Towards a fun and playful model for young children's foreign language learning

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ABSTRACT

Lawrence, Daniel. 2017. Towards a fun and playful model for young children's foreign language learning. Master's Thesis in Education. University of Jyväskylä. Department of Education.

This thesis proposes a model for young children's foreign language learning with a focus on fun and playfulness as well as emotional needs. The model is based on a wide range of literature on children's development, education, and foreign language learning specifically.

Foreign language teachers are surveyed to discover their current practices. This data is analysed and compared to the proposed model.

The study finds many teachers already follow many of the principles of the proposed model in their everyday practice. The use of fun activities as well as an awareness of learners' emotions are prevalent. Communication and technical aspects of language are also major themes common across teachers' practice.

While some of the themes of the proposed model are already found in teachers' current practice, some are not as widely reported. Further research is needed to gain a better insight to teachers' practice as well as to further develop this model.

Keywords: foreign language teaching, foreign language learning, foreign language education, children, teachers, fun, play

CONTENTS

1   INTRODUCTION

This thesis proposes a model for class teachers of young foreign language learners in Finland. It is a suggested approach to foreign language teaching based on the principles of fun and playfulness, as well as emotional awareness.

2016 saw the introduction of a new national core curriculum in Finland. Significantly, the foreign language curriculum for grades 1-9 (ages 7-16) repeatedly states that, "there is plenty of room for joy, playfulness, and creativity in language learning" (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, pp. 135, 236, 374). While a lot is known about play and its benefits for pre-school children, play and playfulness in primary education is less documented and even less practiced. Additionally, the inclusion of play in young children's education rarely focuses on foreign language learning. This thesis draws links between play and foreign language learning to help build the model.

Research on foreign language teaching and learning often focuses on older learners. The proposed model is targeted towards younger learners. Furthermore, rather than focus on the specifics of language, the approach itself is the focus.

The model is compared to teachers' reported current practice in foreign language teaching and supporting young learners' foreign language development. From this, it is possible to see what is currently being done and understand the reasons why, as well as what areas are lacking and how they can be improved.

A model is proposed as it shows *how* teaching and supporting language learning can be done, without dictating *what* should be done. While teachers in Finland hold Master's degrees, they do not necessarily have specific pedagogical training or understanding of foreign language development. Teachers may then draw from what they do know to develop their own kind of model, but will lack the more specific criteria to judge how appropriate their approach may be.

Any innovations introduced into the classroom have to compete with teachers' already established pedagogical views (Bruner, 1999). A model of this kind respects the different approaches teachers have and does not expect them to radically change their practice. Neither does it expect teachers to somehow find time to insert something completely new and separate into the timetable. Instead, the model suggests approaches to activities and general practices teachers are already doing. Some teachers may unknowingly be working to the detriment of children's welfare due to a poorly conceived theoretical basis or belief (Bruner, 1999). A model can help shape better practice for such cases, not only for teachers but also parents wishing to support their child's foreign language learning.

Any proposed model or theory should not exist in a separate bubble to practice; each should help inform the other (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). By understanding what teachers are currently doing, both the model and teachers' practice can be refined. While a model may highlight gaps that need to be addressed, it may also promote aspects that are already commonly practiced. It is of value to know this, both to understand what is being done well, and to help further develop a model to be of genuine use to teachers.

This thesis justifies the need for the proposed model by arguing for the benefits of a fun and playful approach to foreign language education. It also asks what is currently practiced by foreign language teachers, and finally, how this practice and the proposed model align.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Brief overview of the Vygotskian perspective on learning and development

Vygotsky (1962) closely connects words and meaning; the idea that a word cannot be learned without understanding the underlying concept. This means that while an adult can provide a child with language (for example, words), they cannot provide them with the required thinking (Vygotsky, 1962); rather, that comes through social interaction and learning from experiences in different situations (Vygotsky, 1978).

Cameron (2001, pp. 5-6) summarises this underlying Vygotskian theory as, "the central observation that development and learning take place in a social context, i.e. in a world full of other people, who interact with the child from birth onwards". This suggests that young learners are not alone in their learning; they construct meaning from their environment. Furthermore, with regard to foreign language learning, it highlights how important it is for teachers to be aware of talk and communication in the classroom.

Rather than taking place in stages, learning can be considered as an ongoing process between what the child already knows and what they are capable of knowing with assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). This is the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD). One of the ways to support learners in this Vygotskian approach is to use scaffolding. Pinter (2011) suggests this can done with teachers bridging the gap between learners' existing knowledge and a new task, seeing learning as a shared task between teacher and learner, having learners actively participate in tasks, and allow more free dialogue between teacher and learner rather than question-and-answer. Pinter (2011) also highlights that foreign language teachers must pay attention to individual differences and consider various ways of assisting learners at different levels when using a Vygotskian approach.

As it is considered that teachers have a large role in children's learning, the proposed model focuses on teachers' approach; *how* they are scaffolding in foreign language education. The underlying theory of the components that comprise the proposed model are explored in this literature review with a Vygotskian perspective.

2.2   Brief overview of the Finnish national core curriculum "conception of learning"

The Finnish national core curriculum is based on a "conception of learning" (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, p. 17). Any proposed model must at least be compatible with this conception of learning, but ideally have its foundations built upon it. In addition to the Vygotskian view of learning and development, the model proposed in this thesis is founded on the Finnish National Board of Education's conception of learning, itself based on Vygotskian principles. This conception of learning is described below:

Emotions are of great importance. Having positive emotional experiences help learners develop competence. Furthermore, the learning process and motivation is influenced by learners' emotions. This is in addition to children's ideas of themselves as learners.

Learners' self-image, self-efficacy and self-esteem have effect on goals they set for their actions. It is important to note that it is the learner who sets goals, emphasising the value placed on self-efficacy and trust in themselves. For learners to have trust in their potential, it is necessary for them to have encouraging guidance throughout the learning process. Receiving (and giving) positive feedback supports learning and is an essential aspect of interaction.

Learning can take place alone and with others, including fellow learners, teachers and other adults. A key part of the learning process involves improving skills to work with others. Learning with others aids learners' creative and critical thinking skills as well as their emotional awareness; understanding different viewpoints.

Creative activities help promote learning as well as the joy of learning itself. Throughout the process of learning, children learn how to reflect. This reflection covers their learning, experiences and emotions. Additionally, learners think, plan and explore and importantly, assess these processes.

To summarise, the national core curriculum emphasises emotional awareness on both the part of the teacher and the learners. This, coupled with having positive experiences, seems to help allow the joy, playfulness and creativity in foreign language learning that is integral to the curriculum.

It is likely that learners need a careful approach from their teacher that allows them to develop and grow both in content knowledge and in understanding themselves. Motivation is a crucial aspect of this, and teachers need an approach that is not only motivational, but allows learners to consider their own development and goals, and find individual motivation.

Finally, if interaction and communication are essential elements of learning in general, then the use of these aspects in foreign language learning is also essential, but perhaps should be approached carefully. Positive feelings and good self-esteem are also integral to the conception of learning, so interaction and communication between learners and between learner and teacher needs to be carefully considered.

Now the foundation and underlying principles that the proposed model is based on have been considered and discussed, the elements of the model itself must be explored, starting with its cornerstone: fun and playfulness.

2.3   Fun and playfulness

Play is a leading factor in children's development (Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky suggests that play starts early in children's development as more of a recollection or imitation of something witnessed or experienced, but develops over time. As it develops, so do the rules of play which become more complex. Play is a crucial part of children's development, as it is considered a way of developing abstract thought (Vygotsky, 1978).

Playfulness is the affective quality of play which is suggested to support learning (Howard & McInnes, 2010). While the value of play in the development of very young children is widely documented, it is still overlooked in formal education, even for young learners (Moyles, 2010).

To help define what playfulness in education is, Howard and McInnes (2010) look at it from the perspective of children, understanding what they see as play, and what they see as work, citing the few studies conducted in this area. The authors find there are both emotional and environmental cues to help understand how children distinguish between play and work:

Play is seen as voluntary and under the child's control, and is considered by the child to be easy and fun. Play is done more on the floor and does not have adult involvement or assessment. It is focused on the process rather than an end product and is physical or tangible.

Conversely, work is seen as mandatory, under the control of an adult, difficult, but with the possibility of it being fun. Work is performed more at a table and involves adults, including evaluation. It is focused on the end product rather than the process, and is less physical.

A playful approach in education should aim to somewhat blur the lines between play and work. Moyles (2010, p. 21) divides this playful approach into "playful learning" and "playful teaching". Playful learning features learning experiences that engage children in playful ways, reflecting their instinct to play. Playful teaching takes advantage of children's natural enjoyment of playful learning. Tasks should be generally fun and open, though not necessarily seen by children as play.

If children discern what they consider to be work and what is play, it could be argued that any task or activity set by a teacher will not be seen as play. That well may be the case, but children may still see it as *playful*.

As play is important in the development of enthusiasm, motivation, and willingness to engage (Moyles, 1989, in Moyles, 2010) there is a great need to both use play in education as well as to get it right. If used successfully at the

start of a child's educational career (and ideally before that as well), play could help towards a general positive attitude for learning.

Conversely, if play is not considered an aspect of education by teachers, they may be missing out on great opportunities for learning in their practice. Ignoring the notion that children can learn through play – including *away* from the classroom – does not give a teacher as full a picture as possible (Drury, 2007), and could reduce potential development.

2.3.1   Creativity

Creativity in the classroom can come from both learners and teachers. Teachers that make use of creative approaches can help develop creativity in their learners. This is of particular significance, as in the classroom needs creativity for learning, motivation and joy (Starko, 2014); fundamental aspects of the proposed model.

Children actively try to construct meaning and purpose for what they are asked to do, though they can only make sense of things with the limited knowledge they have. Because of this, it is important that teachers consider if children will be able to make sense of new language in classroom activities (Cameron, 2001). It can be argued that children's creativity can help in sense-making. Perhaps teachers that prepare creative tasks give more affordances for learners to construct their own meaning in the foreign language classroom.

Creativity can be considered a cognitive trait as well as a personality trait (Wright, 2010). These personality traits are connected to a very wide range of thinking styles involving: "visualisation, imagination, experimentation, analogical/metaphorical thinking, logical thinking, predicting outcomes or consequences, analysis, synthesis and evaluation" (Wright, 2010, p. 3). As young learners are less analytical than older learners, their use of creativity demonstrates their construction of meaning. If creativity is encouraged, these thinking styles can help towards foreign language learning through sense-making.

This also means that teachers need to strike the right balance of guidance and support to encourage creativity. As Haigh (2010) highlights, teachers need

to find ways to address the limitations of learners' knowledge while also balancing their autonomy. This scaffolding supports learners rather than rescues them (Drapeau, 2014). If this can be done from a young age, the benefits of thinking creatively could develop earlier and positively influence learning in many areas, including foreign languages.

In the proposed model for young learners, the *approach* to foreign language teaching is emphasised over the content. Appropriate scaffolding coupled with a safe learning environment can help learners develop the skills to think creatively and get the most benefit from learning in a fun and playful way.

One personal quality fundamental to the development of creativity is motivation (Wright, 2010). If motivation is maintained, then so should creativity. The reasons why this is important are discussed in more detail later. If it is also considered that providing opportunities for children to experiment with new language help supports language learning (Moon, 2000), there is great potential in involving creativity with a playful approach.

It seems reasonable to suggest that creativity is intertwined with play, as children using imagination fosters creative thinking (Macintyre, 2017). Furthermore, children can revisit ideas during play, to help make sense of them (Moyles, 2010). This notion of using creativity to help construct meaning connects with the role of play. If children can use play to help them make sense of language, they can be seen as using creativity as a tool to help.

2.3.2   Fun and playfulness in foreign language education

While it is considered that tasks should promote playful and creative participation in foreign language learning (Legutke, Müller-Harmann & Schocker-von Ditfurth, 2009, in Pinter, 2015), there appears to be little written explicitly on play and foreign language education, perhaps because much literature on foreign language learning focuses on older children and university students. However, play is considered an essential aspect of young children's development and has value in promoting and fostering attitudes conducive to good

learning. Because of this, it can be argued that play should be incorporated into foreign language learning for young children.

To support this claim, this literature review looks at topics related to young children's learning and creativity, with specific focus on foreign language learning. These topics include emotions, risk taking, motivation, communication and routines. The role that play and playfulness have in these areas and their effect on the foreign language learning of young children will be explored and connected to form an overall view.

2.4 Emotional aspects

2.4.1 Emotions, positive attitude and risk taking

Emotions centre around an affective core; something that is beyond thoughts or cognitive states (Frenzel & Stephens, 2013). Teachers with knowledge and awareness of emotions can both better understand their students and better create ideal learning environments for them (Frenzel & Stephens, 2013). It is of great value for teachers in any context to be emotionally aware, as emotions are connected with important issues related to learning, as this section discusses.

As noted above, playfulness can bring about positive emotions in children which in turn can bring a positive attitude towards learning. Similarly, an adult that helps children consider and make sense of their changing emotional states can be important for cultivating a positive attitude towards difficult or challenging learning situations (Gerhardt, 2004, in Moyles, 2010).

This has great relevance to the foreign language classroom, as children's language learning is deeply rooted in their emotional development (Pinter, 2011). By helping children recognise their emotions, helping label them, and acknowledging that emotions do change, a practitioner in the foreign language classroom can provide great support for learning the subject. A responsive teacher who cares can help children become resilient in and to demanding learning situations (Elfer et al., 2003, in Moyles, 2010). Having good emotional support from an adult can give a child more security and lead to more complex-

ity in play (Moyles, 2010), which may contribute towards a more confident approach to learning, perhaps with more risk taking, discussed further below.

It can be seen that adults have significant impact on both children's emotions and children's understanding of their emotions. As both factors affect their wellbeing and learning, it should be considered that the responsibility adults have in this area is great.

If an adult can show a child trust, particularly in their play, the child will in turn show trust in that adult; confidently asking for help or playful interaction (Scott, 1996, in Moyles, 2010; Webster-Stratton, 1999, in Moyles, 2010). It is therefore important for a language teacher to show trust in their learners, so that they in turn can trust their teacher. This may go some way to creating a safe learning environment; important as conditions that allow children to take risks and enjoy their learning support language learning (Moon, 2000). Greater trust can lead to greater play and risk taking in play; an element that could help support children's foreign language learning.

2.4.2 Emotions, positive attitude and risk taking in foreign language education

Emotional engagement can help young learners gain a positive mindset by identifying with their language learning (Bland, 2015). If young learners are more aware of their emotional states, and those of others, it can influence their learning (Pinter, 2017). Such emotional engagement could be achieved through play (and drama, which Bland (2015) argues can be playful with young learners). Drama and other forms of play require risk taking, and therefore also a safe environment and the confidence to engage. Such an environment can help children experiment with language and allow them to explore their understanding without the fear of being wrong (Moon, 2000).

In language learning for young learners, there should not only be content goals, but also attitude goals. Halliwell (1992) points out that for primary school practitioners the emphasis should be on attitude goals, and there is good opportunity to do so due to less pressure for formal exams compared to secondary

level. These attitude goals should help foster a good attitude by promoting confidence, willingness to try and risk taking (Halliwell, 1992).

Incorporating these attitude goals in foreign language learning should be beneficial to young learners. Tasks should help promote confidence and willingness to take risks (Legutke et al., 2009, in Pinter, 2015), helping support and promote the non-content goals. This is of great use as risk taking is very valuable, particularly with regard to communication; discussed later in greater detail. The importance of risk taking with regard to motivation is discussed in the next section.

Halliwell (1992) argues that not only are these attitude goals beneficial to young language learners, but that teachers have the responsibility to prioritise them. She further points out that if this is not done, secondary school teachers will have an even greater challenge. Pinter (2017) has the view that a focus on emotional states and feelings can work towards raising children's self-esteem and self-confidence and have improve motivation. She also notes that these factors contribute towards helping children's learning to learn. These matters highlight just how crucial it is to foster a positive attitude early in children's educational careers. They also reflect the challenge of decreasing motivation in children as they grow older; something explored in the next section.

Fostering a positive attitude in the classroom cannot be done without the teacher having concern for building confidence and raising self-esteem (Pinter, 2017). It would therefore be especially important for teachers of young learners to establish a good relationship with them. As their foreign language teacher will also likely be the same class teacher of all subjects, young learners and teacher should have a lot of time together and quickly become familiar with each other. But establishing a relationship that fosters positive emotions requires effort.

2.4.3   Motivation

As discussed above, playful practitioners help children learn and develop a positive mentality for learning. Similarly, adults showing emotional interest

and trust in children gives those children more security and confidence. These are important for a child's education in general, and most certainly applies in the foreign language classroom. As the classroom environment is a significant factor in motivation (Dörnyei, 2007, in Bland, 2015), and it can be considered that the foreign language classroom that has higher "risk" (speaking a foreign language, for example), having confidence could aid motivation.

A positive start to children's foreign language learning can create a strong foundation. Cultivating self-esteem gives children confidence and allows them to approach new challenges positively, as well as to be resilient when things go wrong (Macintyre, 2017). Anxious, less motivated learners will find tasks more difficult than relaxed, happy and confident learners (Pinter, 2015).

A positive self-esteem can therefore be a great help towards motivation in the foreign language classroom. Learning a new language requires taking risks, especially when it comes to speaking. With a low self-esteem, children are more likely to be afraid to try anything new and completely disregard learning entirely (Macintyre, 2017). A young language learner with a low self-esteem is likely to have a difficult, unhappy time, likely reflecting on their education and development as a whole.

Younger learners are less inhibited and less anxious than older learners (Read, 2003, in Rich, 2014). Similarly, the potential for fostering a positive attitude towards speakers of a target language can be more difficult to do with older learners as they are more likely to already have formed stereotypical impressions that can be difficult to shift if negative (Barrett, 2007, in Rich, 2014). As older children become less motivated with time (Sharpe, 2001, in Rich, 2014; Williams, Burden & Lanvers, 2002, in Rich, 2014), it is all the more important in this proposed model for young learners to be motivated.

Motivation in young learners tends to be based on enjoyment, interest, curiosity and self-awareness (Johnstone, 2009). However, because motivation decreases over time, it is important that young language learners have activities that build and sustain motivation and positive attitudes (Rich, 2014). Relying on

intrinsic motivation while the children are still young and enthusiastic is perhaps not the best approach. As Johnstone (2009) notes:

> While it makes good sense with very young learners to exploit the 'fun' side of intrinsic motivation through games, songs, play acting and 'doing things', it is important to develop the 'self awareness' side of intrinsic motivation too, so that children become motivated through realizing that they are becoming successful learners of their additional language and taking pleasure in this. (p. 38)

Perhaps by following Johnstone's advice, good practice incorporating fun but also developing awareness in the learner could help sustain intrinsic motivation in young learners as they progress through the education system. This would be vital to "set up" in the early stages of their education so the benefits can be reaped when they are older and likely have reduced motivation. It is perhaps especially important for this model, as "intrinsic motivation and commitment are important personal qualities that are fundamental to the development of creativity" (Wright, 2010, p. 3). Creativity, as discussed earlier, helps young learners with sense-making and construction of meaning; very valuable for early foreign language learning.

2.4.4   Motivation in foreign language education

These considerations regarding motivation are important for young learners across the curriculum. With specific regard to foreign language learning, motivation is a key factor and connects with other aspects of the proposed model. Making children's initial experiences of a foreign language fun helps foster motivation (Pinter, 2011).

Perhaps by making young learners' early exposure to foreign language education as fun as possible, and fun can give a positive attitude towards learning, their motivation for continuing learning can be much higher than it would otherwise be. This is particularly valuable for addressing the issue of gradually decreasing motivation in children as they get older. The role of the teacher in this cannot be understated.

The teacher should be a positive role model in learning and using a foreign language. As teachers are the source of motivation for younger children

(Pinter, 2017), it would not only be wise to use this for positive benefit in language learning, but also towards an attitude for learning in general. A positive, cheerful and friendly demeanour in a teacher can help towards this (Pinter, 2017) as can the cultivation of a positive and relaxing learning environment (Pinter, 2015).

The motivation for learners to learn a foreign language, even from a young age, can be aspirational; a new way of engaging with the world (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2017). This can be cultivated with an emotionally aware, motivating teacher early in children's development. The more their minds are opened, the more they may strive for bettering their foreign language skills.

Similarly, if teachers and parents can offer children as many different experiences as possible, young learners may see their growing ability to speak a foreign language as a gift; "a gateway to something other" (Moate & Ruohotie-Lyhty, 2017, p. 11). This can help direct learners' education, motivating them from an early stage.

The issue of motivation in the foreign language classroom should not exist on its own. It connects closely to what has already been discussed with regard to fun and playfulness, as well as emotions and risk taking. By taking into consideration these matters, motivation should be cultivated alongside positive self-esteem and willingness to take risks, for example. Each of these matters influence and affect the other, including communication.

2.5   Communication and social interaction

Language and communication are closely linked, and are both an integral part of social interaction. Learning a language therefore involves more than understanding words on a page. As young foreign language learners are still learning reading and writing in their first language, a focus on speaking and listening is more appropriate start (Cameron, 2001; Pinter 2017). For this reason, it makes sense to consider how to best encourage and support foreign language communication in the classroom.

Speaking and listening are inherently social activities, as is play. Macintyre (2017, p. 18) considers that children playing together "encourages socialising and turn taking," and that these are "precursors to language…". If we consider this, playful learning and playful teaching (or learning and teaching playfully) could greatly help communication in the foreign language classroom.

Children need to understand the spoken language first to be able to learn it (Cameron, 2001; Linse, 2005). This suggests that it may be unreasonable to expect children to speak full sentences in the early days of foreign language learning. For children to learn discourse skills, they need to build up the knowledge and skills to participate (Cameron, 2001). This can be done with the use of comprehensible input (Krashen, 1986, in Linse, 2005) which is somewhat above the learners' current level, but still understandable. Considering this, it may be best for children to be initially exposed to a foreign language without expectation to produce it. With context and other support, children with only a partial understanding can make sense and meaning of comprehensible input (Linse, 2005; Locke, 1993, in Cameron, 2001).

Additionally, when children encounter a new language, they also attempt to make sense of it by using their social knowledge; knowledge they have about how the world works, the people around them, and prior experiences (Cameron, 2001; Drury, 2007). As discussed at the start of this literature review, the Vygotskian notion that children are making meaning from social interaction connects with the notion of playful learning. As claimed earlier, as play is an inherently interactive or social activity, and now it is considered that children are learning from social experiences, playful activities in a foreign language will help children to learn that language.

The concept of risk taking also applies to communication. Halliwell (1992, p. 12) claims that "real communication demands risk taking". As explored earlier, the creation of an environment where there is reduced fear of getting things wrong can encourage risk taking. Communication with the teacher can also promote risk taking if the teacher can be open, friendly and sympathetic to learners, as it will give them more confidence to make mistakes (Moon, 2000).

Such an approach from a teacher promoting risk taking would be a natural part of playful and supportive practice essential to the proposed model. If a practitioner made use of the proposed model in the way they communicate with children, then children will adopt a similar relationship with language.

2.6   Routines and purposefulness

It has already been discussed how children feeling safe and relaxed (through the work of the teacher and the learning environment) can help cultivate motivation and self-confidence, and the what the effect of those is on foreign language learning. Another aspect that allows young children in particular to feel safe and relaxed is routine (Mourão, 2015).

As Ostrosky, Jung, Hemmeter and Thomas (2003) summarise, routines influence the emotional, cognitive and social development of children. Routines can be fun. For example, games that are played regularly, or making games out of everyday tasks that must be done. This is something that is likely commonly practiced by teachers, though perhaps without the realisation of the full advantages of routines.

The benefits of embracing fun and playfulness in foreign language education for young learners have already been discussed, and making the most of routines is another way to help towards foreign language development. Because the same or similar language will be used each time, it is a good opportunity for learning and for learners to engage in simple conversations (Pinter, 2017). If a regular task or routine must be done, doing it in a foreign language is possible. Frequent repetition of language in routines can give young learners, "...opportunities to predict, support their understanding as well as pick up language and build their vocabulary" (Mourão, 2015, p. 59).

As already mentioned, the familiarity of routines can help young children feel safe and relaxed, which as discussed earlier, helps to create a positive learning environment, and therefore an ideal situation for foreign language learning to take place. The benefits do not end there, however, as once routines are es-

tablished and a foreign language is being used, those routines can be used as a playful teaching tool.

Repetition of language in the classroom need not be limited to exact copying. Larsen-Freeman (2012) argues for a kind of iterative repetition. This allows for variability; it creates choice (promoting and requiring creativity) and helps learners adapt. This can be done simply with young learners with basic phrases that are repeated, but with key words that can change. Similarly, those key words that are learned can also be applied to new phrases which can be used in new routines.

This idea of iterative repetition fits well in a fun and playful model. Static repetition can have a role in games, but teachers can extend structures and script-like exchanges though play initiated by the learners (Mourão, 2015). This requires creativity on the part of both teacher and learners. It is worth noting how Mourão (2015) specifies that it is the learner-initiated play that can expand young children's foreign language learning. This could be made more possible with a setting that addresses the emotional aspects discussed earlier.

2.7   Need for a model

As quoted in the introduction to this thesis, the Finnish national core curriculum for foreign languages states "there is plenty of room for joy, playfulness, and creativity in language learning" (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016, pp. 135, 236, 374). The curriculum does not dictate what should be done in foreign language education, but rather *how* it should be done. This supports the core concept of the proposed model in both its root in fun and playfulness as well as it being a guide to *approach* rather than *method*.

The reason for creating this model has been carefully considered. By simply suggesting to teachers how they should teach, difficulties in them accepting such suggestions may be encountered. However, if they are to instead consider what they already do and how the concepts of fun and playfulness are reflected in their practice, it does not require such a drastic change.

The way teachers currently choose to teach may not necessarily be based on any particular theory; known as folk pedagogies (Bruner, 1999). Any introduction of new ideas might have to compete with or change teachers' current practice, and possibly those of the learners as well (Bruner, 1999). Additionally, teachers may have difficulty introducing or incorporating new or different approaches in their teaching (Nyman, 2014). This is particularly true for newly qualified and unconfident teachers (Nyman, 2014). While proposing a particular approach to teaching foreign languages may appear difficult to implement, it may be very important to do as some folk pedagogies may have beliefs about how children think and learn that might inadvertently work against their welfare (Bruner, 1999).

It is important to challenge these folk pedagogies, though it is equally as important to do it in such a way that makes it likely to be successful. If new innovations may compete with and challenge teachers' existing folk pedagogical knowledge, then perhaps suggesting a completely different way of practising is unlikely to be successful.

From a Vygotskian perspective, theory and practice can be reciprocal (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Rather than considering that the practice is informed entirely on theory or that theory does not apply to practice, it can instead be considered a cyclic relationship (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). The move away from a strictly theory-first approach to practice is supported by Johnson (2004) who argues for a model of second language learning that puts theoreticians, teachers, students and researchers on an equal level where each learns from the other. Johnson (2004) believes that without this kind of approach, it is impossible to make meaningful change between theory and practice in second language acquisition.

The proposed model is based on theory, but with the perspective that it must be accessible to teachers for it to be applied. Furthermore, the model should be refined based on teachers' practice. It is not intended to be static, and as this thesis aims to show, by taking into account what teachers are already

doing, the proposed model can be further developed and improved for the benefit of both teachers and learners.

2.8   Summary of the proposed model

Fun and *playfulness* should surround everything that is done in foreign language education for young learners. Both the teacher and the activities they choose to do should have a fun and playful nature.

The teacher's affect should be positive and cheery. They act as a *role model* for their learners. Children that have good feelings have a better *attitude* to learning are more willing to *take risks*. Teachers should also show *compassion*, so their learners feel both *safe in the environment* and have *trust* in the teacher. Children that feel safe are more willing to take risks.

Children with good *emotional support* from their teacher will have a better quality of play. With play surrounding everything in this model, this emotional support and encouragement of *creativity* should help children's *enthusiasm*, *motivation* and *willingness to engage*. These factors are essential to nurture at this stage as they tend to decrease quite rapidly as children grow.

The need for children to take risks is important in foreign language learning, especially regarding speaking. *Communication* is inherently *social*, as is play. By addressing the issues that help children's willingness to take risks, the hurdles in foreign language learning are lowered. Furthermore, utilising social activities that are playful (for example, games), the positive effects of play and social interaction help feed each other. Activities such as drama allow for a greater *awareness of emotions*, which has benefits, but requires a safe environment and children that are willing to take risks.

Teachers also need to raise children's *self-esteem*. They need to make learners *feel positive* about their learning, and make them aware of their successes. Good self-esteem results in better motivation, and motivation is more likely to last in the long-term if learners can be aware of their achievements.

Making use of *routines* in the classroom helps towards creating a safe environment for children. Additionally, teachers can use routines (as well as play and games) to help build learners' vocabulary, thus expanding their knowledge of comprehensible input. Children make sense of things using what they know, and through social interaction. Through considered use of comprehensible input, social activities and *scaffolding*, teachers can help children learn language in a playful way; that is, a way that does not seem like work to children.

Focusing on children's attitude to learning is appropriate in this context, as there are no exams or formal assessment at this stage. Through the use of this proposed model, young foreign language learners will be set up with a good attitude, belief and motivation to further learning.

Finally, not only should practice follow the model, but the model should also suit teachers' practice. The model should not be considered set in stone. For it to be a useful tool to teachers, teachers must have the ability to modify and adjust the model based on their practice.
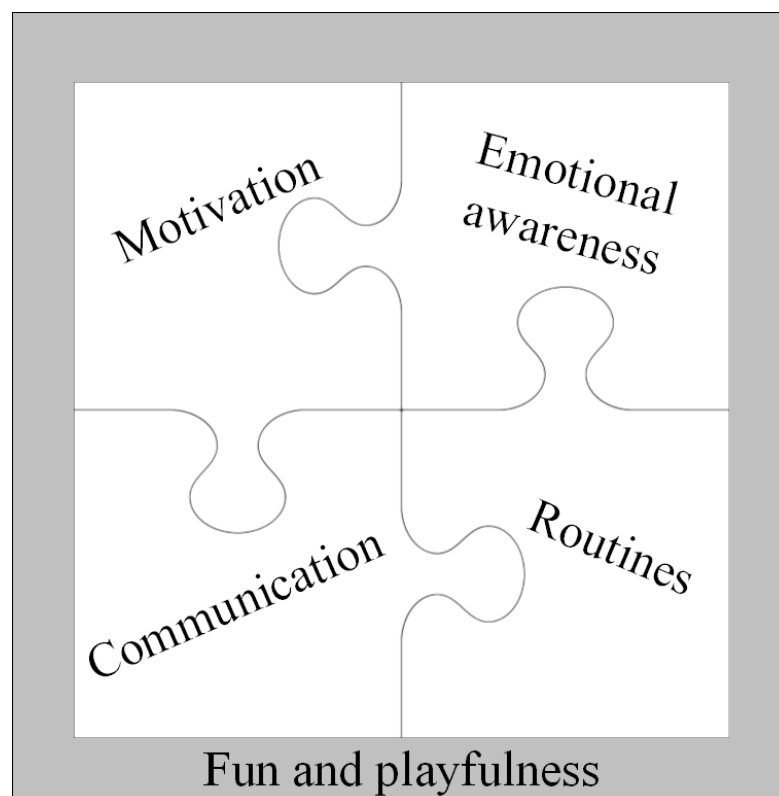
Figure 1 illustrates the proposed model:

FIGURE 1. Illustration of the proposed model

The illustration shows the proposed model as four interlocking jigsaw puzzle pieces, connected within, or surrounded by a frame. The frame represents fun and playfulness, highlighting how every other aspect of the model fits within that, and how fun and playfulness surrounds everything.

The four jigsaw puzzle pieces are labelled with different aspects of the model. The pieces interconnect, just as the concepts they represent also interconnect. There is crossover between the elements, and the elements rely on each other to work and be effective, much as a jigsaw puzzle works.

The sizes of the pieces are all the same, representing how the elements are of equal importance. The jigsaw puzzle is incomplete if even one piece is missing, just how the model is incomplete with one element removed. The pieces fit together to form an overall picture; there is no beginning or end or order to the pieces, much how the model does not have a beginning-to-end process or a certain order.

Any picture can be pieced together in a jigsaw puzzle. The same is true for the proposed model. The model is intended to be revised and adjusted, somewhat changing the resulting "picture". This works as long as all of the pieces are there, they still interconnect, and still fit within the frame of fun and playfulness.

2.9 Research questions

This thesis addresses the following research questions:

1. What are teachers currently doing to support foreign language learning?

2. How does teachers' current practice align with the proposed model?

The first question explores teachers' current practice and aims to discover what they do to support foreign language learning with their learners. It also allows for the second question to be addressed.

The second question considers how teachers' current practice aligns with the proposed model. This helps highlight gaps that need to be addressed as well as promote aspects already commonly practiced. Revising the model based on such knowledge also helps it be of genuine use to teachers in the classroom.

3   METHODOLOGY

To support the development of the proposed model, it is necessary to under-
stand what teachers of young foreign language learners are currently doing. To
do this, an internet survey was conducted. It was sent to teachers and
headteachers of primary and pre-primary schools as well as relevant adminis-
trative leaders in the cities of Jyväskylä, Vantaa, Tampere, Lahti, Espoo and
Joensuu in Finland. Participation was voluntary, and no reward was offered.
The internet survey is presented in full in the appendix.

3.1   Ethical considerations

The survey was anonymous and did not collect any information that could be
used to identify individuals. No contact information was gathered. The only
demographic questions asked the number of years of teaching experience and
foreign language teaching experience the respondent has. The respondents'
gender, age, the school or even the city they work in was not collected in the
survey, so their identities are impossible to ascertain.

The matter of informed consent was considered. One accepted practice for
internet surveys is to have an introductory consent page before the questions
(Balch, 2010). Sue and Ritter (2012) state that for volunteers to make an in-
formed decision to participate in research through an internet survey, they
should be told about the nature of the study, how the data will be used and the
average time it should take them to complete it; all of which were included in
the survey for this research.

3.2   Data collection method

3.2.1   Justification for the use of an internet survey

There are a number of benefits to using an internet survey for this research. It is a relatively quick method of data collection on the part of the respondent, especially compared to interviews (Sue & Ritter, 2012). As teachers are busy professionals and have a duty of care to their learners, finding time to complete a survey is easier.

Surveys need to be easy to administer so that errors are less likely when the questions are asked and answered (Peterson, 2000). Making use of an internet survey drastically reduces the chance of human error in the administering stage. Internet surveys are also economically affordable and can be distributed to a wider potential pool of respondents (Sue & Ritter, 2012). This is important because as Master's thesis research, there is no budget and potential respondents may not consider the research to be of enough significance for them to participate, hence the need for the survey to be distributed as widely as possible.

As surveys should be created to efficiently make the responses usable for analysis (Peterson, 2000), administering it electronically allows for greater affordances in this regard. For this survey, responses could be easily read per-question and per-respondent; something that would be impossible to do with paper-based surveys or other methods such as interviews.

3.2.2   Disadvantages of internet surveys

One disadvantage of internet surveys is that they exclude people with no or limited internet access (Sue & Ritter, 2012). They require some amount of computer literacy and internet knowledge. This issue was considered in the design of this research. All teachers in Finland need to use online systems as part of their work. As the skills required to fill out an internet survey are fairly basic, it is considered that using this medium would not hinder the overwhelming majority of potential respondents.

Another issue to consider with regard to internet surveys is abandonment; often occurring when the survey is too long (Sue & Ritter, 2012). For this reason, the survey was designed to have as few questions as possible to still allow for the collection of enough useful data. Even the questions were kept short to avoid survey abandonment.

Similarly, the survey instructions emphasised that for open-ended questions, the length of the answer was entirely down to the individual participant. The advantage to this is that long answers are still going to be received, but there is the chance that more short answers will be received as well. While these cannot be analysed in quite the same way, they can help add strength to the "popularity" of answers when grouping them. It is also worth noting that the length of a response is not necessarily indicative of its usefulness or value in a study (Sue & Ritter, 2012). A shorter response may give a greater insight to an individual's wider practice, than a long-winded explanation of a single point.

The decision to include open-ended questions was a considered one. Item nonresponse has been shown to be higher for questions with open text boxes rather than selecting a response from a list (Couper, Traugott & Lamias, 2001, in Sue & Ritter, 2012). Open-ended questions have also been shown to result in more missing data than if the same questions were asked in a closed format (Reja, Lozar Manfreda, Hlebec & Vehovar, 2003, in Sue & Ritter, 2012).

Despite these shortcomings, responses from open-ended questions have shown to have a high degree of validity (Couper et al., in Sue & Ritter, 2012) and can produce a more diverse set of results (Reja et al., 2003, in Sue & Ritter, 2012). Sue and Ritter (2012) believe that this may be due in part to the fact that open-ended questions do not force participants to select answers from a list created by the researcher. While this is a benefit, Thomas (2004) points out the increased analysis time needed for open-ended questions.

3.3   Survey question design

The approach of the questions was very carefully considered. It was important to avoid using leading questions that can lead a respondent towards a particular answer (Sue & Ritter, 2012; Thomas, 2004). It was a particular concern to avoid suggesting a response for questions on fun and playfulness. If the survey were to ask teachers directly "do you make your lessons fun" or "do you allow your children to be playful", it could make teachers feel they ought to answer "yes" as it might reflect poorly on them to answer otherwise.

For this reason, the questions were constructed in such a way that the issues of fun and playfulness could be observed in the answers without asking about them directly. For example, "what are your favourite classroom activities" is more neutral in tone; a good way to avoid leading questions (Thomas, 2004). The neutral question allows respondents to answer more freely and still gives relevant data for analysis on fun and playfulness.

Two questions ask "what kind of resources do you use in your language activities" and "do you sometimes edit or modify the resources? If so, why?". Again, a neutral tone is used with no presumption that teachers should be editing or modifying resources. It could be argued that the first question assumes that teachers are using resources, but it is perhaps not an unreasonable assumption to make considering the demographic. Importantly, the questions do not specifically ask about if the resources are used and/or edited to make them more fun, for example, giving greater validity to the responses.

The questions also had to be designed with the analysis method in mind. Asking questions that require numeric responses would benefit from being analysed quantitatively. This was not considered the best approach considering the aims of the research; namely finding out what teachers do, why, how, and considering how it connects with the proposed model. As a qualitative thematic analysis would be conducted on the responses (the reasons for this are explained later in this section), the questions needed to open enough to allow re-

spondents to write freely, but without asking them to write specifically about particular topics.

Open-ended questions are appropriate when there can be a wide range of responses and there is a desire to understand the thinking and reasoning of the respondent; things that cannot be gained from fixed-response type questions (Thomas, 2004). Because teachers' practice is so varied, having them select activities from a list would be problematic for two reasons. The first is that some teachers will do activities not on the list. That means that data would never be collected. The second issue is far greater; knowing what activities the teachers do gives no insight to why they choose to do them. Considering the focus of this thesis, it is of great importance to understand the reasons and thinking behind teachers' decisions.

3.4   Other considerations for the survey

3.4.1   Understandability

It was important for the survey to be understandable for participants. Overly complicated language was avoided and a friendly tone was used in the introduction and questions. It is suggested to use everyday language and to avoid jargon and slang in online surveys (Fink, 2002; Sue & Ritter, 2012).

3.4.2   Brevity

While having clear instructions is important, writing very clear instructions can lead to lengthier instructions (Balch, 2010). It was important to get a good balance between clear instructions and brevity. This issue extends to the questions themselves. Short, simple questions were asked, as long questions increase the chance of it being unanswered (Sue & Ritter, 2012).

3.4.3   Language

The language of the survey also has an effect on the understandability of the survey as well as potentially the length of time it takes a participant to complete. The survey was conducted in English despite most potential respondents having Finnish as their first language. Although the questions were in English, respondents were given the option to answer in Finnish, which two did. It was considered appropriate to ask the questions in English as the survey targeted foreign language teachers, and English is by far the most common foreign language taught in schools. It could be considered highly unlikely that most teachers in Finland (that generally have a very high standard of English) would not understand the questions, even if they chose to respond in Finnish. At worst, if a respondent did not understand, they would not answer.

3.4.4   Layout and colour

The appearance of the survey was taken into consideration in its design. The survey was divided into six pages. While this can reduce load times (Balch, 2010), the main reason was to avoid the survey appearing to be too much of a daunting task to the participant. If a survey is shown in its entirety on a single page, a participant may be more likely to abandon it than if it was of the same length but spread across several pages (Balch, 2010).

There are a host of technical complexities that arise with multi-page online surveys (Balch, 2010; Dillman, Smyth & Christian, 2014). It was not deemed necessary to create a survey system for this research project as pre-made, customisable online tools met its needs. Google Forms was used as it allows for simple creation of multi-page surveys, has options for many different response types, and collects and saves data in an easily-readable, exportable format; something that is essential, as discussed earlier and supported by Peterson (2000).

Visual design is a primary concern in online surveys as there is no interviewer to guide them (Dillman et al., 2014). While good visual design can re-

duce errors and lessen non-responses, poor visual design can have the opposite effect (Dillman et al., 2014). An informed use of spacing and colour can help items stand out and be distinguished as related or separate to each other by the respondent (Dillman et al., 2014).

Balch (2010) also notes that the most common forms of colour blindness are related to the colours green and red, so these colours were avoided in the survey. The primary colours of the survey were blue and white as it allowed for items to be distinguished easily as well as it having positive connotations for the Finnish audience, though the concept that colour can convey meaning (Couper, 2008) was considered. The colour of the text against the background colours was also considered so that readability was not hindered, avoiding similar colours or shades together (Balkey & Nall, 2003, in Balch, 2010; Couper, 2008).

The use of images was considered to make the survey more appealing. No significant support could be found to justify its inclusion. In fact, it is possible for images to affect the responses given in an online survey (Couper, 2008), which is something that should be avoided.

3.5   Analysis method

A thematic analysis was conducted on the survey responses. Despite it being generally described poorly (Lapadat, 2010), it is a widely used method of analysis for qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method was selected as it helps identify, analyse and report themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and is done so in a way that "captures the important concepts within the data set" (Ayres, 2008, p. 87). Importantly, it can be "useful for producing qualitative analyses suited to informing policy development" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97), something which this this thesis aims to do.

Additionally, thematic analysis is a relatively quick method to learn and conduct while not being too difficult, making it an accessible method for re-

searchers with little to no experience with qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Data are coded; a process that requires careful scrutinisation of data to find of finding recurring subjects or relationships, and marking them with a code or label to be able to group and more easily find them later (Lapadat, 2010). The result of this process is a description of the recurring patterns and the themes and what unites them (Ayres, 2008).

While a theory-lead approach to thematic analysis is possible, an inductive approach is more common (Lapadat, 2010). Braun and Clarke (2006) warn not to base themes on the questions that were asked to participants, as well as to ensure that themes are clear and consistent. They also emphasise the importance of actually *analysing* the data, rather than simply reporting it.

In order to avoid basing the analysis on the questions themselves, the questions were carefully worded so as to not provoke a particular type of response, or to acquire data on a single theme. This allowed an inductive approach to the thematic analysis for this study. The process was based on Braun and Clarke's (2006) six phases of thematic analysis. These are, (1) becoming familiar with the data, (2) creating codes for similar data, (3) organising the codes into themes, (4) checking if the themes work with regard to the codes and the original data, (5) clearly defining and naming the themes, and (6) producing a report on the analysis.

In addition to following the six phases of thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke's (2006) fifteen-point checklist of criteria for good thematic analysis was also referred to throughout the process. This is a useful summary of the analysis process that offers valuable advice and reminders of the potential pitfalls to avoid. The process of analysis for this study is described in detail in the next section.

3.6   Analysis process

The first phase of the process was becoming familiar with the data. To more easily read the data, the questions and responses were exported from Google Forms to Google Sheets; an online spreadsheet application. Each column contained responses to a single question, and each row contained responses from a single participant. Having all data browsable on a single spreadsheet (rather than separate sets of questions and answers) meant that all the data could be read in a single place. Having data readable in this form could also allow for machine-based approaches to analysis, though such tools were not used for this research.

The data was read through several times and initial notes were made. These notes included words, activities and topics that were mentioned multiple times and possible ideas for coding.

The second phase involved producing initial codes from the data. These codes were basic elements of data, not yet interpreted. It was important to not start to categorise these codes into themes at this stage, though some ideas regarding themes had already been noted in the first phase.

After carefully reading the data and coding, the third phase commenced. Themes were searched for amongst the codes. At first, themes were simply identified from the codes. Then, as more themes were identified, the relationship and crossover between them was considered as well as how broad or narrow they were. At the end of this phase, sixteen themes were identified.

It was very important to ensure from this stage onwards that the themes were formed based on the codes from the data, and not on the original questions that were asked. Using data collection questions as themes is one of the common pitfalls of conducting thematic analysis highlighted by Braun and Clarke (2006), and this was consciously considered during the analysis process.

The fourth phase involved refining those themes. As Braun and Clarke (2006) note, during this process, some themes may not have enough data to

support them, two separate themes may actually form one, or some themes may be too broad and need to be separated.

This refinement of themes was done in what Braun and Clarke (2006) call two levels. Level one involved checking that the codes belonged to the proposed themes. It was considered that the initial themes did fit the coded data, which meant that level two of the process could commence. This is where the validity of the themes was considered in relation to the whole data set; were the themes accurately reflecting the meanings in the data.

At this stage, the sixteen themes that had been identified were considered sub-themes. While Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest using a visual thematic map to aid finding main themes from sub-themes, a text-based approach was used. This followed the same principle; considering the significance of each theme and how they relate to each other. As a result of this, four main themes were identified from the sixteen sub-themes.

With this done, the fifth phase could begin. The four themes were named and defined. It was important to check that the essence of the theme could be easily understood and did not try to cover too much or too little. The themes were checked by going back to the original data set and categorising extracts into the themes. The sub-themes were not discarded, but instead kept as a tool to help give structure to the main themes.

Having completed these phases of analysis, the sixth and final phase could be done; the writing up of the findings, presented in the proceeding section. Again, Braun and Clarke's (2006) common pitfalls of conducting thematic analysis were consciously kept in mind during this phase. Specifically, to be aware of mismatches between data and analytic claims. It was important to ensure that the claims made are consistent with the original data.

# 4	FINDINGS

A total of thirteen respondents completed the survey. Additionally, there was one set of responses that were blank, likely as a result of someone reading through the entire survey to help decide if they want to complete it later. This set of responses was discarded.

Five of the respondents have less than ten years of teaching experience, three respondents have ten to twelve years of teaching experience, and five have over eighteen years of teaching experience. The youngest children they currently work with range from six to eleven years old, and the oldest range from twelve to sixteen years old, suggesting a subject teacher answered the questionnaire.

The length of the responses varied widely across respondents. For example, one question elicited responses of six words or less from seven of the thirteen respondents, while one respondent gave a 124-word response to the same question. All respondents answered the required questions. Questions that were not applicable to some respondents were left blank. For example, the question "Do you sometimes edit or modify the resources? If you do, how do you edit them and why?" was left blank by one respondent, presumably because they did not modify or edit their resources.

Analysis of the responses showed four main themes present in teachers' foreign language education. These themes are: (a) fun and enjoyment, (b) emotional awareness, (c) communication and interaction, and (d) technical linguistic aspects. Each of these are explored below. Numbers in square brackets, for example [3], each refer to an individual respondent.

4.1 Fun and enjoyment

A key theme throughout the responses is fun and enjoyment. The need for learners to enjoy themselves appears to be important to teachers. One teacher reported the use of several different activities with the explanation that they support language learning by "having fun" [13]. One way teachers report having fun in class is by using games. One teacher reported that one of their favourite classroom activities is a "find your friend game" [3] because it is "playful and fun" [3], while another said that they sing and play with their learners because "it is fun!" [5].

Songs as well as games are used by teachers to have fun in the classroom. As with games, songs can be seen as more fun than traditional classroom activities. Both activities may not be seen as learning or educational by learners [11] and result in "learning by accident" [12]. Similarly, singing and playing both "makes learning fun" [3] and "gives [the learners] the possibility to enjoy themselves while learning" [8].

It is not only the explicit mention of fun that shows teachers' recognition of its importance. The activities they do can be considered to be chosen because they are fun for learners. For example, *Kahoot!* was specifically mentioned by four of the thirteen teachers. *Kahoot!* is a web-based tool that allows people to make multiple-choice quizzes. Anyone can then take part in the quiz at the same time by connecting to that quiz with a smartphone or device with an internet browser. A similar service, *Quizlet* was mentioned by three teachers.

It could be argued that these services are used because they allow teachers to tailor the content to meet their exact needs. One teacher specifically says they make use of these services for this reason [12]. However, the more prevailing theme appears to be that they make learning more pleasant [12] and more interesting [4]. In combination with other activities, they allow learners to have fun [13] as they "just love to do these activities" [11]. Other reported benefits are discussed in the next section.

While it clear that fun in the classroom is directed towards the learners, some responses suggest that it may also be important for the teacher to have fun. When asked about working with young learners and foreign language, one teacher indicated "it is almost always very rewarding and fun" [9], while another similarly stated "it's sometimes exhausting but most often very nice and extremely rewarding" [2].

The idea that teaching a foreign language to young children can be "nice" and "fun" shows that perhaps a fun approach can be appreciated by both learner and teacher. Along this line, one teacher stated that foreign language teaching, "is fun and gives a kind of break to the schoolday [sic] otherwise filled with exercices [sic] and thinking and concentrating" [15]. It is not clear if the teacher means that it gives the children a break, or the teacher, or perhaps both. More clear is the teacher who says they sing and play with their children because "it's fun and I love singing" [13]. It can certainly be considered that both learner and teacher benefit from fun in the classroom, perhaps due to it being a different approach to most lessons, and perhaps because learners are more likely to have fun if they believe that their teacher is having fun as well.

Even if the teacher does not consider it important for themselves to have fun, they at least appear to recognise the importance of fun in their approach to teaching. When discussing foreign language teaching with young learners, one teacher reports that "playfulness is the key" and suggests to "give them the joy" [11]. Another suggests that "teachers should not [be] afraid to try it. It is almost always very rewarding and fun" [9]. One quite strongly claims "attitude - that's what counts!" [13]. While the attitude is not specifically defined, the belief that a particular attitude is needed is clear.

Fun and the use of games and activities that are fun for learners (and teachers!) are important to teachers. This aligns with the proposed model, as fun and playfulness is the key factor. Similarly, putting learners' enjoyment first and using a playful approach to teaching is also in line with the model. This is strengthened further with the consideration that the teachers themselves may

also be enjoying (and perhaps benefiting from) fun and playfulness in the classroom.

Less in line with the model is the role of creativity. While activities are fun, they may be somewhat rigid and not give learners the opportunities to use creative thinking. Creativity has connections with other aspects in the model such as motivation as well as benefits for sense-making that can help in early foreign language learning. If fun activities can be expandable, flexible and open for modification (much like the model itself), there can be many more allowances for creativity.

The specific use of songs is not in line with the model, as the model does not currently mention this. While the use of songs can be considered an activity rather than approach, as it is something that both teachers and learners enjoy and make use of, teachers may wish to modify the model to include it.

However, the songs themselves should be fun and playful as well as give room for learners' own creativity. The use of songs requires emotional awareness on the part of the teacher by reducing the barrier to participation and creating a safe environment. The teacher should also remember their status as a role model in this. Making use of songs can certainly fit within the proposed model, as long as the other aspects of the model are considered and respected.

While fun and enjoyment are prominent in teachers' current practice, there are reasons *why* they consider them to be important that fall under the second theme, *emotional awareness*.

4.2   Emotional awareness

Teachers appear to be very aware of young learners' emotions with regard to language learning. One teacher reported that they tailor their materials so that their learners "have a good feeling about their language skills" [9], while another did so to "give them successful experiences" [11]. Similarly, one teacher recognised that helping their learners feel successful helped support their learning [15]. There was recognition that children can have a negative view of them-

selves as learners [11], which can extend across all subjects, not just foreign languages. The desire for young learners to feel successful in their learning suggests teachers are sensitive to their emotional needs.

This is highlighted further by teachers' conscious choices in activities. Making lessons fun through the use of games appears to be fairly common. Some reasons for this show emotional awareness in teachers. One teacher felt that using the language while playing is seen as less scary by learners [15], while another said that playing games helps learners "use language in a non - threatning [sic] way" [11]. There was even recognition that the learning environment can have an effect on children's emotions [9].

One of the most common themes related to emotional awareness was *motivation*. Teachers use certain songs and games because they are fun, and having fun helps motivate their learners [4], [7], [8], [15]. Similarly, motivation is taken into consideration when a teacher wants to ensure that children have "enthuciasm [sic] to learn more" [11].

Not only is the need for motivation mentioned, but the way it can be developed and also harmed is considered. One teacher notes that if a child finds something too easy, they can lose motivation [15]. Three other teachers also indicate the need to sometimes increase the difficulty of tasks, activities or resources [8], [10], [11]. Teachers may also need to make tasks easier to meet the needs of their children [2], [8], [9], [11], [15]. One teacher expressed that reducing the difficulty helps make it easier for children to cope with [2], while another said it helps children "to have a good feeling about their language skills" [9].

It appears that teachers are sensitive to the emotions of their learners and recognise that motivation is an important part of this. However, motivation is not discussed by all teachers. One reason for this could be that it is so ingrained to their teaching practice in general that they did not consider such an inherent aspect to be noteworthy. This is supported by the fact that other common teaching issues were not raised, for example behaviour management and marking.

Most teachers display at least some level of emotional awareness. Some responses were rather short, and while they may explain *what* the teacher is do-

ing, it does not necessarily give an insight as to *why*. Those that do show consideration to the feelings of their learners seem to do so not only to help their language learning, but likely to help their learning in general through the promotion of motivation and self-esteem.

Teachers' current practice with regard to emotional aspects aligns with the proposed model to some degree. Some teachers explicitly show awareness of learners' feelings and self-image in the foreign language classroom. For teachers who do not mention these aspects, it is possible they do not consider them important for foreign language education, or (more likely) that they consider these aspects across the curriculum.

Other emotional aspects in teachers' current practice align more clearly with the proposed model, such as motivation. The way that motivation affects, as is affected by other issues is recognised by teachers, and their practice is shaped by this awareness. This adds weight to the argument that teachers already consider these elements fundamental to their practice, and do not think to mention them.

However, if this is the case, the proposed model could add more value to teachers' practice by making them *specifically aware* of these matters. A greater, conscious awareness of elements of the model already practiced by teachers could strengthen those aspects of their teaching. In this case, a greater awareness of the emotional aspects of foreign language learning could help better guide their chosen activities, as they will be consciously developed to also aid motivation, for example, and be fun and playful for the benefit of foreign language learning.

There is little recognition of the influence of the teacher themselves on their young foreign language learners. There is little consideration of how teachers' demeanour, or their status as a role model has an effect. This is in contrast to the proposed model. While it is highly likely teachers recognise their impact on their learners across the curriculum, the unique environment and circumstances of the foreign language classroom requires teachers to pay particular attention to how their actions impact and influence the emotions of their

learners, and understand what effects those emotions have on their foreign language learning.

The importance of risk taking is emphasised in the model, but is not specifically addressed by teachers, suggesting a lack of awareness of its importance, and highlighting the model's value and use. Teachers want to ensure their learners have a good feeling about learning, as well as have a learning environment that supports this. These are elements needed to cultivate risk taking. If the fun activities described earlier also made greater use of learners' creativity, this would link ideally with risk taking and giving learners a good attitude towards learning and motivation to continue; aspects that *are* recognised in teachers' current practice, and in line with the model.

4.3   Communication and interaction

The favourite classroom activities of over half of the teachers surveyed specifically involve learners speaking with each other [2], [3], [6], [7], [8], [10], [11], [13], suggesting the importance teachers place on oral skills in foreign language learning. Indeed, some teachers mention that they use these activities because they "requiere [sic] oral production" [8] and they "force them to speak in English" [10]. Teachers seem to recognise the difficulty or reluctance some children may have with using a foreign language, and are most pleased with the activities that make it more approachable for the learners.

Additionally, teachers have a greater focus on the learners talking with each other than with the teacher. One teacher mentioned the use of a "find your friend-game" [3] where learners ask each other questions, and another mentioned a game called "mingle" where the children swap partners and have conversations on different topics [11]. Others do not give as much detail, for example, "reading and talking in pairs, playing games in pairs" [13] and "games/activities that requiere [sic] oral production and social skills" [8], but they still show that the communication in these activities happens primarily between the learners, rather than between learner and teacher.

It is worth considering that some teachers may use discussion and pair work as part of their regular teaching practice, regardless of the lesson. For some teachers, it may not be a deliberate choice to aid foreign language learning. This may be why some teachers did not offer as much detail on what the activities where learners communicate entail. However, one teacher's comment on this is worthy of note: "social activities are important for language learning since language is a tool for social situations" [8]. This suggests that even if social and communication activities are a part of everyday practice, it is perhaps recognised as even more valuable in the language classroom.

As already touched upon, teachers appear to use activities involving communication and social interaction with purpose. Several teachers note that they use certain activities because it makes learners use the target language [3], [4], [7], [8], [10], [11]. Regardless of who is involved in the communication, it is clear that teachers recognise the need for the foreign language to be more than an "academic" subject; something that is only studied. Rather, they consider the foreign language to be something practical.

The ways that communication and interaction are used to help support foreign language learning aligns with the proposed model. Oral skills are not practiced through simple parroting of the teacher or a recording, but instead through playful interaction. The way that playfulness and social interaction are combined is an approach very much in the same spirit as the model.

The use of games and peer interaction may be chosen due to an awareness of learners' emotions; what approach they would feel comfortable with and what motivates them to learn more. Without specific mention of this link, it is not possible to say that teachers consciously make connections between communication, fun and playfulness and emotional aspects, as promoted by the model.

As touched upon earlier, the potential lack of risk taking that does not fall in line with the model is relevant here. Communication will be limited if learners do not feel able to take risks. Similarly, a potential lack of room for creativity

may limit communication and not make the most of opportunities for sense making and learners' own fun relationship with the foreign language.

4.4   Technical linguistic aspects

While teachers show care for affective issues and the need for social interaction and communication, there is still recognition for the teaching of the language itself; aspects that are a part of the "traditional" view of language teaching. These include pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, amongst other elements.

As discussed earlier, the use of songs is popular amongst foreign language teachers. One of the reported uses of song is to help with pronunciation [2], [9], [11]. One teacher mentions that the rhythm of the songs also helps [11], which perhaps shows an awareness of prosody, and an engaging way of addressing it in the classroom.

Two teachers specifically mention that they use songs to help teach grammar [4], [15], and another uses phenomenon-based grammar teaching [6]. Teaching of vocabulary is also supported by songs as well as games [2], [3], [4], [15]. Similar to grammar teaching, songs, as well as games, are considered a valuable tool. Teachers reported that they help make teaching and learning new vocabulary "easy" [4], [15], "fun" [3], [4], and "more interesting" [4].

Some of the reasons why teachers choose to incorporate fun activities such as songs and games in their lessons are related to emotions, as already discussed. However, it seems that teachers recognise both the usefulness of fun and games in teaching the technical linguistic elements of language, as well as holding the view that these aspects are important or necessary to teach. This suggests that teachers do not consider an affective approach and teaching technical linguistic elements as opposing methods, but rather two sides of the same coin.

This is further highlighted by one teacher who promotes "playfulness" and "joy", believing there is "no need for grammar or spelling test in the begin-

ning" [11], suggesting that there is a place for testing in foreign language lessons, but perhaps not at the early stages. Three other teachers mention the use of tests in their teaching [4], [12], [13]. Again, it is possible that more teachers make use of testing, but consider it a normal part of their practice, so do not think to report it. One of those teachers mention that they edit or modify the tests designed for use with teaching materials for two reasons: "I don't like the tests" and "they don't test the things I want" [13].

It is worth exploring both of these statements. Firstly, on the surface, "I don't like tests [13] suggests the teacher's personal dislike for them. However, it is worth considering that they do not like testing because it is not an activity their learners enjoy. This is quite possible, as this teacher specifies several games as well as the use of songs in their teaching, claiming they help support foreign language learning by "having fun" [13]. It is worth noting that although they do not like tests, they still use them, perhaps because it is a part of the teaching material they follow, and the use of materials like textbooks is very common and widespread in Finland (Luukka et al., 2008). Secondly, editing or modifying the tests because "they don't test the things I want" [13] suggests a recognition of either a need to use tests, or an assumption that testing as part of the more traditional foreign language teaching is simply an unquestioned requirement.

Finally, teachers appear to make use of one other traditional foreign language teaching element; repetition. Teachers acknowledge the value in having learners repeat words and phrases. While most teachers do not give their reasons for wanting use repetition, one teacher surveyed believes that "oral repetition of the learned contents help children to storage [sic] the language in their long term memory" [8].

What is more insightful is that teachers use certain activities *because* they involve repetition. One teacher likes using a game in class as it is a "playful and fun way to get to know/repeat the vocabulary and useful basic phrases" [3]. Another uses songs and games because they "usually make children repeat important contents all over again" [8]. Coupled with the reasons discussed earlier

as to why teachers want to include fun and games in lessons, it suggests that teachers feel the need to have children repeat words and phrases, recognise the value of fun and games, and see a way to combine the two.

It is not clear if all teachers aim to combine playfulness and repetition. One teacher describes a number of games and social activities in their classroom as well as "repeating after me/the tape" [13], believing these activities support language learning through "repetition + having fun" [13]. While there certainly is room for repetition in the games and social activities, it is possible the teacher only actively uses repetition in the more traditional repeat-after-me sense.

When specifically asked about classroom routines, teachers explained how they use a foreign language, not necessarily strictly in foreign language lessons. "We start the lessons together saying hi and asking how are you in the targer [sic] language. One routine is that I always introduce the next activity in the target language so they have learned that it means time to move forward from the last activity" [8]. In a similar manner, another teacher explains, "during the lesson I give most of the instructions in English and repeat and try to show them what to do" [10]. This practice closely resembles that of another teacher who describes, "we greet each others [sic] in English in the beginning and in the end of the lesson. If I ask them to take out their books, pencils etc. I'll do [it] in English and we mark the homework in English" [13].

Similar practices were reported by many teachers, as they were specifically asked about classroom routines, but did not indicate that they take place in the foreign language classroom, or that a foreign language is used. However, the examples given above show how teachers choose to use a foreign language with their learners in contexts that do not require it. It suggests that they recognise the power of repetition, whether it is on the part of the teacher, or from the learners.

Some of these elements align with the proposed model, though it is important to remember that the model suggests an *approach* to foreign language education, and this theme relates more to content. However, the way that the content is taught aligns somewhat with the model, for example using songs and

games. Though it is worth considering how much learners are given opportunity or encouragement to play with the language itself. A playful approach to technical linguistic aspects should consist of more than playing games, but giving children the tools, encouragement, creativity, courage and environment to make sense of it themselves.

Also applicable is how repetition is utilised. Repetition is used, though perhaps not always in a fun and playful manner. However, considering teachers' practice in other aspects, it is possible that fun and playfulness do play a role, though perhaps in a limited way.

An aspect that appears to align with the proposed model is that of routines. Routines should link with learners' emotions by helping them feel secure and safe, having a positive effect on their motivation and attitude to learning. However, it is difficult to judge how closely teachers' current practice aligns with the model, as it is difficult to ascertain the reasons *why* they make use of routines. The model promotes the benefits of routines, and if teachers are more reflective of their practice and consciously consider their current routines, and what routines they may be able to introduce, they may better support their young foreign language learners.

5 DISCUSSION

This thesis aimed to find out what teachers are currently doing in foreign language education, and how that practice aligns with the proposed model. Regarding teachers' current practice, the findings suggest that teachers widely integrate fun into their lessons by selecting activities that they consider their learners to enjoy. Games and songs are commonly used to this end. The reasons for incorporating fun are not often explicitly stated, but are at least partly due to addressing the emotional needs of their learners.

Teachers show an understanding of their learners' emotional needs by indicating an awareness of how their learners might feel about using a foreign language, and how the learning experience may make them feel. Teachers choose approaches that address these issues as well as have an impact on learners' motivation. Social activities involving communication are used both because they are fun and because they promote core language skills such as speaking and listening. These are important to teachers along with other technical linguistic aspects such as grammar and pronunciation, which in turn are also taught in a fun manner.

Even though there are distinct themes in teachers' approach for foreign language learning, teachers approach these themes in ways that interconnect. For example, fun is had in lessons to support emotional needs, and to teach technical linguistic aspects in a more engaging way. This practice falls in line with the proposed model.

Now to look more in depth at how teachers' current practice aligns with the proposed model. Teachers use activities that are fun but did not always specify that they used those activities *because* they are fun. However, it is likely that these teachers did not feel the need to explicitly claim that the games they play in class are fun. Similarly, while some teachers made clear the connection between fun and the emotional needs of their learners, most did not. Again, it is

possible that the teachers did not feel the need to make this explicitly clear as it is perhaps embedded in their everyday practice. A similar statement can be made regarding what teachers reported regarding emotional awareness.

The fact that not all teachers explain explicitly the reasons behind their practice and choices relates to two factors: survey design (discussed later) and folk pedagogies. The findings suggest there is a possibility that teachers make certain choices because they simply think it is right, or that it falls in line with what they consider to be common practice. It can be argued that choosing to incorporate fun and playfulness into lessons because the learners clearly show enjoyment is being emotionally aware, but it might be done simply for the reason that it makes the teacher feel good or that it is an easier way for them to get their job done.

This is something that teachers should be aware of when using the model, or generally wanting the benefits of a fun and playful approach to foreign language education. Simply have fun and playing will not immediately result in better learning, and is not indicative of a fun and playful *approach*. In the proposed model, fun and playfulness should surround all of the other elements in the model; if they are not present, one is left with just an empty frame.

There is the possibility that folk pedagogies lead foreign language educational practice for young learners. This could be understood better with further research. This study could have gone to further lengths to understand the reasons *why* teachers make certain choices, potentially reducing the chance that folk pedagogies lead practice. Limits in the research design are discussed later in this section.

It is worth noting that folk pedagogies are not something to work against. Indeed, the idea of the proposed model was not to compete with folk pedagogies, but rather work alongside teachers' current practice. Considering this, many teachers are already following practices regarding fun and playfulness as well as emotional awareness in their foreign language teaching, so their approach already aligns with the model.

However, it is not enough for practice to simply *happen* to align with the model. Teachers should benefit from thinking through the reasons *why* they choose to work the way they do. By being reflective of their practice and genuinely considering it within the model, teachers can better address the needs of their learners, especially considering how many factors of the model (and foreign language learning) interconnect.

The use of songs was common amongst teachers, and is an aspect not mentioned in the proposed model. While songs are considered an element of fun, the fact that it is explicitly mentioned by a large number of teachers suggests it is something that a future revision of the model could incorporate.

However, it is important to remember that music is a subject in its own right, and while the findings show that at least singing and listening to songs suits the foreign language classroom well, this is only a tiny part of the subject. Additionally, the model is not intended to direct the type of activity teachers use, but rather their approach.

The fact that teachers already choose to use songs to help teach some elements of foreign language because it is fun supports the view that teachers already consider a fun and playful approach in their teaching. Again, the issue of if they have considered *why* they want to use this approach is relevant here.

Activities involving communication and social interaction appear to be common in the foreign language classroom. There is more evidence to suggest that teachers are actively using these activities because they support foreign language learning, especially technical linguistic aspects, such as pronunciation. Though as discussed already, it may also be that they are a part of everyday practice.

The model is based upon the idea that social interaction can help with play, and that teachers need to support learners' emotional needs (such as self-esteem, risk taking) for positive social experiences. This means that communication and social interaction in the foreign language classroom both *helps* with emotional needs, but also *requires help* from the teacher for them to be sensitive to those needs.

For this reason, it is important that teachers understand *why* they are choosing to make use of social interaction and communication in the classroom, beyond the technical linguistic aspects. It may be that current practice sits well in the proposed model, but it may be for different reasons.

The final theme in the findings is of technical linguistic aspects. This area was not addressed in the proposed model as it is designed to suggest an *approach* to teaching the contents, rather than the contents itself. However, certain topics within the theme such as pronunciation and repetition could be specifically addressed in future revisions of the model as they were mentioned by the surveyed teachers. These topics could be taught in a very dry, mundane way, but as the findings show, teachers already actively, specifically use fun and playful approaches.

As this is the case it also suggests that teachers are aware of the emotional aspects, due to how they are intertwined with fun and playfulness. But it must be questioned if they actively think of the emotional aspects when choosing a fun and playful approach. It is possible that although these aspects are interconnected, they may not be seen as such by teachers.

This leads to another point to consider. While teachers' practice aligns with the model, and while there is some evidence to show that practice is based on some elements present in the model, there may not be awareness that the elements of the model work together.

The components of the model do not exist in separate bubbles, unaffecting and unaffected by each other. Similarly, teachers' choices in practice should not be made without consideration of how those choices affect and are affected by other decisions they have made. A teacher making use of the proposed model should become more aware of these factors. This more importantly means that the young learners of such a teacher have greater possibilities and opportunities for learning a foreign language.

There are a number of ways teachers will benefit from making use of the model. As already discussed, the findings suggest that teachers already make use of many elements of the model. Furthermore, as emphasised throughout

this thesis, the model is an *approach*, rather than dictating what should be done. These aspects make it easier for teachers to adopt the model into their practice, as it does not require them to make large, potentially uncomfortable changes in the way they work.

Significantly, introducing the model would require teachers to be reflective in their practice for two reasons. Firstly, as the model suggests an approach that their current practice already somewhat aligns with, it requires them to consider what they are already doing, how that aligns with the model, and what they could do to adjust some activities to encompass the approach.

Secondly, as the model is open for revision, teachers must be reflective in their practice to adjust the model to better serve their learners. Being reflective in this way may also help them introduce the model to other practitioners. Making use of the model may encourage further reflective practice from teachers.

It must also be considered if the model benefits from teachers' contributions, as the model is meant as a practical tool that can be adjusted and modified. As much of teachers' current practice aligns with the model, it is important that teachers do not just adjust the other parts of the model simply to fit their practice. Rather, they should consider how they can shape their current practice that does not align with the model to follow its principles.

That being considered, the model should not be rigid, and should benefit from teachers' contributions. For example, the findings show that teachers commonly make use of songs. Those teachers may choose to strengthen the connections between the *routines* and *communication* aspects of the model through using songs. They may find technical linguistic aspects such as vocabulary building benefits from this, but also may wish to emphasise creativity by having their learners modify the songs by changing certain words.

Indeed, some teachers may wish to place a greater emphasis on creativity throughout the model, particularly as it is highlighted in the Finnish foreign language curriculum. In this way, the model benefits from teachers' contributions, but it also helps guide the teacher in making those modifications. To place greater emphasis on creativity, for example, the teacher must still be aware of

the emotional issues, such as how those activities may make children feel, the amount of risk they may need to take, and if the learning environment is set up for such risks. Those matters then connect with the learners' motivation and attitude to learning, as all aspects of the model are interconnected. The model is both adjustable, and helps guide the adjustments.

Now that the model has been devised, teachers' current practice investigated, and how that practice aligns with the model considered, the next step is to pilot the model. For it to be of best use to teachers, and best serve the needs of young foreign language learners, the model should be trialled. Identifying its strengths and weaknesses will better allow it to be adjusted, and help develop good methods for its introduction into classroom use.

5.1   Issues and future directions

As already touched upon, there are some minor issues in this research that similar future studies could improve upon. Creating a survey is a complex task, and great care was taken in designing the survey for this research. While trying to make the survey as approachable as possible, respondents were invited to write as much or as little as they wanted. Unfortunately, some responses were very short, which coupled with a low response rate limits the scope of the findings.

Much effort was exerted in getting a higher response rate, but it remained low. This may be partly due to the fact the survey was for a Master's thesis, rather than something of more significance, such as a PhD thesis or government funded research. Respondents may feel their effort will be of little consequence. However, the channels of distribution were authoritative; teachers would have been informed of the questionnaire either by their headteacher or from the administrative level.

It is also possible that the language of the survey may have had a small effect on the response rate. While participants were invited to use their first language or English, the questions were only in English.

Future studies in this area would perhaps benefit from a slightly different research instrument. While surveys have their advantages and was an appropriate choice for the scope of this study, interviews should be considered for future research. They would allow for further clarification on responses and could elicit longer, more detailed responses. Especially for young learners, interviews would have a great advantage, as long as they are planned and conducted with the awareness of the different considerations needed for interviewing children. Interviews generally need to be planned in advance, so an assured number of participants can be obtained, though likely with more effort than a survey.

An improved data collection method would perhaps allow more clear answers to the reasons behind teachers' reported practice. It can be unclear or difficult to tell why teachers' make certain decisions in their practice. A better understanding of this would allow for a much greater insight into what teachers do before the implementation of the model, what affect the model has on practice, and what adjustments need to be made to the model.

This research could be taken a step further by piloting the proposed model with teachers and continuing to develop it with them. As the model is intended to be used and improved upon, this should be done in a research context to discover how useable and workable this approach is.

In similar future research, it would be of interest to ask learners their views, for example to see how important they consider fun and playfulness, or having a teacher that is emotionally aware. Such a study could also be used to help understand how well teachers address learners' wants by comparing responses from teachers and learners.

5.2   Closing thoughts

To conclude, play in early childhood education is well researched, but specifically linking play and foreign language learning for young children appears to

be very rare. This thesis has aimed to argue for the value in doing this, as well as how it can be done in practice by proposing a model for teachers.

This study has investigated teachers' current practice in foreign language education and found that elements align with the proposed model. They are already making use of fun and playfulness in their teaching, though it may be through using certain activities rather than in their wider approach. This considered, the benefits of these activities are positive and resemble those in the proposed model. This gives strength to the practicality of the model as well as further justification for its use. The model can be – and should be – developed further and trialled to help better shape a positive direction in foreign language education for young learners.

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APPENDIX

Internet survey

What do you do with your children in the foreign language classroom?

Introduction

Hello! This short, simple survey is intended to gather data for my Master's thesis on young children's foreign language learning.

The questions ask about what you do in your foreign language classes and why. Write as much or as little as you want to (or have time for!)

If you don't understand a question, or don't know what to write, just move on to the next question :)

Jos sä haluat vastaa suomeksi, ole hyvä!

Important information

Responses will be saved for use in the Master's thesis.

No personally identifying data will be asked.

Any personally identifying data given will be anonymised.

The Master's thesis is part of my Master's Degree Programme in Education at the University of Jyväskylä. My supervisor is Josephine Moate (josephine.m.moate@jyu.fi)

Questions

What are your favourite classroom activities?

How do you think these activities support language learning?

What kind of resources do you use in your language activities?

Do you sometimes edit or modify the resources? If you do, how do you edit them and why?

What kind of classroom routines do you use with your children?

Do you use songs and/or games with your children? *Mark only one oval.*

Yes / No

Songs and games

What kind of songs and games do you use in your foreign language lessons?

Why do you sing/play with your children?

Language showers If you don't do language showers, you don't have to answer these questions.

When doing language showers, what has gone well?

Has anything surprised you?

Has anything worried you?

About you Some short questions about you

How many years of teaching experience do you have?

How many years of LANGUAGE teaching experience do you have?

What is the age or age range of the children you teach?

Anything else? This is the last question!

Is there anything else you would like to say about your work with young children and foreign language?