määritelmää. Tästä syystä on tärkeää selvittää, mitä toiminnallisuus on, miten sitä voidaan hyödyntää opetuksessa ja millaisia toiminnalliset opetusmenetelmät kielten opetuksessa ovat.</p> <p>Tutkielman tarkoitus on selvittää, miten alaluokkien englanninopettajat ymmärtävät termin toiminnallisuus ja miten he käyttävät toiminnallisia menetelmiä opetuksessaan. Myös opettajien kokemuksia toiminnallisten menetelmien käytöstä ja niiden vaikutuksista oppimiseen tarkastellaan tutkielmassa. Käytetty aineisto koostuu kolmen englannin oppitunnin observointimuistiinpanoista ja kahden opettajan haastatteluista. Tutkielman aineisto on analysoitu sisällönanalyysiä soveltaen.</p> <p>Tulosten mukaan opettajat käsittivät toiminnallisuuden melko yleisellä tasolla ja määrittelivät sen tarkoittavan kaikkea, mikä ei edellytä pulpetissa istumista ja työskentelyä kynän ja paperin kanssa. Opettajat käyttivät toiminnallisia menetelmiä melko paljon opetuksessaan, mutta niiden määrä ja luonne vaihtelivat opettajasta riippuen. Opettajat kokivat toiminnallisuuden edistävän oppimista nostamalla motivaatiota ja antamalla onnistumisen kokemuksia myös heikommille oppilaille.</p> <p>Rajallisuudestaan huolimatta tutkielma esittää näkökulmia toiminnallisten opetusmenetelmien käytöstä alaluokkien englannin opetuksesta sekä tarjoaa tietoa opettajien kokemuksista ja asenteista sitä kohtaan.</p>	
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

“Toiminnallisuus” or action-based teaching<sup>1</sup> is a core concept in the rhetoric of pedagogical literature and education in Finland today. Many writers use the term in their writing to describe the nature of a preferred approach to teaching, which emphasises the active role of learners. However, the definitions of the term given in literature are rather imprecise and ambiguous even though action-based teaching and learning are not new concepts in Finnish education. The Finnish National Board of Education states in the new National Core Curriculum for Basic Education (*Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet*) (2014: 242), that versatile and action-based (“toiminnallisia työtapoja”) approaches should be used in foreign language teaching. However, it is not specifically defined in the Curriculum what action-based teaching is and how it should be applied in language teaching.

As pointed out above, action-based teaching is not a new concept in the field of education and language teaching. The Council of Europe (2001: 9) presents a common framework for language teaching in Europe in which an action-oriented, that is, action-based approach to teaching is adopted. Van Lier (2007) describes action-based teaching as a similar approach to language teaching in which the learner is considered an active agent and learning is understood as a result of meaningful activity of the learner. These descriptions of action-based approach to teaching, however, do not present the specific activities that would be considered as action-based teaching. Neither do they provide research information about the possible effects of action-based teaching on the learning results of learners.

As action-based teaching will become a required approach to language teaching according to the new National Core Curriculum of 2014, which takes effect in 2016, the phenomenon has recently become a rather popular subject of study. Seppänen and Väisänen (2015) investigated the use of physical activation of learners in secondary and upper-secondary school Swedish education. Their results showed that physical activation of the learners was used to some extent but it did not prove to be a regular practice among teachers. Furthermore, Seppänen and Väisänen (2015) found that most exercises in Swedish books did not require

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<sup>1</sup> Since there is no term for “toiminnallisuus” in English, the term action-based teaching is used in the present research. It comes from van Lier’s article (2007), where he uses the term to describe a phenomenon that is very similar to “toiminnallisuus”.

any physical activation from learners. However, according to Sergejeff (2007: 82–83), physical activation is only one feature of action-based teaching, which also includes mental activation as well as personal and emotional engagement to the content to be learnt. Thus, action-based teaching as a whole was not studied in Seppänen and Väisänen (2015).

So far, little research has been done on action-based teaching and its use in the context of language teaching. The present study, therefore, sets out to investigate the use of action-based teaching in Finnish primary school English classes and to explore their teachers' experiences about it. The aim of this study is to better understand what action-based teaching is, what kind of approaches to teaching are used in it and what its effects are on learning. The study is conducted from the point of view of language teachers.

## 2 ACTION-BASED TEACHING

In this chapter, I will briefly introduce my reader to relevant changes in approaches to language teaching that have influenced action-based teaching. I will then address the issue of defining action-based teaching first in general and then in the context of language teaching. Lastly, the Finnish National Core Curriculums for Basic Education of 2004 and 2014 will be consulted in order to investigate what is said there about action-based teaching and its use in primary school language education.

### 2.1 Language teaching methods and action-based teaching

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011: 1) define the term *method* as “a coherent set of links between the actions of the teacher in a classroom and the thoughts that underlie the actions”. The methods of language teaching have been studied and developed throughout the history of language study. Over the past decades, these methods of teaching have experienced significant changes (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011). The emphasis on different skills has changed along the understanding of what language is and what is seen as important in it. The trend in teaching methods has shifted from deductive studying of grammar and vocabulary towards more learner-centered and inductive approaches on learning (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011). In recent years, the things that learners do and say have become more important aspects in language teaching than the form and the quality of linguistic input (Van Lier 2007: 46). As Van Lier (2007: 46) states, the focus has shifted from mental processing of information towards active participation of the learner in meaningful activity.

One significant method that puts more emphasis on the role of the learner than the teacher or input matters in language learning is called the Communicative Approach (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011: 115–145). This approach on language teaching considers learning to communicate in meaningful situations the central focus of language learning and teaching (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011: 122). It focuses on abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation, which include the body and the mind of the learner (Kohonen 2001: 29). From these ideas, researchers have developed further approaches on language teaching, one of which is the focus of the present study, that is, *action-based teaching*.

It is important to emphasise at this point that the different methods of language teaching are not seen as competitive since there is no empirical evidence on superior effectiveness of one teaching method over another (Kohonen 1987: 69). No method, as Kohonen (1987: 69) stresses, can be proven suitable for every learner or teacher in any possible context. Consequently, teachers can use and apply these methods and combine them together as they see suitable for the purpose and context of their teaching as well as for the group of learners they are teaching.

## **2.2 Defining action-based teaching**

Jaakkola, Liukkonen and Sääkslahti (2013: 668) define the term action-based learning (“toiminnallinen oppiminen”) as learning in which problems, questions and tasks (e.g. cognitive, social, ethical, affective and motor) are being solved through physical actions. Thus, action-based teaching can be understood as an approach to teaching that facilitates these forms of learning. Sergejeff (2007: 82) defines action-based teaching as an approach to teaching in which the learner is an active participant. According to this definition, learning is understood as the product of experience that results from comprehensive activity of the learner (Sergejeff 2007: 82). She argues that action-based teaching emphasises learning in practice, which enables learners to connect the content of learning to themselves and to their feelings and through this make the learning process easier (Sergejeff 2007: 82–83). Vuorinen (2005: 180) states that action-based teaching is a way of making teaching concrete. He argues that action-based teaching allows the learner to explore, try and rehearse the content that is being learnt. In his opinion, it involves active participation from the learner, which means that learning is based on the learner’s own experiences (Vuorinen 2005: 180–181).

Based on these definitions of action-based teaching, the phenomenon can be understood in various ways. Jaakkola et al. (2013: 668) emphasise the role of physical actions in action-based teaching. Accordingly, in their view, action-based teaching approaches focus on the physical activity of the learners which means that the use of one’s body in learning is crucial. In contrast, Sergejeff (2007) and Vuorinen (2005) define action-based teaching so that it is not entirely limited to the physical activity of the learners. Rather, they emphasise the aspect of learning in practice through concrete actions. In their view, the activity of the learner can be physical but it does not necessarily have to be that. However, the ways in which action-

based teaching is understood and defined can depend on the context in which it is used. That is, action-based teaching can be different in the context of physical education compared to the context of language teaching. The context of language teaching is discussed in more detail in 2.1.3.

### **2.3 Action-based teaching approaches**

Based on the definitions described above, action-based teaching can be stated to include various forms of teaching that focus on the activity of the learner. Vuorinen (2005: 181) argues that games, plays and competitions are a crucial feature in action-based teaching and are at their best when connected to the phenomenon that is being learnt. In the Finnish National Core Curriculum of 2014, action-based ways of teaching are defined rather similarly. In the Curriculum (2014: 21), games, physical activity, experimentation and different art forms are listed as examples of action-based teaching. It is stated in the Curriculum (2014: 21) that these action-based approaches on teaching promote the joy of learning and enable the development of creative thinking in learners. Koskenkari (2013) argues that activities that promote learning through physical exercise can also be seen as an approach to action-based teaching. Accordingly, action-based teaching includes a spectrum of teaching practices that aim to activate the learner on psychological, physical, emotional, cognitive and social levels using the body and senses of the learner as tools for learning.

Vuorinen (2005: 180) states that action-based teaching is usually a social phenomenon, in which a group of learners support each other's learning and take responsibility for their work and the problems that occur in it. Thus, cooperative approaches and group work activities can also be seen as action-based teaching as long as they include active participation of the learners. Action-based teaching approaches, as Koskenkari (2013) points out, develop the social skills of learners as they engage them in cooperative and social situations. She argues that discussions and negotiations are in a significant role in action-based approaches and through them learners learn to take their peers into account. However, it is worth pointing out that cooperative learning, which is "yhteistoiminnallinen oppiminen" in Finnish, is not an interchangeable term with action-based learning and teaching ("toiminnallinen oppiminen") and does not necessarily include features of action-based teaching. As stated above, the active participation of the learners is the crucial feature.



## 2.4 Action-based teaching in the context of language teaching

In order to get a broad understanding of theories that have affected action-based teaching in the context of language teaching, it is important to acknowledge that it has some overlapping features with many rather significant methods of language teaching (van Lier 2007: 48). Methods such as Total Physical Response (see Asher 1982, Koksela 2001) and Task-based Language Teaching (see Long 2015) can be seen as closely related to action-based teaching, since they all emphasise the active role of the learner in language learning. Van Lier (2007) discusses action-based teaching in the context of language teaching. In his view, action-based teaching is connected to, for example, the following methods: task-based, content-based, project-based, exploratory, experiential, English for specific purposes (ESP), Community-based language socialisation and Computer-assisted language learning (CALL) (van Lier 2007: 48). Of the related methods listed, experiential language learning and teaching can be argued to have most prominent overlapping features with action-based teaching (see Kohonen et al. 2001).

In language teaching, action-based teaching can be understood as an approach to teaching that emphasises the functionality of language. That is, language skills are seen as means of performing actions and functioning in real life social situations. The Council of Europe (2001: 9) uses the term action-based teaching interchangeably with the term *action-oriented approach* to language teaching and describes it as follows:

(...) it views users and learners of a language as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning.

Thus, the main goal in language teaching, according to the Council of Europe (2001: 9), is to teach learners how to function in everyday social situation by using the target language. In other words, the focus in language learning and teaching is not on some specific language skill. Rather, the aim is to provide learners with useful means and knowledge of how to use the target language in real life situations. According to this view, language is learnt best in social situations that require interaction with other users of the language. Consequently, action-based teaching approaches can be viewed as ways of providing learners with these types of social situations through which concrete use of the target language can be learnt. Since real life situations where the target language would be naturally used are hard to arrange

in school contexts, action-based teaching approaches can serve as a way of rehearsing these situations within the school environment. (See Council of Europe 2001: 9–15).

Van Lier (2007) describes action-based teaching in a very similar way. He points out that, in action-based teaching, *agency* is seen as the most prominent feature over any specific curricular organisation (van Lier 2007: 46). He explains that agency involves the idea that learning results from the initiative and the activity of the learner (van Lier 2008). This notion closely resembles the approach to language teaching discussed by the Council of Europe (2001: 9). In their view, language is a way of performing actions and is therefore needed for functioning in real life social situations (Council of Europe 2001: 9). Van Lier (2007: 52, clarification added) states that “AB [action-based] pedagogy is centrally concerned with setting up facilitative structures that enhance, but not impede, the processes that lead to lasting and meaningful learning”. In other words, in action-based teaching, the contents taught and the approaches used are based on the needs and activities of the learner rather than determining the contents that must be covered in language teaching (van Lier 2007: 53, Council of Europe 2001: 9). The role of the teacher is to provide with resources for learning and guide the learner’s actions towards achieving the goals for learning (van Lier 2007: 53). Van Lier (2007: 54) argues that action-based teaching makes use of something that is called the learner’s *kinaesthetic perception*, which means that all the senses of the learner are treated as a whole in teaching. He expresses this notion as follows:

However, the ecological, action-based view assumes that what is stored in the brain is not an ever-growing and complexifying linguistic system, but an increasingly sophisticated array of action-schemata that incorporate linguistic, perceptual, bodily, affective and other real-world aspects of experiences as models for future activities that include repetitions – with – changes. (Van Lier 2007: 55).

As discussed earlier in this study, little research has been done on the phenomenon of action-based teaching in the context of language teaching. Seppänen and Väisänen (2015) studied physical activity of secondary and upper secondary school learners in the context of Swedish language teaching in Finland. The focus of their study was specifically physical activity of the learners, which can be seen as one approach to, or a feature of, action-based teaching (see Jaakkola et al 2013: 668). Seppänen and Väisänen’s study focused also to the ways in which the textbooks used in Swedish teaching support the physical activity of learners. The data consisted of four B1 level Swedish textbooks and thematic interviews of five Swedish

teachers. The results of the study showed that, in general, the teachers had a positive attitude towards activating learners physically in language teaching. According to Seppänen and Väisänen (2015), the teachers used physical activity in their teaching to an extent but the reasons for using it usually stemmed from the teachers' personal interest towards physical activation. However, Seppänen and Väisänen (2015) ignored other features of action-based teaching in their study.

The present study explores action-based teaching in the context of language teaching. In this study, action-based teaching is defined as teaching that focuses on the active role of the learner in the language learning process. It is considered to include approaches to language teaching that address the kinaesthetic perception of the learners by using, for example, play, games, drama, songs, experiments, arts and physical activation in order to produce meaningful learning through personal experience. The main idea is that learning results from participating in meaningful activity and the activation of the learner's kinaesthetic memory.

## **2.5 Action-based teaching in the Finnish National Core Curriculums**

In Finland, the Finnish National Board of Education defines the national guidelines and rules for primary school level teaching in the Finnish National Core Curriculum (Perusopetuksen opetusunnitelman perusteet). That is, all primary schools and their teachers in Finland are obligated to follow the alignments of this document. The Finnish National Core Curriculum gives guidelines of, for example, how learning is understood, what contents should be taught in each class and what kind of methods and learning environments should be applied in teaching. The current National Core Curriculum is from the year 2004. However, a new revised curriculum, which was finished on 22 December 2014, comes into effect on 1 August, 2016 (Finnish National Board of Education 2015). The following paragraphs show what is said about language and language teaching in the current (2004) and the upcoming (2014) National Core Curriculums. The ways in which the curriculums are related to action-based teaching are also discussed below.

It is stated in the current National Core Curriculum (2004: 18) that learning results from the learner's active and goal-oriented action. That is, learning is seen as a consequence of the learner's active and purposeful participation. This definition of the nature of learning is

closely related to how learning is understood in the action-based teaching approach. As mentioned earlier, action-based teaching considers learning as the result of the learner's comprehensive activity (Sergejeff 2007: 82). The Finnish National Board of Education states in the National Core Curriculum (2004: 18) that the nature of foreign language teaching in the first and the second grade of primary school is *action-based* ("toiminnallista") and has features of play in it. Thus, it is clearly expressed in the Curriculum of 2004 that action-based teaching should be used in language instruction at least at the earliest stage of foreign language learning. However, there is no mention of action-based teaching when it comes to grades 3-9 in the Curriculum (2004: 138–142). Furthermore, in several Finnish schools the teaching of English only begins at the third grade of primary school. Based on what is said in the Curriculum of 2004, it seems that action-based teaching is limited to concern language teaching only in the first two grades in primary school level language education whereas it is not required later on in other grades.

The new Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014: 127; 219; 348) states that versatile and action-based ("toiminnallisia työtapoja") methods should be used in foreign language teaching in general. That is, in contrast to the curriculum of 2004, the 2014 version expands the use of action-based teaching to concern all foreign language teaching from grade one until grade nine. It is stated that English teaching in grades three to six should include games, play, singing and drama (Finnish National Core Curriculum 2014: 221). These forms of teaching are characteristic to action-based teaching and are considered as ways of making teaching concrete and to include emotional, experiential and physical activation of the learner in it (Vuorinen 2005: 180–181). The alignments about teaching in the Finnish National Core Curriculum (2014: 17) are based on the idea of the learner as an active agent.

Based on these differences in the National Core Curriculums of 2004 and 2014, the use of action-based teaching in primary school English classes should increase as the curriculum changes in 2016. However, little research is done on the phenomenon of action-based teaching itself even though the term is used frequently in Finnish pedagogical literature and in curriculum texts. Accordingly, it is important to investigate how action-based teaching is currently used in primary level English teaching and how it is realised in the language classroom context.

### **3 THE PRESENT STUDY**

#### **3.1 The research questions**

This research aims to better understand the use of action-based teaching in Finnish primary school level English teaching. It aims to study how (if at all) action-based teaching is currently used in English classes in Central Finland and what kind of experiences and thoughts their teachers have about using it. To be more exact, it sets out to answer the following questions:

1. How do the teachers understand the term “toiminnallisuus” or action-based teaching?
2. How, if at all, is the action-based teaching method used in the English classrooms?
3. What kind of experiences do the teachers have about action-based teaching and its effectiveness?

With the first question, I would like to find out how the teachers understand the ambiguous term “toiminnallisuus”. Since the term is used somewhat liberally in the rhetoric of present pedagogical literature, it is possible that teachers understand the term in different ways. The way action-based teaching is understood most probably affects the way teachers organise their teaching. Accordingly, exploring the teachers’ understanding of the term may explain the reasons behind their choices for the teaching methods they use.

With the second question, my aim is to discover if there is some observable use of action-based teaching approaches in the English classes. I also wish to find out whether there are any connections between the ways in which the teachers understand action-based teaching and the ways in which they use it in their own teaching.

The third question focuses on the teachers’ experiences about using action-based teaching. It sets out to explore the teachers’ thoughts about the positive and negative sides of using the action-based teaching approach. Moreover, it aims to find out the teachers’ subjective thoughts about the effect of action-based teaching on pupils’ learning.

### **3.2 Data and methods of analysis**

The data was gathered in May 2015 by doing a qualitative mixed methods research, which combined observation and interviews. The advantage of combining these methods is that they provide a broader understanding of the use of action-based teaching in the English classrooms than when used separately. Observation has been used by other researchers (e.g. Larsen-Freeman and Anderson 2011) when researching teaching methods and approaches. The interviews set out to discover the teachers' subjective thoughts about action-based teaching while the observation part aimed to study its actual use in the classroom more objectively.

The subjects of this study were two primary school English teachers from Central Finland. Both of the teachers were females. Firstly, their use of action-based teaching was observed, focusing on the observable features of action-based teaching in the teachers' classroom instruction, such as the use of games, songs, drama or other activities that combine physical activity and English language use. These observations were documented in written form (see Appendices 1 and 2). Two 20-minute long observations were conducted in Teacher 1's first and second-grade classes. The third observation, which was made in Teacher 2's third-grade English class, lasted 45 minutes. The first two observations were shorter because the school's schedule was arranged so that the first and second-grade groups had both 20 minutes of English within one 45-minute lesson and 5 minutes of the lesson were used for switching the groups.

Secondly, the teachers were interviewed and their answers were recorded. The interviews were semi-structured; the questions (see Appendices 3 and 4) were designed according to the areas of interest defined above, such as the teachers' understanding of the term action-based teaching, their perceptions and experiences of action-based teaching, and the use of action-based teaching approaches in their classroom. The teachers were also asked about their subjective thoughts considering the possible positive and negative effects of action-based teaching on their pupils' learning. The interviews were in Finnish since it was the native language of the teachers.

The data was analysed by using content analysis as the main method. The recorded data was transcribed since text is easier to handle and analyse than auditory data (Flick 2007: 103). The data was then analysed by coding and categorizing, which are frequently used ways of

analysing data that results from interviews and observations (Flick 2007: 101). The comparison of the teachers' answers to the observations aimed to discover similarities and differences between the teachers' own experiences of action-based teaching and their use of it in the language classroom context. The data was lastly grouped and classified according to these similarities and differences (see Flick 2007: 103).

## 4 ACTION-BASED TEACHING IN PRIMARY SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASSES

The purpose of this study was to better understand how action-based teaching is currently understood and used by primary school English teachers. It also explored what kind of views and experiences the teachers had about its effectiveness. This chapter presents the findings of the present study.

### 4.1 The teachers' definitions for action-based teaching

As pointed out earlier, the definitions of action based teaching made in pedagogical literature are rather ambiguous and more general than specific (compare Jaakkola et al. 2013, Sergejeff 2007 and Vuorinen 2005). Consistent with this notion, both of the interviewed teachers had trouble defining the term “toiminnallisuus” or action-based teaching in their own words when asked to do so. This was evident in the fact that the teachers defined the term at a very general level instead of giving detailed and unambiguous definitions for it. The generality and ambiguity of the teachers' definitions may stem from the current pedagogical discourse in which the term action-based teaching is frequently used in different educational contexts without comprehensively defining what it means. It is possible that the term “toiminnallisuus” is seen as self-explanatory in Finnish language and it therefore is not defined so specifically. Examples 1 and 2 show what kind of definitions the interviewed teachers gave to action-based teaching. Moreover, Example 2 shows how Teacher 2 states that action-based teaching is something that can be understood in different ways and that it does not necessarily mean the same thing to everybody:

(1) T1: No ihan käytännössä se mun mielestä tark... mahdollistaa niinku sen erilaisen oppimisen liikkeen kautta. Ja se mahdollistaa vieraissa kielissä niitten merkitysten ilmasemisen ilman että tarvii sitä kääntämistä paljon käyttää varsinki pienillä oppilailla.

*Well in practice in my opinion it means... enables that different learning through motion. And in foreign languages it enables the expression of meanings so that interpreting is not used much especially with small pupils.*

(2) T2: Kun toiminnallisuus sen voi todellakin tulkita monella tavalla. Eli jotain sellasta oppitunnille että lasten ei tarvitse istua 45 minuuttia ihan paikallaan tekemässä kirjallisia tehtäviä.

*Action-based teaching can certainly be interpreted in various ways. So it is something to a lesson that children do not have to sit 45 minutes completely still doing written assignments.*



The teachers were also asked to formulate a condensed definition of action-based teaching, which would express their understanding of what it means. Examples 3 and 4 show how the teachers summarised what action-based teaching was to them:

(3) T2: No sanoisinko näin että kielen oppimista niin että peppu ei ole välttämättä penkissä kiinni... ja suu liikkuu... tai eleet toimivat.

*Well, should I say that it is language learning so that one's bum is not necessarily stuck to a chair... and one's lips are moving... or gestures are working.*

(4) T1: Se on kaikkee sitä mikä ei oo sitä kynää ja paperia. Joka... jonka tavoitteena on niinku mahdollistaa se motivaation kohottaminen ja sitä kautta myöskin sitten ehkä paremmat oppimistulokset.

*It is everything that is not pen and paper. That... In which the aim is to enable that motivation to grow and through that then also maybe better learning results.*

According to the Examples above, action-based teaching was a familiar concept to both of the interviewed teachers. Both teachers shared a similar understanding that action-based teaching could be anything that did not require the learners sitting still by the desk doing written assignments. Thus, the interviewees' summarised definitions of action-based teaching can be argued to implicitly contain a similar idea of learners as physically active participants that is discussed in Jaakkola et al. (2013: 668). However, the definitions the teachers gave to action-based teaching were so general and wide that, according to them, nearly anything the learners do that is different from writing while sitting by the desk would be counted as action-based learning and teaching. Accordingly, if the definitions were taken literally, for teaching to become action-based, there would be no need for further activation of the learners than just taking them away from the desk. Furthermore, the statement that pen and paper are not used in action-based teaching would mean that no written assignments could be counted as means of action-based teaching. In contrast to this interpretation, Vuorinen (2005: 180–181) and Sergejeff (2007) put more emphasis on the active role of learners in action-based teaching. Moreover, van Lier (2007) adds to the notion of learner agency the use of all the senses and the complexity of the human body.

## **4.2 Approaches associated to action-based teaching by the teachers**

Although action-based teaching was defined rather generally by the teachers, they seemed to have a more concrete and clear understanding of what it was in practice. The interviewees were able to identify several activities that they considered action-based teaching. They listed things such as games, pantomime, songs, poems, cooperative assignments and drama as

different forms of action-based teaching. A rather similar list is given also in The National Core Curriculum (2014: 221) as examples of action-based approaches to language teaching. The question of what action-based teaching is was discussed in the interviews by asking the teachers how they themselves used it in their language teaching. The teachers were also asked to give concrete examples of the ways they used action-based teaching approaches. Example 5 shows what kind of approaches Teacher 1 viewed as action-based teaching:

(5) T1: No kaikki laulut, leikit, erilaiset piirileikit, sormileikit, tavallaan täs niinku kehon liikkeissä niin mä pyrin siihen et ois niinkun erilaisia... et eri kehonosat on liikkeessä et sekä kädet ihan sormenpäitä myöten, jalat ja sitten myöskin kroppa liikkuu ja taipuu ja hyvin erilaisia temppuja.  
*Well, all songs, plays, different round games, finger games, kind of here in body movement my aim is that there would be kind of different... so different parts of the body are in the move so that also hands all the way to the finger tips, feet and then also the body moves and bends and very various tricks.*

Moreover, Teacher 1 pointed out in the interview that, in her view, action-based activities did not necessarily require body movement. As examples of these non-physical action-based activities, she mentioned the use of different kinds of word cards and memory games in language learning.

In addition to activities discussed above, Teacher 2 understood working in pairs and as a whole group as action-based approaches to language teaching. In her view, it was possible to use action-based approaches for example when dividing the group of learners into pairs. She explained that she usually activated the learners by giving them for example different animal names in small pieces of paper and then asking them to form pairs by finding a peer who had the same animal.

### **4.3 Observations: English classes of Teacher 1**

Observations were made in three primary school English classes. The first two of the observed lessons were taught by Teacher 1. The first one of them was for second graders and consisted of different activities, such as songs, plays and poems. The topics covered were verbs in *ing*-form and the use of phrases “No I’m not”, “Yes I am” and “Are you... [for example swimming]”. The second lesson was for first graders and consisted of similar activities as the first lesson. The main topics were numbers from one to thirty, fruits and vegetables and their colours and the phrases “Can you give me a...” and “Here you are”. A new song about trains was also introduced to the learners during this lesson.

It was observed that Teacher 1 used action-based teaching approaches very much while teaching English to her first and second graders. Nearly all of the assignments done during the classes had some features of action-based teaching in them. Most of the tasks involved activity of the learners. Activating approaches to learning, such as singing, acting, moving and talking were used throughout the classes. The fact that action-based teaching proved to be a regular practice in Teacher 1's English classes, in which the learners were first and second graders, is consistent with the guidelines for early age language teaching expressed in the current National Core Curriculum (2004: 18).

The use of action-based teaching was routine-like in Teacher 1's classes. Based on the observations, it seemed like the learners were used to the ways in which language learning was arranged in the classes since they were clearly familiar with the tasks that were done. Versatile approaches to action-based teaching were used in these classes. For example, both of the classes began and ended with singing songs and reciting poems while illustrating the words by moving. Moreover, action-based teaching was used when learning or trying to recall grammatical features of English. For instance, verbs in *ing*-form were rehearsed in the form of a pantomime game. In the game, one learner at a time illustrated some verb before the class only by moving his/her body, while the others were trying to guess the right word.

Teacher 1 often acted as the model to show examples of what was to be done or said while the pupils repeated the action or said or sang the words according to the teacher's examples. This confirms the idea of the teacher in action-based teaching as the facilitator of learning stated by van Lier (2007). The pupils were not expected to produce much output themselves. Their task was often to react to the teacher's questions and requests by moving or repeating what the teacher said and did. The learners also acted and used pantomime to explain or express meanings. In Example 6, Teacher 1 points out that in her opinion, with small children, an action-based approach to language teaching means, to some extent, that the pupils imitate and copy the teacher. Thus, one may argue that the action-based teaching methods used by this teacher resembled significantly those used in Total Physical Response method (see Asher 1982, Koksela 2001).

(6) T1: He [oppilaat] matkii ja jäljittelee et se toiminnallisuus pienillä kieltenopetuksessa on myöskin se et he jäljittelee hyvin paljon opettajaa.

*They [the pupils] imitate and copy so that action-based learning and teaching with small pupils is also that they imitate the teacher very much.*

Teacher 1 did not usually explain to pupils what was about to happen next; she simply began the activity and the pupils followed her example or just knew what was expected of them. The dominant language during the lessons was English and the activities done in class focused on developing children's oral skills. There were no written assignments done during the lessons. The emphasis on oral language skills in Teacher 1's classes may be explained by the young age of the learners, since at that stage of language development, the learners' written communication skills might be defective even in their mother tongue.

#### **4.4 Observations: English classes of Teacher 2**

The third observed lesson was taught by Teacher 2. Her lesson was for third graders and lasted 45 minutes. It consisted of checking the homework, doing assignments from the English book, listening and repeating after the tape, playing a pantomime game and doing assignments in pairs. The main topics of the lesson were animals, clothes and the use of phrases "Are you a...", "Yes I am", "No I'm not" and "Have you got".

Based on the observations made in class, Teacher 2 used both teacher-centered teaching approaches and approaches that had features of action-based teaching in her English class. Her lesson began with teacher-led work but changed into more learner-centered and activating assignments towards the end of the class. The learner group in this class consisted of third graders with whom action-based teaching approaches are not currently required according to the National Core Curriculum (2004). Accordingly, the lesser use of action-based approaches compared to Teacher 1 might be explained by this.

The tasks that were done in class included teacher-led instruction, action-based teaching and communicative cooperative pair assignments. It was observed that Teacher 2 introduced new contents by using teacher-led or teacher-centered approaches, such as repeating new words out loud after the teacher and translating them into Finnish when requested to do so by the teacher. This new information was then rehearsed by using learner-centered methods, which can be understood as action-based teaching methods. For example, the pupils first repeated words for new animals after the teacher. Then the teacher asked them to translate the English words into Finnish. Finally, these animal names were rehearsed in an action-based drama activity in which the pupils went before the class and acted like one of the animals without

using words or sounds while the rest of the class tried to guess the right animal (compare Koksela 2001). Furthermore, Teacher 2 used also cooperative learning in the form of a pair assignment in which the learners chose a word for some piece of clothing and tried to guess which word their pair had chosen.

The teacher's role was mainly the leader of the lesson and the provider of questions. Teacher 2 gave instructions to her learners about what they were supposed to do and what was expected of them. She also asked the learners questions that required some production of output in the target language. Thus, the learners in this class were expected to produce utterances in the target language slightly more than in Teacher 1's classes. However, the learners were also allowed to use Finnish in class and the teacher herself used Finnish frequently when giving instructions to the learners. Teacher 2 took varying roles during the lesson as the teacher-centered approaches alternated with more action-based ones. While learning new contents, the teacher worked as the leader and the instructor of the class, whereas while doing more action-based activities, the teacher was more of an observer and supporter of the learning process (see van Lier 2007).

Based on the observations, it can be stated that Teacher 2 did not seem to emphasise any specific language skill over another in her instruction. She used both written and oral assignments throughout the lesson. For example, as written assignments, the learners filled a crossword puzzle in their English books and wrote sentences they had had as homework to the whiteboard. In turn, oral skills were rehearsed for instance in the cooperative pair assignment where the learners were supposed to discuss the assignments with their partners.

#### **4.5 The teachers' views on action-based teaching**

In order to see possible differences or similarities between the extents to which the interviewees thought they used action-based teaching and that they actually used it in practice, they were asked about their thoughts considering their own use of the approach. When asked whether they used action-based teaching approaches in language teaching or not, Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 gave rather different answers. Examples 7 and 8 illustrate their views on the matter:

(7) T1: Tietysti vähän luokasta ja aineesta riippuen mut että alaluokilla se on kokoajan siinä [opetuksessa] mukana ihan kokoajan. Et se on niinku se perus ajatus joka on ihan varmasti joka tunnilla.  
*Of course it depends a little on the group but in primary school it is always included in it [teaching] all the time. So that it is like the fundamental thought that is certainly present in every lesson.*

(8) T2: Kyllä mä luulen käyttäväni [toiminnallisia menetelmiä] mutta en aina. Siis kyllä mä käytän jonku verran.  
*Yes, I think that I use [action-based teaching approaches] but not always. Yes I do use them to some extent.*

The views of the teachers about their own use of action-based teaching were consistent with the findings of the observation data. Teacher 1 stated in the interview that she used action-based teaching approaches constantly when teaching primary school pupils, while Teacher 2 reported that she did not always use them but used them to some extent. This was also visible while observing their classes. Teacher 1 used action-based teaching approaches nearly throughout the whole class whereas Teacher 2 combined teacher-led approaches and cooperative learning to more action-based activities.

The differences between the uses of action-based teaching in these observed classes might be explained by the fact that Teacher 1 taught first and second graders, while Teacher 2 taught third graders. That is, the age of the learners may have affected the teaching approaches the teachers chose to use. When asked about the use of action-based teaching with older pupils, both of the interviewees said that they used the approach much less with them because, in their view, it was harder to motivate older children to those kinds of activities and there was less time to be used for them as well. However, both of the teachers taught pupils that had just begun studying English and, therefore, the effect of learner age to the teaching approaches used could be overturned by the rather similar level of language competence.

The duration of the lessons was also different in the classes observed. Teacher 1 had two lessons that were only 20 minutes, whereas Teacher 2's lesson lasted 45 minutes. Thus, since the duration of Teacher 2's lesson was longer, she might have experienced that variable approaches to teaching helped the pupils to maintain their interest and patience throughout the whole lesson. Example 9 shows how Teacher 2 explained her use of variable teaching approaches in the interview:

(9) T2: Mut et se ei kuitenkaan voi olla ihan vaan aina sitä leikkiä se enkuntuntikaan. Että kyllä mä sen perinteisiin menoihin meinaan kyllä jatkaa. Katotaan mitä opsi [uusi opetussuunnitelma] sanoo siitä. Ei se varmaan niin tarkkaan tuu kertomaan et mitä saa tehdä. Kyllä mä luotan kuitenkin myös siihen että sanat täytyy kielessä oppia myös kirjottamaan ja niitä sää et siinä toiminnallisuudella välttämättä opi, että sää opit ne sanomaan ja se on tärkeä se kommunikaatio, mut se ei riitä kyllä.

*But the English class cannot always be all about that play, though. So that I will surely continue using traditional approaches to teaching. We shall see what ops [the new curriculum] says about that. It probably will not tell so precisely what is allowed to be done. I do trust also that words must be learnt to write as well in the language, though, and you cannot necessarily learn them through that action-based teaching, so that you learn to say them and that is important that communication, but it is not enough.*

Both of the teachers pointed out during the interviews that they used action-based teaching approaches quite much with small pupils, but their use of them decreased when it came to older pupils or students. The reasons for the lesser use of action-based approaches with older pupils, according to the teachers, had to do with the limitations of time and learner motivation that appear as the pupils grow older and the requirements for language skills learnt become more academic. For example, Teacher 2 explained that it could be hard to motivate older pupils to participate in games or plays that they tended to consider as childish and thus embarrassing or stupid. Moreover, Teacher 1 stated that there was less and less time to use for action-based activities with older pupils. In her view, action-based teaching was a prominent part of language instruction that was constantly used with small pupils, whereas with older pupils she considered it as something extra during the lessons. Example 10 illustrates how Teacher 1 expressed this idea in the interview:

(10) T1: Ja sit taas niinku isommilla oppilailla niin se toiminnallinen hetki voi olla vaikka tunnin alussa tällöinen asiaan johdatteleva. Se voi olla tunnin keskellä tällöinen niinkun siitä muusta työstä vähäks aikaa irrottava. Tai sitte siellä tunnin lopussa se voi olla semmone herkkupala joka sitte tehään semmosen ehkä vähän kuivanki teoreettisen työn päätteeks et tehään välissä vähän jotain muuta.  
*And then like with older pupils that action-based moment can be for instance this thing that leads to the content to be learnt at the beginning of the lesson. It can be in the middle of the lesson something that like distracts learners from other work. Or then there at the end of the lesson it can be a treat that is done then after some perhaps a little dry theoretical work so that something else would be done in between.*

This notion is rather interesting since, as discussed earlier, action-based activities are mostly defined as means of learning something through the activity but not as something extra to the lessons (see Jaakkola et al 2013, Sergejeff 2007, Vuorinen 2005 and van Lier 2007 and). That is, the purpose of action-based teaching activities is to facilitate learning through concrete actions instead of providing something extra that is not connected to the other contents of the lesson. Koskenkari (2013) argues that action-based teaching is not an extra “treat” to the lessons but an actual way of learning contents. She points out that having action-based teaching as some extra “treat” to the lessons is a way of making the lessons more activating to learners, but it is not exactly action-based teaching.

However, in Examples 11 and 12, Teacher 1 contradicts herself by stating that action-based teaching is not only something extra to the lessons but also a means through which actual contents of the lesson can be learnt. Furthermore, she also describes how action-based teaching is a way of adopting a learner-centered approach to teaching that is required in the National Core curriculum (2014: 6).

(11) T1: Kyllähän se toiminnallisuus parhaimmillaan niin sehän liittyy siihen aihepiiriin mitä me ollaan oppimassa. Että et jos sää vaikka opetat kielioppia nii sää voit siihen mieltä jonkun toiminnallisen jutun joka sitten tavallaan vahvistaa vaan sitä oppimista. Että et ei ne oo mitään vaan irrallisia vippaskonsteja joita tehään siinä oppitunnin seassa vaan ne aina liittys johonkin.

*Surely, action-based teaching at its best is connected to the theme that we are learning. So that if you teach grammar you can come up with some action-based thing that then in a way only strengthens that learning. So they are not just some loose hocus-pocus tricks that are done in the middle of the lesson, yet they would always be connected to something.*

(12) T1: Mää koen että se toiminnallisuus... nyt puhutaan niinku siitä osallistavasta opetuksesta ja nyt ku uudet opsit tulee et se kääntyy et se opettajajohtosuus niinkun vähenis entisestään et se tulis se lähtökohta sieltä niinku oppilaasta päin. Nii musta se on myös sitä toiminnallisuutta että et siihen mä pyrin noitten isojen [oppilaiden] kanssa.

*I feel that action-based teaching... now we are talking about that involving teaching and now as the new curriculums come that it turns around so that the teacher-centeredness would like decrease even more so that the starting point would come like from the direction of the learner. So, in my opinion, that is also action-based teaching as in that is what I see as my goal with older [pupils].*

The view to action-based teaching presented above in Example 12 is very close to what the National Core Curriculum (2014: 17) states about the view on learning in which the learner is seen as an active agent. Teacher 1 seems to consider action-based teaching with older pupils as a way of making teaching more learner-centered, which means changing the role of the teacher from the giver of the knowledge to the facilitator of learning.

#### **4.6 The effects of action-based teaching on language learning**

The interviews show that, in general, both of the interviewees had a very positive view on action based teaching. They both discussed how action based teaching approaches were usually experienced as fun and motivating by the learners. Teacher 1 discusses the aspect of learner motivation in Examples 13 and 14:

(13) T1: Jos mä nyt aattelen omia ryhmiä niin mä koen et siin [toiminnallisuudessa] on niinku motivaatiota nostava vaikutus ja jos motivaatio nousee nii sehän automaattisesti vaikuttaa site oppimistuloksiin.

*If I now think about my own groups, I feel that it [action-based teaching] has a motivating effect and if motivation increases it then automatically affects the learning result.*

(14) T1: Sit se on niinku semmonen, sellanen niinku mahdollisuus että mun mielestä niinku oppilaat



innostuu siitä [toiminnallisuudesta]. Niin kauan kun se [toiminta] on opettajajohtosta niin se on tylsää, mut vaikka se ois vähän haastavaaki niin mutta ku se lähtee se toiminta heistä [oppilaista] itestään nii sillon se muuttuu mielekkäämmäksi.

*Then it is also like a kind of a chance that in my opinion like learners get excited about it [action-based teaching]. As long as it [the activity] is teacher-led it is boring but even though it would be even a little challenging but when the activity comes from [the learners] themselves it becomes more meaningful.*

The Examples above show that Teacher 1 believes that the motivational aspect of action-based teaching approaches can relate to their learner-centered and experiential nature. When engaged in activities that make learning concrete, learners are able to connect the content that is being learnt to themselves and to their feelings (Sergejeff 2007: 82–83). Thus, action-based teaching approaches engage the learner in the learning process personally, which can be more motivating than just learning contents that are brought about by the teacher and do not touch them in a more personal level. This view of Teacher 1 is also rather similar to the theory of agency discussed by van Lier (2008). Moreover, Teacher 2 pointed out in the interview that action-based activities did not necessarily require advanced language skills, that is, they could be done successfully even if one's language skills were not very good. This aspect of action-based activities may as well increase learner motivation as the learners get positive experiences about the use of the target language and get the impression that others can understand them in that language.

Based on the interviews, it can be stated that both interviewees considered action-based teaching as an effective approach on language teaching that facilitates learning and has a positive effect on the learning outcome of pupils. Teacher 1 linked the effectiveness of action-based teaching to its motivational effect on learners. In her view, motivation was the most crucial aspect in language learning and action-based teaching helped in motivating the learners. She also argued that action-based teaching was a good way of individualising teaching according to the different needs and skills of the learners. As Vuorinen (2005) points out, action-based teaching makes learning concrete, and thus, according to Teacher 1, can make it easier for those learners who have weaker language skills. In Teacher 1's view, the goal in action-based activities was that everybody was able to participate regardless of their level of language competence or skills. She stated that through action-based activities, the learners were able to realize that their language capacity was larger than they had thought. Teacher 2 also discussed this same idea in the interview and her thoughts are presented in Example15:

(15) T2: Ja niitä [toiminnallisia tehtäviä] voi tehdä aika pienellä kielitaidollakin. Ei tarvi kauheen olla suurieleistä tai suurilauseista se sitte se heidän [oppilaiden] työskentely.  
*And they [action-based activities] can be done also with small language skills. Their [learners'] working does not have to be very grand or big sentences are not needed.*

Furthermore, Teacher 2 argued that when doing action-based activities in class, pupils were able to see their peers from a different perspective and notice skills they did not know their peers had. Her assumption was that through action-based teaching it was possible to exploit such skills the learners had that did not get noticed in more formal learning situations.

Example 16 shows how Teacher 2 saw action-based teaching as something that helped learners to concentrate better during the lessons. In her view, small pupils had trouble sitting still the whole lesson time and action-based approaches provided them with opportunities to move and be active in class.

(16) T2: No hyviä [puolia toiminnallisuudessa] on tietysti se että se piristää sitä luokan... tai sanoisinko jopa ilmapiiriä ja piristää myös sitä että tulee vähän vaihtelua siihen opiskeluun.  
*Well pros [in action-based teaching] are that it cheers up the class... or would I even say the atmosphere [of the class] and it cheers up also so that it brings about a little variation to studying.*

When discussing the possible learning goals that could be achieved while using action-based teaching, the teachers mentioned that the goal did not necessarily have to be language related. According to Teacher 2, the learning goal in action-based learning activities could be a social one as well. In her view, action-based teaching approaches could also be used in order to develop the learners' social skills. This notion is also discussed in Koskenkari (2013), who explains that action-based teaching approaches engage learners in cooperative and social situations which enable the development of their social skills. Thus, the use of action-based teaching may have a positive effect on the development of a wide range of skills that can be language related but also for example social.

However, the teachers did not see action-based teaching approaches as completely unproblematic. In their view, the successfulness of an action-based activity depended highly on the group of learners it was used with. They also stated that if learners were used to having action-based teaching in language education, the activities done were more likely to be successful. This notion is discussed in Example 17:

(17) T2: No riippuu hirveesti siitä ryhmästä. Että on tullut ihan hyviä onnistumisia pienten kanssa ja sit tullu semmosia et okei ei tehäkään enää lisää tätä et vaihetaan aihetta.

*Well it depends very much on the group. So that there have been rather good moments of success with small pupils and then there have also been those situations that okay, let's not do more of this, that let's change the subject.*

Another problem in action-based teaching was, according to Teacher 2, that action-based activities were usually very loud and increased volume in class. Teacher 2 stated that even some of the pupils found the noise that action-based approaches caused disturbing and unpleasant.

In conclusion, action-based teaching was considered an effective approach to primary level English teaching by the teachers. Action-based teaching also proved to be a regular teaching approach in the observed classes. The teachers were familiar with the term action-based teaching and were able to define some approaches to teaching that they considered as action-based. However, the teachers struggled with giving specific and unambiguous definitions for the term. Furthermore, the observations and the interviews confirmed the notion that action-based teaching could be understood in various ways and used either as a means of learning the actual content of the lessons or as a refreshing extra activity without any specific learning goal.

## 5 CONCLUSION

The research questions of this study aimed to better understand how action-based teaching was used in primary school English education in Central Finland and how teachers understood the term action-based teaching. Furthermore, the goal of the present study was to explore how teachers applied action-based teaching in their work and what kind of experiences they had about its effects on learning.

As discussed in the previous section, the findings of this study showed that both of the interviewed teachers were familiar with the term action-based teaching. However, they both had trouble defining the term specifically in the interviews. The teachers understood action-based teaching in a rather general level and described it as something in the language classroom that did not require sitting still and using pen and paper. This definition of action-based teaching given by both of the teachers implicitly included the idea of physical activation of the learners discussed in Jaakkola et al. (2013: 668), but did not specifically explain the ways in which the learners would be activated. In other words, it was left unclear if the goal in action-based teaching was to activate the learners cognitively and engage them mentally in the learning process or was the required activation only physical.

In a more practical level, the teachers were able to describe some approaches to language teaching that they understood as action-based. These approaches included for example games, songs, plays, pantomime and drama. Again, these examples of action-based teaching activities did not contain any information of the purpose of the learner activation. Therefore, based on the definition of action-based teaching given by the teachers, it was unclear whether any physical activation of the learners could be understood as action-based teaching or would it require cognitive activation as well. It can thus be stated that action-based teaching is a rather ambiguous term that needs to be defined more specifically.

The results showed that both of the teachers used action-based teaching approaches that activated the learners in their observed English classes. The teachers used activities such as songs, poems and pantomime games in their teaching. In the interviews, both of the teachers also reported that they used action-based teaching to some extent in their teaching. Teacher 1 stated that she used action-based teaching constantly with young pupils but less with older

pupils. Teacher 2 reported that she used action-based teaching in language teaching but not constantly and also relied on the more conventional ways of language instruction. These results about the use of action-based teaching were in line with the results of Seppänen and Väisänen (2015), which also showed that teachers used action-based teaching in language instruction to some extent.

The experiences the interviewed teachers had about action-based teaching and its effects on learning results were mostly positive. Both of the teachers reported that action-based teaching was beneficial to all types of learners and helped in increasing the learner motivation towards language learning. The teachers felt that action-based teaching enabled personal engagement of the learners in the learning process, which is also discussed by Sergejeff (2007), van Lier (2007 and 2008) and Vuorinen (2005). Furthermore, the teachers stated that action-based activities helped learners to notice new skills in themselves as well as in their peers. As negative effects of action-based teaching, the teachers mentioned the increase of noise in the classroom and the limitations of time in lessons. They also pointed out that action-based teaching was more successful in smaller than larger learner groups and with groups that were used to action-based teaching than with those who were not.

Because of the limitations of a Bachelor's Thesis to the data collection, the findings of the present study cannot be generalized. However, they provide relevant information about the use of action-based teaching in the context of English language teaching that has been studied very little before. In addition, the present study provides answers to its research questions as it illustrates the views and experiences of the teachers combined with the use of action-based teaching in practice.

In the future, if similar studies were to be done, some improvements would be suggested to the methods of study. Firstly, in order to get more generalizable results, more data would be needed and some quantitative analysis would perhaps be useful when investigating the use of action-based teaching in English education. Secondly, since there is little research done on this phenomenon, the definition of action-based teaching is left rather ambiguous in the present study. Therefore, in the future, more thorough review of previous research and theory about action-based teaching would perhaps lead to more accurate results. Thirdly, if a similar observation study would be conducted, video-recording of the observed lessons would most probably provide the researcher with a more specific view of what is happening in the

classroom and what kind of teaching approaches the teachers are using. Video-recordings would also allow the researcher to return to the observed situation and analyse things that may have been neglected in this study because of the use of field notes instead of video-recordings. Lastly, this study explored action-based teaching from the teachers' point of view and did not investigate how learners experienced it. Thus, further research from the learners' perspective could provide with new aspects to the phenomenon.

All in all, it can be stated that more research is needed about the use of action-based teaching approaches in language teaching, as it will be a required approach to teaching after the new National Core Curriculum (2014) comes to effect in 2016. More specific definitions of the action-based approach, the types of activities used in it and its benefits on learning outcome could be helpful and important to language teachers and motivate them to apply action-based teaching to their own work.

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## APPENDIX 1: Observation notes (Teacher 1's classes)

6 May 2015

Teacher 1's English classes

### Questions for the observations:

1. What is happening in the classroom? What kind of activities are there?
2. Are action-based approaches used in class? How are they used and what kind of activities are they?
3. Do the action-based activities have some specific learning goals?
4. What does the teacher do?

**Class1** (2<sup>nd</sup> grade, 20 minutes)

### The beginning of the class:

The pupils and the teacher start the lesson by singing a “good afternoon” song together. The teacher just starts singing and the pupils join in. Straight after this the teacher starts to recite a poem and again the pupils start reciting it too. The words of the poem are illustrated by body movements. The teacher is a model for the learners and the pupils imitate her.

After this, the learners and the teacher together recite a poem “This is my left hand...” and illustrate its words by moving their bodies. The teacher says the words out loud and the pupils repeat after her and imitate her body movements. This resembles TPR assignments.

The teacher lets the pupils sit down according to the colours in their clothes. The teacher asks for example “Who has got something green?” and the pupils who are wearing something green are allowed to sit down.

### Pantomime game:

The teacher writes down to the blackboard some verbs that are in *ing*-form. One of the learners chooses one of these verbs (for example “swimming”) and plays it to the other pupils by moving his body (for example by pretending to be swimming). Words or sounds are not allowed when acting. The other pupils try to guess the right verb by asking for example “Are

you swimming?” and the actor answers “Yes I am” or “No I’m not”.

The teacher gives instructions to the learners and asks the actor to whisper the right verb to her so that she is able to help the pupils when needed. The teacher also corrects the learners if they speak Finnish and do not use the correct English phrases. For example, one actor says “oikein” as one of the pupils says the right answer and the teacher corrects him by saying “Please say yes I am”.

After the pantomime game, the *ing*-form verbs are learnt by repeating them and illustrating them by pantomime body movements. The teacher says the verb and does the movements that correspond to it and the pupils repeat and imitate her. For example, as the pupils say “I am swimming” they do swimming movements and as they say “I am singing” they sing the words etc.

#### **Simon says:**

The class plays “Simon says” together. The teacher is “Simon” and gives orders to the children. When she says “Simon says” at the beginning of an order, the pupils have to obey and move according to it. When she does not say it and just gives an order, the pupils must not obey it. Those who obey the order when the teacher does not say “Simon says”, have to sit down to their places. All of the pupils are active and move their bodies. No output is required from the learners.

#### **The end of the class:**

The pupils and the teacher sing together “If you’re happy and you know it stamp your feet” etc. and move according to the words of the song. All of the pupils participate and are active as they sing and move.

The lesson ends and another group comes in.

#### **Class 2 (1<sup>st</sup> grade, 20 minutes)**

#### **The beginning of the class:**

The learners and the teacher sing the same “Good afternoon” song as in the first lesson. Then they recite a poem “Clap your hands, clap your hands, clap them just like me...” and move

their bodies according to the words of the poem. The pupils seem to know the words and the body movements by heart.

**Number game:**

The teacher starts counting numbers from 1 to 30. The pupils join in the counting and they say all the numbers out loud together and count them by their fingers simultaneously. After this, the teacher asks the learners for example “Can you show me number 4” and one of the learners go and show the right number from the wall. (There are all the numbers from 1 to 30 on the wall.) The teacher answers “That’s correct” and asks for another number. One pupil at a time moves in the classroom and shows the number. The others sit still and raise their hand in order to show that they would like to answer to the teacher’s question.

The teacher and the learners recite a poem about numbers and clap their hands in the rhythm of the poem. The teacher first lists the numbers and claps her hands and the learners then repeat her actions. Then some numbers are deleted from the number poem so that there is only a clap in their places. The teacher again works as a model and the pupils repeat and imitate her actions.

**Learning a new song:**

The class learns a new song about trains. The teacher first sings it and the learners then sing after the teacher’s example. As the pupils learn the song, the teacher divides the class into two groups and asks them to sing in turns. The learners are sitting still on their places but everybody is singing.

**Fruit basket game:**

The teacher takes out a basket that has colourful plastic fruits and vegetables in it. She says “Come and give me a red apple” and one of the learners gets a permission to go before the class and to give the correct fruit to the teacher and say “Here you are”. The teacher says “Thank you” and asks again for another fruit and its colour or the number of them; for example “Come and give me two bananas”. One learner at a time walks in front of the class and gives the correct fruit to the teacher saying the required phrase out loud in English. Other learners sit on their places.

**The end of the class:**

The class sings and plays a song “Three little monkeys”. Three pupils are randomly picked to play the monkeys in the song and they go before the class. The others sing the song and move their bodies according to its words in their own places. The three selected pupils play their roles as monkeys in front of the class. The teacher sings and plays along.

**General observations:**

Both of the classes were full of action-based activities. The learners were in an active role nearly all the time during the lessons. However, sometimes only some of the pupils participated in the action-based activities. The purpose of the action-based approaches used was often to learn the actual contents of the class. Some of them were also used as “refreshment”.

## **APPENDIX 2: Observation notes (Teacher 2's class)**

19 May 2015

Teacher 2's English class

(3<sup>rd</sup> grade, 45 minutes)

### **Questions for the observation:**

1. What is happening in the class? What kind of activities are there?
2. Are action-based approaches used in class? How are they used and what kind of activities are they?
3. Do the action-based activities have some specific learning goals?
4. What does the teacher do?

### **The beginning of the class:**

Everybody stands up and says "Good afternoon". The pupils return their exams to the teacher and try to remember what they had as homework from the last lesson.

### **Checking the homework:**

Some of the pupils go in front of the class and write the answers for their homework assignment to the whiteboard. This requires activity and physical action from some of the learners. Some of the pupils are writing the answers to the board while the others show the teacher that they have done their homework. These learners sit still by their desks.

The teacher asks the class to repeat the homework sentences after her example. The teacher first says the sentences out loud and then the learners repeat them as a group. The teacher asks the learners to translate some words from the sentences, such as "beach, library and park" into Finnish.

### **New content:**

Next, the teacher asks the learners to open their English books on a page that has animal words in it. The learners are sitting still by their desks and looking at the book while the teacher tries to find the right CD.

The learners listen to the new animal words from the CD and repeat them after it and the teacher's example. The teacher reflects the page of the book to the whiteboard and shows pictures of the animals as the pupils repeat the words for them in English. No movement or further activation is required from the learners. After this, the teacher asks the learners to translate the English animal words into Finnish. The learners get the turn to answer by raising their hand. The learners are eager to talk to the teacher in Finnish and are rather loud.

**Drama activity:**

One learner at a time goes in front of the class and plays one of the animals that they have just learnt. The others try to guess the right animal. As the learners play the animals, they use body movements and sound (if they want to) in order to get their message across. For example, one learner swings his hands and whistles as he plays a bird. When the pupils want to make a guess at the animal one of them is playing, they have to ask in English for example "Are you a butterfly?". The actor answers either "Yes, I am" or "No, I'm not". The pupil who guesses the right answer goes in front of the class next to play another animal. The learners do not always remember to give the answer in English and use Finnish instead.

The teacher gives the instructions for the activity and then follows it from the side. She asks the actor some specifying questions if needed, for example, "Äänteleekö se jotenkin?". She also corrects the pupils' answers for example "Aloita are you a...". The teacher also shushes the class as the noise gets too loud. If nobody guesses the right animal, the teacher asks the actor to whisper the animal to her and then tries to give him/her some hints about how to play it so that the others can understand. The learners who act move their bodies and are active. The others sit on their places.

Next, the pupils do a crossword puzzle from the study book. The crossword is checked so that it is reflected to the whiteboard through a document camera and the learners tell the right answers to the teacher. The learners get a turn to answer by raising their hand. During this, the pupils sit still on their places. (The learners are rather restless and a lot of time is spent for keeping the class peaceful.)

After this, each of the pupils gets a small piece of paper that has one animal name in English in it on their desks. Their task is to circle around the classroom and to find another learner who has the same animal in his/her paper. The pupils have to ask each other in English for

example that “Are you a horse?” etc. The idea is that the pupils form pairs for the next assignment by doing this activity. The pupils move around the class and are active. They also rehearse the new animal words and phrases. The teacher’s role is to give instructions for the activity and to share out the pieces of paper.

The pairs that are formed in the activity sit next to each other and start doing an exercise from the study book together. In the exercise, there is a picture of two children who are wearing different clothes. The goal is to learn the English words for the pieces of clothing the children in the pictures are wearing. The teacher first asks the learners to translate the words into Finnish. Then the learners have to choose one piece of clothing and their pairs guess which garment they have chosen. The pair asks for example “have you got jeans?” and as the correct piece of clothing is said, the asking turn changes. In this exercise, the learners are free to move in the classroom and choose the place and the position in which they want to work. Some of the pupils are sitting while some of them are standing. One of the pairs chooses to go to a corner and sit there. The teacher moves around the class and observes how the pupils are working. She helps and guides the pupils who are struggling with the exercise and are not so self-regulated. She also encourages the learners to ask questions from each other and to switch pairs when the correct answer is found.

**The end of the class:**

At the end of the class, the teacher gives homework to the pupils from the study book. The homework is an assignment in which the learners have to write sentences in English. The pupils mark the homework in their books and leave the class.

**General observations:**

There was no singing or reciting poems in the class. Physical activation was used in the drama activity and when forming pairs. Action-based activities took place in the middle of other assignments that were done from the study book. In the drama assignment, action-based teaching was used in order to learn the actual contents of the class. In the pair forming assignment, the action-based approach was used more as a “refreshment” but had also a learning goal which was using the phrase “Are you a...?”. The teacher discussed with the learners in Finnish quite a lot during the lesson. She also listened to the learners and let them tell her things they had in mind. The language of instruction in the class was Finnish.

### APPENDIX 3: Interview questions (Finnish)

1. Kauanko olet työskennellyt opettajana?
2. Millainen koulutus sinulla on? Oletko luokanopettaja, aineenopettaja vai pätevä molempiin?
3. Mitä luokka-asteita ja oppiaineita olet opettanut?
4. Miten määrittelisit termin ”toiminnallisuus” ja miten ymmärrät sen merkityksen?
5. Mitä toiminnallisuus on mielestäsi kielten opetuksen kontekstissa?
6. Käytätkö toiminnallisia menetelmiä omilla englannintunneillasi?
  - a. Jos käytät, niin miten? Kuvaile toiminnallisuuden käyttöä omassa opetuksessasi.
  - b. Jos et, niin miksi?
7. Uskotko, että kollegasi käyttävät toiminnallisuutta opetuksessaan?
8. Kerro kokemuksistasi toiminnallisten menetelmien käytöstä englannintunneilla.
9. Millaisia positiivisia ja negatiivisia puolia olet havainnut toiminnallisuuden käytössä omassa kieltenopetuksessasi?
10. Mistä kuulit ensimmäistä kertaa toiminnallisuudesta? Opitko toiminnallisten työtapojen käyttöä yliopistossa opettajankoulutuksen aikana? Jos et, oliko sinulla mahdollisuus osallistua johonkin koulutukseen, jossa opetettiin toiminnallisten työtapojen käyttöä kieltenopetuksessa?



**APPENDIX 4: Interview questions (English)**

1. How long have you worked as a teacher?
2. What kind of a degree do you have? (Class teacher/Subject teacher).
3. Which grades and subjects have you been teaching?
4. How would you define the term "toiminnallisuus" (action-based teaching) and how do you understand its meaning?
5. In your opinion, what is action-based teaching in the context of language teaching?
6. Do you use action-based teaching in your English classes?
  - a. If yes, how? Please describe the ways in which you use it in your teaching.
  - b. If no, why not?
7. Do you think your colleagues apply this method in language teaching?
8. Please tell me about your experiences of using action-based methods in English teaching.
9. What kind of positive and/or negative sides have you noticed in using action-based teaching in your own language teaching?
10. Where did you first hear about action-based teaching? When you were a teacher trainee did you learn about this method at the university? If not, did you have a chance to attend a training/course/conference where you learnt about action-based teaching?