

PERSONALIZED LEARNING IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN
LANGUAGE EDUCATION

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<p>Tiivistelmä – Abstract</p> <p>Uuden, alakouluissa jo syksyllä 2016 voimaan astuvan opetussuunnitelman keskiössä on ajatus oppilaasta ainutlaatuisena yksilönä sekä aktiivisena toimijana. Näiden ajatusten saattamana sekä opettajien että median katseet ovat kääntyneet Pekka Peuran kehittämän yksilöllisen oppimisen mallin suuntaan, missä tavoitteena on oppilaiden omistajuus omasta oppimisestaan. Tämä opetusmalli perustuu tavoiteoppimisen, omatahtisen oppimisen sekä autonomian käsitteisiin, joiden perusajatus on oppilaiden yksilöllisyys sekä aktiivinen toimijuus.</p> <p>Tämän tutkimuksen ensisijaisena tavoitteena oli perehtyä siihen kuinka yksilöllisen oppimisen ajatuksia on toteutettu englannin kielen opetuksessa. Tavoitteena oli myös selvittää mallia soveltavien opettajien syitä opetuksen yksilöllistämiseen sekä heidän mielipiteitensä tämän mallin hyvistä ja huonoista puolista. Lisäksi olin kiinnostunut siitä kuinka opettajat kokivat että heidän oppilaat, näiden vanhemmat, sekä kollegat ja rehtorit olivat suhtautuneet näihin kokeiluihin. Tutkimusta lähdettiin toteuttamaan laadullisena tutkimuksena, missä keskityttiin viiden englannin opettajan kokemuksiin yksilöllisestä oppimisesta. Aineistoa kerättiin analysoimalla blogitekstejä, haastatteluilla sekä havainnoimalla erään haastateltavan oppitunteja.</p> <p>Tutkimukseen osallistuneet opettajat suhtautuivat positiivisesti yksilöllisen oppimisen menetelmään, joskin he kaikki myönsivät toteutuksistaan löytyvän puutteita. Osallistuneiden opettajien mukaan sekä he että heidän oppilaansa pitivät omatahtista oppimista menetelmän parhaana puolena niin nopeiden kuin hitaidenkin oppilaiden kannalta, vaikka omatahtisuus oli joidenkin oppilaiden kanssa ollut ongelmallista. Oppilaiden lisääntyntä vastuunkantoa omasta oppimisestaan pidettiin myös erittäin positiivisena, joskin todettiin, että tämä vaatii oppilailta melko paljon työtä. Tutkimuksessa tulee myös ilmi menetelmän merkitys opettajien kannalta, sillä osallistuneet opettajat kokivat työstänsä tulleen mielekkäämpää tämän menetelmän myötä. Syiksi tähän muutokseen nimettiin sekä läheisemmät välit oppilaiden kanssa että vapautuminen taulusta ja tietokoneesta sekä perinteisestä luokanhallinnasta. Joidenkin oppilaiden kohdalla motivaation ja/tai keskittymiskyvyn puute olivat kuitenkin osoittautuneet ongelmiksi. Lisäksi opetusmallin muutos oli osoittautunut melko työlääksi ja aikaavieväksi. Kokemukset vanhempien, kollegoiden sekä rehtorin kanssa olivat olleet melko rajallisia. Oman koulun kollegoiden lisäksi oli tukea kokeiluihin ja kehittämiseen haettu sosiaalisen median kautta. Vaikka tämän tutkimuksen tulokset eivät ole suoraan yleistettävissä, voi tutkimuksen tuloksista olla hyötyä etenkin englannin tai muiden kielten opettajille jotka ovat kiinnostuneita yksilöllistämään opetustaan.</p>	
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Abbreviations

EFL/ESL - English as a foreign/second language (used interchangeably)

L2 - Second language

FLL/SLL - Foreign/Second language learning (used interchangeably)

PSI - Personalized System of Instruction

CALL - Computer-assisted language learning

ZPD - Zone of Proximal Development

Transcription signs

[]	the beginning and end of overlapping
discontinued wo-	discontinued word or a sentence
.	short pause
...	long pause for reflection
(something)	vaguely audible phrase
((something))	transcribers notes
H: / IR:	interviewer (Finnish/English)
V: / IE:	interviewee (Finnish/English)
(Name)	interviewee's name

1 INTRODUCTION

The present study focuses on personalized learning (*yksilöllinen oppiminen*) and how it has been applied to English as a foreign language (EFL) learning contexts. The inspiration for the topic came from recent events surrounding personalization of learning in the Finnish educational context, more precisely the work of Pekka Peura. For the purposes of the present study, personalized learning signifies a teaching approach which emphasizes learners' role in taking ownership of their learning by regarding them as active individuals. One of the main emphases of the approach is that each student has the opportunity, at each moment, to study the particular item that is the most relevant to their personal learning development. The approach was initially introduced by Peura, a Finnish mathematics teacher who, along with primary school teacher Markus Humaloja, has also been the most influential figure in its popularization. As a result of the promotional efforts made by Peura, Humaloja and a few others, the approach has gained wide recognition within the Finnish education system as well as the general public. Perhaps most significant in bringing information to the public has been a television series called *Koulukorjaamo* (School Repair Shop in English) published by the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE, which followed the experiments of Peura and Humaloja during the 2015-2016 schoolyear. After its initial introduction in 2009, the approach has been subject to several alterations and improvements, by Peura himself as well as several other teachers who have experimented with this approach in their own teaching (Hacked: n.d.). In sum, the approach has been developed and spread by teachers themselves without the enforcement of any external entity.

It is important to note that the term 'personalized learning' is a translation for the Finnish term 'yksilöllinen oppiminen'. This was chosen instead of the translation 'differentiated learning' or 'individualized learning' in order to avoid mixing the studied approach with 'differentiated instruction' (*erittyävä opetus*) and 'individualized instruction' (*yksilöllistetty opetus*). In spite of being near synonyms, personalized, individualized and differentiated learning are considered to be completely separate issues; the studied personalized approach does not completely realize the concept of differentiation or individualization, and these terms, in turn, do not fully explain the concept of the studied approach. To put it somewhat simplistically, in a differentiated or

individualized classroom, the teacher takes into consideration the diverse nature of students and provides support for students who “learn in different ways and at different rates and who bring to school different talents and interests” (Tomlinson 2014: 13). According to Tomlinson (2014: 19), teachers can achieve differentiation through modifying the content, process and products according to their students’ individual processes, interests and learning profiles. However, the key difference between the personalized learning approach reviewed in the present study and the two other concepts is perhaps the students’ role in the personalization process. In differentiation and individualization the analysis and decision making would seem to be mostly in the hands of the teacher, whereas in personalization one of the most crucial points is that learners begin to take responsibility for and ownership of their own learning. This should not be misinterpreted to mean that the teacher is relieved of any responsibility, because, although the role of the teacher changes, the teacher is still ultimately responsible for what takes place in the classroom.

The term ‘personalized learning’ has previously been used to some extent, but it does not seem to have a unified definition in educational contexts (Buckley 2005: 6). The context in which the phrase can most commonly be found is in connection with ‘Personal Learning Environments’ (PLEs). PLE is a concept or an approach where technology is used to build environments of personalized learning (Fiedler and Våljataga 2011). Buckley (2006) stated that personalization can happen either by the teacher, which he considers to be a natural evolution from differentiation, or by the learner. According to him (Buckley 2006: 6), if the personalization is done by the learner, it “would require a transformation of the model of education and would change the current roles of learner and teacher.” He goes on to claim that this type of personalization “would provide greater choice, responsibility and ownership in the hands of learners” (Buckley 2006: 6). As will consistently be shown throughout the present paper, the approach on which the present study is focused is much in line with the latter type of personalization described by Buckley.

Information about Peura’s approach, suggestions on its implementation, as well as ideas and thoughts relating to the topic has been shared for the educational community via multiple channels. Primarily, there is a website created by Peura that provides helpful information for those interested in the approach (maot.fi). Peura’s blog texts on this website have been the main source for the following description of Peura’s approach.

The website *Matematiikan opetuksen tulevaisuus*, (The Future of Mathematics' Education in English) contains, for instance, information on the approach, materials for teachers, popularized versions and links to theoretical articles about the approach. In addition to Peura's website, a group has been created in the popular social network *Facebook* to facilitate the communication and exchange of ideas between teachers interested in the personalized learning approach (facebook.com: Yksilöllinen oppimien ja oppimisen omistajuus) Currently (Aug 14, 2016) the group holds 11,497 members. There is also a specialized group for personalized learning in languages, holding 749 members (Aug 14, 2016) (facebook.com: Yksilöllinen oppiminen ja oppimisen omistajuus: kielet).

The approach as introduced by Peura began as a mathematics teaching experiment and, as such, might be best suited for science subjects (e.g. mathematics, chemistry, physics). Therefore, it is essential to keep in mind that in order to apply Peura's model to other subjects, some consideration of the inherent differences between those subjects is necessary. A project driven by teachers and funded by the National Board of Education called HackED (HackED n.d.) has been central in providing information on how the approach has been implemented in other subjects. Along with others that have participated in the project, an English teacher called Minna Ala-Akkala has shared her experiences with the method through blog texts on the HackED website. There is an undeterminable number of English teachers across Finland who have taken upon themselves the task of applying the approach in their teaching. Some of these teachers have shared their experiences with their colleagues through, for example, the Facebook groups dedicated for the approach. Presumably, however, there are numerous teachers who have experimented with the approach without having voiced their experiences in any public manner.

It is clear that there is widespread interest towards Peura's personalized approach in the general public as well as the Finnish teaching community. However, it can be seen from the popularity of the two Facebook groups that this interest goes beyond Peura's realization, as teachers of all subjects are interested in developing their own implementations based on the concept. As will be made clear by the discussion of previous research on the topic (section 3.1), the theoretical information available on the approach is limited. Moreover, the limited research on the topic has previously focused on other subjects, such as mathematics (Toivanen 2012, Saari 2015) and biology

(Mäenpää 2016), not on the teaching on languages. Therefore, taking into consideration the popularity of the approach as well as the small number of previous studies, there is a clear need for research on it. The present study attempts to bring some assistance to filling the gap in the particular topic of how the ideas of personalized learning may be implemented in EFL teaching.

As suggested above, in order to actualize Peura's personalized learning approach into language teaching, it is necessary to embark on the process of developing an implementation that takes into account the fundamental differences between learning science and languages. It is the main purpose of the present study to present some of the implementations that have been realized by practicing English teachers. For this purpose, one teacher's blog texts were analyzed, four English teachers were interviewed and two lessons of one of the interviewees were observed. The present study also attempts to pinpoint some of the advantages and disadvantages of the approach as identified by the participating teachers. In addition, it was of interest to define the teachers' reasons for implementing the approach. Finally, the present study was interested in determining how the participating teachers' experiments have been received by other affected parties, such as students, parents and colleagues.

The present thesis is organized quite conventionally. Section 2 is dedicated to the presentation of the theoretical framework relevant for the present study. Its first subsection, section 2.1, begins with a description of Peura's approach. This is followed by a presentation of research directly linked to Peura's approach, after which follows a portrayal of two similar approaches. After this, section 2.2 focuses on particular aspects of language learning research, such as autonomy and individual differences. Section 2.3, on the other hand, is dedicated to reviewing particular classroom practices that were deemed important by the collected data. To finish the theoretical review, section 2.4 considers the relevant issue of teacher-student relationship from the teachers' point-of-view. In section 3, the data and methods of the present study are presented to a certain detail. Moreover, section 4 is dedicated for the depiction of the findings of the present study. In this section, the topics that presented themselves from the data are also connected with the theoretical framework. Finally, the present study is concluded in section 5 with a concise reiteration of the main findings, as well as a short discussion of the study's limitations and prospects for future research.

2 PERSONALIZED LEARNING THROUGH THEORY

This section is divided into four parts: (1) personalized learning and similar approaches, (2) foreign language learning research, (3) classroom practices, and (4) teachers' view. The first subsection begins with a description of Peura's personalized approach and the previous research directly linked to that. After this two similar approaches are presented: mastery learning and personalized systems of instruction (PSI). From this the discussion in subsection 2.2 moves on to focus on issues that are particularly relevant for the implementation of personalized learning into foreign language learning (FLL): learner autonomy and individual differences. Furthermore, subsection 2.3 discusses specific classroom practices relevant for the present study, such as assessment and group work. Finally, subsection 2.4 concludes this section with a discussion of teacher-student relationship from the teachers' viewpoint.

2.1 Personalized learning and similar approaches

The theoretical framework begins with a description of the personalized approach developed and promoted by Peura. From there, the discussion progresses to briefly present the previous research directly linked to this approach. Finally, the section concludes with an examination of similar approaches, focusing mostly on the concept of mastery learning.

2.1.1 Peura's personalized learning approach

The purpose of this section is to describe Peura's approach in some detail. It is essential for the present study, as the studied implementations rely on his work. In Peura's approach, learning is regarded as an individual process, which varies between each student (Peura 2012a). Studying is organized through concepts so that, instead of attempting to teach everything to everyone, each learner constantly builds on their individual study path. This allows for an ideal situation, where each student's learning is personalized, but collaborative at the same time as students work together and are assisted by the teacher. It follows that all learners tread at their own pace, only moving on from one topic to the next after they have mastered the first one. The goal of Peura's personalized teaching approach is to create a learning environment, in which all students are provided with the opportunity to learn according to their own abilities

(Peura 2012c). According to Peura, this can be achieved, on the one hand, by giving the more advanced students the space to learn further than the original course schedule and, on the other hand, by providing the slower students with enough time and support to truly understand and learn the basic content of the course. The minimum expected final level of skills is, however, same for all students as it set by the National Core Curriculum for General Upper Secondary Intended for Young people (Peura 2012a, Lukion opetussuunnitelman perusteet (LOPS): 2015). The purpose of this is to improve learning results, motivation and the students' skills to study and learn in a social environment. These goals are met with the same economic and educational resources as with more traditional method. As stated by Peura, one of the goals is also to blur the line of secondary school and upper secondary school and to create a more flexible continuum of learning in those two institutions (Peura 2012a).

According to Peura, personalized learning can be either fully independent, fully collaborative (the collaborating parties being students, teachers, parents, etc.) or anything in between (Perna and Peura 2012). In principle, the teacher does not lecture about theory to the whole group, but the students either learn the theory on their own or as a group by utilizing peer support through student-to-student discussions. It is also common that the teacher teaches a theory to an individual or to a group of students who are at the same point in their learning process. However, the approach does not exclude any teaching method, including lecturing to the whole group. The underlining idea is that all teaching is implemented according to the students' needs. The classroom itself where each student is learning a different issue might seem chaotic but, according to Peura (2012a), in reality it is not. He views the situation as extremely natural and consistent, as all students are learning according to their own levels and progressing through a given order of issues. Peura continues that the traditional classroom, where all students are focused on the same topic and attempting to learn all the same things is the unnatural one. This is because the traditional approach consumes more mental energy and transfers it onto things that are of lesser importance. Thus, a controlled chaos can be seen as a more energy efficient approach. Peura stresses that creating a learning environment which is equal to all participants is not that difficult, but that teachers merely need to understand the transformation in their role in the classroom. Instead of being controlling dictators, teachers must become more like personal instructors to the students.

One area that is emphasized in by Peura (2013a) is assessment. Everhard (2015: 16) finds that there are three approaches to assessment: assessment *of* learning (summative), assessment *for* learning (formative) and assessment *as* learning (sustainable). As summative evaluation, i.e. the assessment *of* learning, remains to be a necessary part of the teacher's responsibilities in the Finnish school system, its purposes need to be filled also in the personalized learning approach. As there is, however, considerable leeway in the upper secondary curriculum (LOPS 2015: 142-143) in regards to how this assessment is executed, Peura has given up the traditional assessment method of a summative final exam (Peura 2013a). Grades assigned to the students for each course are based on self-assessment and individual assessment discussions between the teacher and the students, which can be viewed as sustainable assessment practices that promote assessment *as* learning (Everhard 2015). A final exam has not been excluded completely, but it is optional and serves a formative function of giving students' feedback about their abilities (i.e. assessment *for* learning). Peura briefly discusses the issue of trusting students with their own assessment (Peura 2013a). His experience has been that his trust is rewarded with honesty and hard work, which he demonstrates with illustrating graphs about the results of the numerical self-assessment. Graphs he has posted in his blog would seem to show that most students assess their work somewhere between grade 7 and grade 9, with zero percent claiming they would possess the excellent skills necessary to obtain grade 10.¹

In practice, the organization of courses is arranged so that before a course Peura creates a learning path which the students will then follow (Peura 2015). Peura (2014) uses worksheets which include exercise lists, of which some are mandatory and some optional, and a learning diary. The learning diary is stated to be used as a support tool for instruction, regulation of amount of work and long-term learning. In the diary, learners are expected to note the dates when they have been working, exercises completed at home and during lessons (which ones and how many), and the students' "vibes". In between topics there is a formative test, from which students need to get a score of 85 percent to proceed to the next item. When a personalized course begins, the

¹ The presented grades are on the Finnish secondary and upper secondary scale of assessment from 4 to 10 with 10 being the highest grade. For a description of learning goals for each course see LOPS 2015: 142-154.

learning path, objectives and assessment procedures are presented to the students. After this the students begin working, sitting in small groups of their choosing where they are encouraged to work together and ask their classmates for help.

The role of the teacher during the course is to help when needed, either teaching the students individually, in small groups or, if necessary, the whole group. In order to assist with the pressure of providing learners with lectures on theory, Peura uses educational videos which his students can watch whenever suitable for their learning process (Peura 2013b). In addition, technology is used to facilitate learning through online materials, and formative assessment through online tests (Peura 2014). On the website, there is a visual representation of instructions for teachers on how to implement the approach accordingly (Peura 2015).

Although this approach has been built from and for classroom contexts, support for its principles can be found from pedagogical research. Most essentially, Peura's approach is based on the *mastery learning theory* by Bloom (1971), of which he has published an evaluative summary on his webpage (Peura 2012b). He emphasizes that the studies by Bloom (1971, 1984) and Guskey (2007) have shown mastery learning to clearly improve learning results. For his own personalized approach, Peura acknowledges that he has combined the ideas of Bloom's theory with self-paced learning in order to produce a learning environment where slower learners are allowed more time to learn the core content of the subject matter and where faster learners are allowed to learn more advanced content. Peura (2015) also emphasizes that teachers implementing the approach should encourage autonomy and support mastery learning. This, according to him, can be assisted by the use of formative tests based on self-assessment. The concepts of mastery learning, self-paced learning and autonomy are discussed in more detail in section 2.

2.1.2 Previous research on personalized learning

Next, I will briefly present the studies that are in direct connection with Peura's approach. As the personalized learning approach developed and experimented in the Finnish context by Peura is still rather new, research on it is extremely narrow. Currently there are only one bachelor's thesis (Saari 2015) and two master's theses (Toivanen 2012, Mäenpää 2016) that are related to the subject. In addition, Marika

Toivola is currently writing a doctoral dissertation, a part of which consists of an analysis of Peura's approach. Her work is based on an analysis of the blog texts on maot.fi -website, as well as interviews and correspondence with Peura. Even though the dissertation is yet to be finished and published, an article has been released on the maot.fi -website that provides some insight on the results of her analysis (Toivola 2015). She found Peura's approach to be a complex combination of several concepts, including autonomy, self-paced learning, mastery learning and collaborative learning. Toivola (2015) saw that Peura's main goal is to make education a more humane process. Furthermore, in her master's thesis, Toivanen (2012) studied Peura's approach and described various perspectives she saw underlying Peura's model. In her view, the approach consisted of the following concepts: (1) small-group learning, (2) flipped learning, (3) blended learning, (4) mastery learning, and (5) self-paced learning.

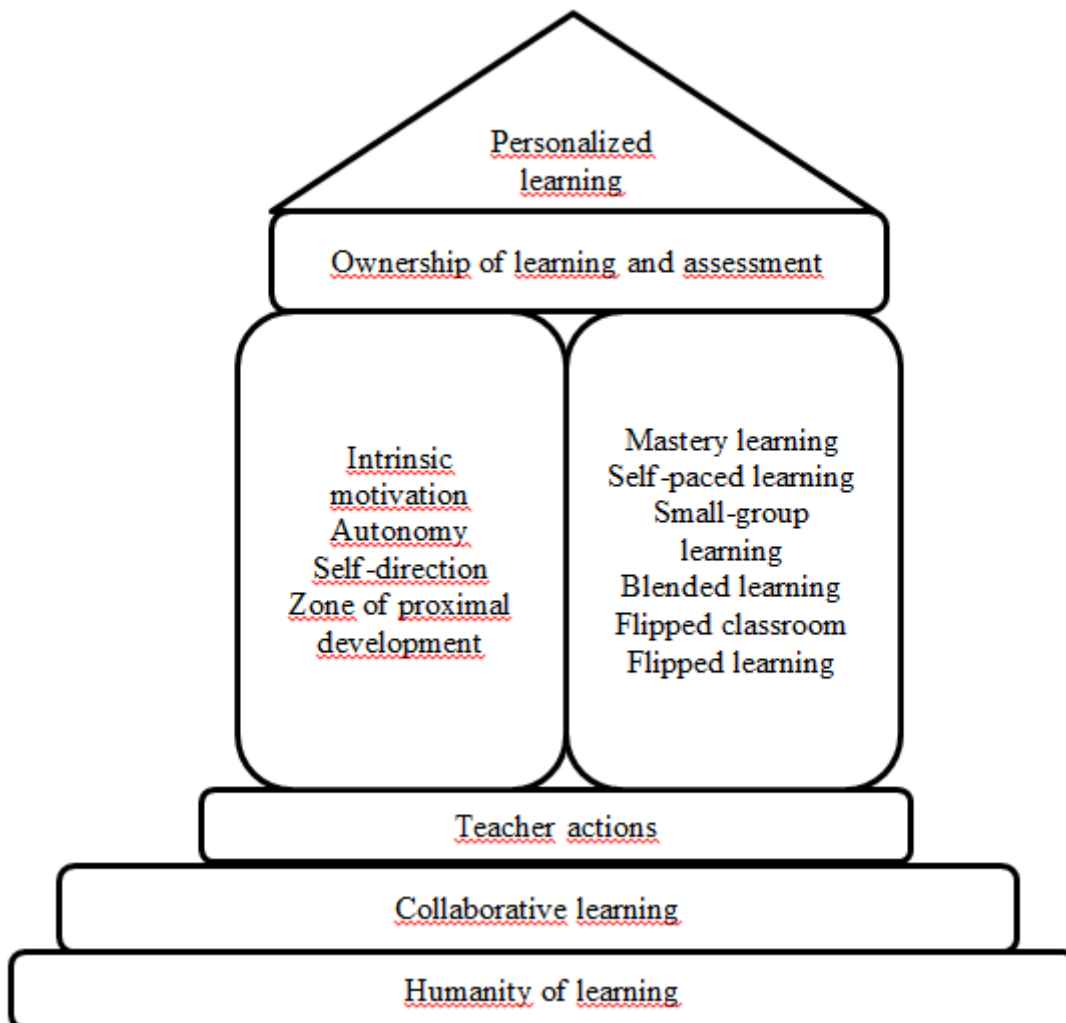


Figure 1 Mäenpää's conceptualization of Peura's personalized learning, adapted from Mäenpää 2016: 41.

Moreover, Saari (2015) focused her bachelor's thesis on an implementation of Peura's approach in 2nd grade mathematics teaching. In her theoretical background, which she based on the texts in maot.fi and the article by Toivola (2015), she emphasized mastery and self-paced learning, small-group learning, blended learning and flipped classroom, flipped learning and learner-centered assessment. Finally, most recently Mäenpää (2016) studied how Peura's approach can be applied to the teaching of biology in secondary and upper secondary school through a teaching experiment. The conceptualization of personalized learning in his study was based on the previous studies described above (Toivola 2015, Toivanen 2012, Saari 2015). Mäenpää (2016: 41) summarized the theories and concepts into figure 1 above, which should be read from bottom up.

Mäenpää (2016: 41) explains that the core is humanity of learning as the overarching concept for the entire approach. Next, there is collaborative learning that, according to Mäenpää, can be used to explain all the other categories. Moving on, the last element at the foundation is the teacher actions that enable the choice of teaching approaches that are presented in the right-hand column. These approaches are viewed crucial in developing a learning environment where zone of proximal development, self-direction, autonomy, intrinsic motivation can flourish. If all these preceding conditions are met, the learners will be able to take ownership of their learning and assessment, which will finally result in a personalized culture of learning and assessment. Mäenpää (2016: 41-42) emphasizes that personalized learning can be conceived either as a way of working, in which case it can be applied for example to study particular topics, or as culture of learning. If it is viewed as a culture of learning, as Mäenpää prefers to view it, personalized learning must be understood as a process with multiple phases, so that it might portray itself in a myriad of ways as teachers can choose to vary their emphasis of the underlying teaching approaches.

Even though the theoretical framework of the present study is not reliant on those of previous research presented above, considerable similarities are evident, and indeed inevitable. For instance, just as with Mäenpää (2016), Toivonen (2012) and Saari (2015), it was seen important to review research on issues such as mastery learning, self-paced learning and collaborative learning in the form of group work. However, as the present study does not focus directly on Peura's work but the implementations of his

personalized learning in EFL teaching, there are some elements in this framework that cannot be found from previous research.

2.1.3 Mastery learning and personalized system of instruction

In order to shed some light on the theoretical justifications of Peura's approach, this section presents two previously emerged approaches that share similarities with Peura's thinking: Bloom's mastery learning and Keller's personalized system of instruction (PSI). With traditional teaching, it seems to be accepted as a fact that grades attained by students need to settle on the normal curve, where a small percentage of learners receives high grades, a small percentage receives low grades, and most learners settle somewhere in the middle (Bloom 1968: 2). Mastery learning is a theory formed by Bloom (1968), which challenges this notion. It is based on an idea that most students (as high as over 90 percent) are able to master the content of education when provided with appropriate conditions to do so (Bloom 1968: 1). It is the fundamental task of teachers choosing to apply the method in their teaching to determine what they mean by mastery of the subject or matter they are teaching. In addition, they are expected to provide the learners with methods and materials that allow them to reach that mastery.

Bloom bases this theory on the Model of School Learning (Carroll 1963), where it is argued that from learner's language aptitude it is possible to predict the level achieved in a given time. In addition, and perhaps even more importantly, language aptitude was perceived to allow for the prediction of the time necessary for achieving a certain level (Carroll 1963, cited in Block 1971: 5-6). Additional factors affecting the degree of learning were perseverance, the quality of instruction, and the learner's ability to understand that instruction. From this, the inference was made that given enough time and assuming that time were spent learning (i.e. if the learner's perseverance was high), all learners could be expected to achieve a certain level of learning. If the quality of instruction and the learner's ability to understand the instruction were low, then the time necessary to achieve that predetermined level of learning would be longer, and if they were high, the time needed would be shorter. This was interpreted to mean that, unlike assumed before, aptitude was not an indicator of the level that can be achieved but rather the time necessary a certain degree of learning.

Bloom (1968: 3-8) identifies five variables for mastery learning which are mostly in line with the variables of Carroll's (1963) model: (1) aptitude for particular kinds of learning, (2) quality of instruction, (3) ability to understand instruction, (4) perseverance, and (5) time allowed for learning. Bloom recognizes that stating that learners of all aptitudes can acquire the same level of mastery can be viewed problematic, even with the condition that they are provided with appropriate solutions in all the other variables. He admits that numerous studies have provided convincing evidence that there are one to five percent of students at both extremes of ability distribution that have a particular ability or a disability for learning a certain subject. Nevertheless, he asserts that there are approximately 95 percent (the 90 percent of so called normal ability plus the 5 percent at the top) that are, under the right circumstances, able to attain a mastery level of learning. Instead of attempting to define quality of instruction in terms of group results, Bloom uses Carroll's views to argue, that the quality of instruction is reliant on its appropriateness on individual students. He claims that individually focused instruction, such as tutoring, would allow all learners to master a subject.

Moreover, in order to achieve successful learning, a student is required to understand the instruction. This is why, so as to ensure every learner's understanding of instruction, teachers should take advantage of various instruction methods, such as group study, tutorial help, different instruction materials such as alternative textbooks, and audiovisual illustrations and academic games (Bloom 1968: 5-6). According to Bloom (1989: 6-7), learner's perseverance, i.e. the amount of time they are willing to spend on learning, can be increased by a higher frequency of reward and evidence of learning. It might, however, be more beneficial to attempt to decrease the need for perseverance through understood, high-quality instruction rather than increasing perseverance. This is because the objective of education should be learning, not unusually high perseverance. Finally, in order to decrease the impact of inherent aptitude on learning results, students should be given enough time to master a task or a subject. Bloom emphasizes that in a system where the allocation time is not fitted for each student's needs, the time allowed for a task or a subject is practically always too short for some students and too long for some.

In so called traditional or conventional education all learners are provided with the same instruction in terms of amount and quality of instruction, and time allowed for learning (Bloom 1968: 3). This means that the correlation between aptitude and achievement is high. Assuming a normal distribution of aptitude, this leads to learning results setting on the normal curve. If, however, learners were provided with the type and quality of instruction and the amount of time appropriate for them, most students could be expected to achieve what Bloom calls a mastery of the subject. This was shown to be true by Anania (1981, 1983) and Burke (1984) as cited in Bloom (1984). They studied learning under conventional education, mastery learning and small-group tutoring and they found that, at the end of the trials, the learning of an average student under tutoring was clearly above that of an average student under traditional education (Anania 1981, 1983 and Burke 1984, cited in Bloom 1984: 4). They also found an average student under mastery learning to be still above the average of the conventional control group. Moreover, a level of achievement attained by 20 percent of students under traditional education was reached by 70 percent of the students under mastery learning, and 90 percent of the students under tutoring. This finding was visualized by Bloom (1984: 5) with figure 2 below.

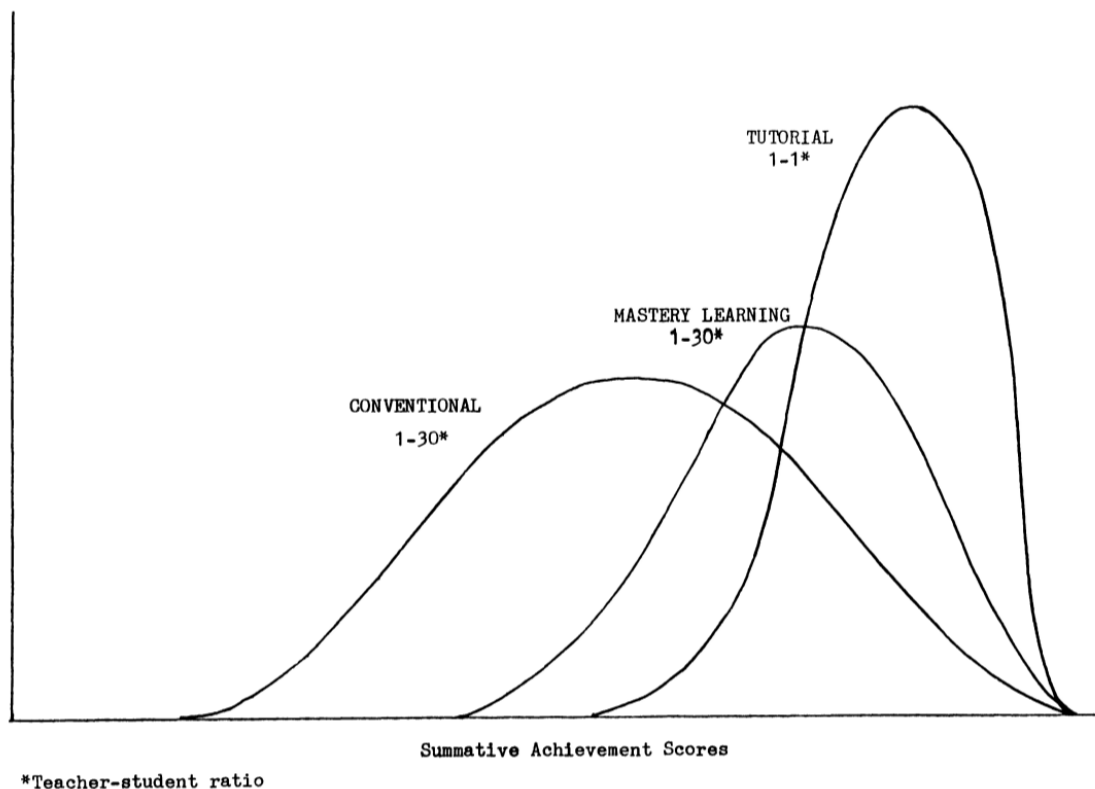


Figure 2 Distribution of achievement in conventional, mastery learning and tutorial instruction (Bloom 1984: 5).

This can be seen as evidence for Bloom's (1968) arguments on the principles of mastery learning, saying that most learners are able to master a subject when given appropriate resources. However, the fact that only 70 percent of students were able to reach the set level of mastery under mastery learning created a problem for the advocates of the theory as tutoring is not a realistic option for wide-range education. This "2 sigma problem" was addressed by Bloom (1984) in a research paper where he offers practical solutions to the problem of limited resources in classroom education. These solutions address for example the topics of improving students' understanding of instruction, improving instruction materials, enhancing out-of-school learning processes, and improving teaching in various ways including the teaching of so called higher mental processes such as problem-solving and analytical skills.

In the first stages of implementing mastery learning in practice, it is necessary for teachers to specify learning objectives of the particular course and the content of instruction (Bloom 1968: 8). Students should be made aware of these objectives and what is expected of them. It is also essential to consider what this means in terms of assessment procedures, both summative and formative. As in Peura's personalized approach, both of these forms play an essential part also in mastery learning (Airasian 1971: 77-79). As with conventional education, summative evaluation is used to provide information on how students have met the learning objectives set for the course, typically at the end of the course. Formative evaluation, on the other hand, has a greater role in mastery learning as provides the teacher and the learners information on how they are progressing. Moreover, formative assessment is also often used at the beginning of a course as a way of providing the teacher with information for individualizing the instruction. Furthermore, mastery learning is often executed through a division of the learning content into units which the learners are then expected to progress through in an organized manner (Bloom 1971: 57-58). Formative assessment is used to ensure that the learners have attained a necessary level of mastery set by the teacher.

Guskey (2007) offers a clear description of the mastery learning process based on the works by Bloom (1968, 1971). This basic structure can be implemented in various ways by teachers. After setting the objectives for the course and ensuring their transparency, the mastery learning process may begin. It begins with instruction of the first unit after which the learners' understanding is assessed. After this, the teacher gives feedback on

the student's performance. If the expected level of understanding is reached, the learner is provided with opportunity for enrichment activities to broaden their learning experience. The learners typically get to choose these activities themselves. After these activities have been completed, the progression is made to the next item. If, however, the learner has not reached the expected level of understanding, the teacher gives the learner individualized correctives to improve his understanding on those parts of the item the knowledge of which have been shown to be insufficient by the formative assessment. This allows the teacher to vary the instruction and differentiate it according to the learner's needs. After the learner has completed the correctives, the formative assessment procedure is repeated and, if successful, the learner moves on to the next item. The inclusion of elements of feedback, correctives and enrichment activities is considered to be vital for an effective application of mastery learning (Guskey 2007: 17).

Criticism against mastery learning raised by teachers has generally to do with problems of time consumption. They assume that if they were to follow the process of mastery learning, it would be impossible to cover as many items as with conventional methods. This might not in fact be true as after an adjustment period, students under mastery learning programs spend more time on effective learning, and thus are able to progress more rapidly (Arlin 1973, Fitzpatrick 1985). Teachers are also often concerned about the amount of work necessary to implement mastery learning. This issue was raised by Guskey (1989), who found that accomplished teachers already apply many of the elements in their teaching and that others felt that combining the process with their previous teaching strategies demanded relatively little effort. If it is possible to share the tasks of developing these procedures with colleagues, it further diminishes the necessary time and effort for the teachers.

Extensive research has proven well administered mastery learning strategies to have a positive influence on students' learning outcomes as well as factors separate from cognition and achievement (e.g. Anderson et al. 1992, Kulik et al. 1990, Walberg 1986, Whiting et al. 1995). For example, it has been shown that the implementation of mastery learning procedures can improve students' test scores and grades, but also their attitudes towards learning (Whiting et al. 1995). Furthermore, Anderson et al. (1992) found that these procedures can develop positive effects on students' academic achievement as well as their self-confidence. In addition, mastery learning has been

shown to diminish variation in learning results, thus assisting with closing the gap between different groups of learners (Walberg 1986). As concluded by Guskey (2007: 24) it is this multidimensionality of positive impact that seems to make mastery learning particularly effective in improving education.

Another theory closely linked to that of mastery learning is Personalized System of Instruction (PSI) by Keller (1968), sometimes referred to as the Keller Plan. Five basic elements have been identified in PSI: (1) self-paced learning, (2) set level of mastery necessary to acquire before progression between items, (3) mostly motivational use of lectures, (4) importance of written materials, (5) and use of proctors to enable frequent formative assessment (Keller 1968: 68). In their comparison between mastery learning and PSI, Kulik et al. (1990: 265-266) conclude that in both approaches the content of teaching is divided into smaller items, and formative assessment is in consistent use. They did, however, also find distinct differences in the two theories regarding three separate aspects. Firstly, in mastery learning the teacher controls the pace with which the learners progress through the content of a course, whereas in PSI the learners are allowed to progress through the content at their own pace. Secondly, in PSI the content is provided for the learners in a form that allows the students to review it independently and the lectures are merely for motivational purposes, whereas in mastery learning the lectures function as sources of information. Lastly, if a learner in PSI fails a formative test, they are expected to study the original material more closely and take tests until they are perceived to have reached a mastery of that particular material. In mastery learning, on the other hand, when a learner fails a formative test he is provided with individualized feedback and correctives. After studying and completing these, the student's learning is reassessed and they move on to the next item.

The most debated aspect of PSI, self-paced learning deserves some consideration at this point. Unsurprisingly, research would appear to be conflicted on the utility of self-paced learning. The benefit of self-paced learning is that it allows students to divide their resources so that they spend more of their time on the topics they find more difficult, and less on the ones that are they might already master or are easier (Eyre 2007: 317). However, the major problem with self-paced courses seems to be students' inability to complete the coursework within the set timeframe (Eppler and Ironsmith 2004, Eyre 2007). In order to resolve this issue, educators have at least three recourses they can take. Firstly, teachers can set deadlines for the course that students are expected to

follow (Eppler and Ironsmith 2004). Secondly, teachers can choose to let their students set the deadlines themselves to fit their own schedules (Roberts et al. 1988). Thirdly, teachers can reward those who finish their work ahead of schedule and punish those who are late in finishing their work (Reiser 1984). If attention is given to learner autonomy (discussed in more detail in section 2.2.1), the second option would seem the most appropriate. Finally, it must be noted that PSI and, as a result, self-paced learning has been mostly applied and studied in higher education. As a result of their meta-analysis of individualized systems of instruction² in secondary schools, Bangert et al. (1983) propose that social support through group-paced study might increase the positive effects of personalization. Their results suggest might be that the responsibility assigned by self-paced study is too demanding for secondary school students.

As mentioned in a previous section Peura' (2012b) views his approach to combine the ideas of mastery learning with self-paced learning. Indeed, Peura's personalized learning approach appears to be mostly in line with the logic of mastery learning as the elements of individualized feedback and instruction are considered to be key elements of the approach. However, it also shares similarities with PSI, for example in that it has a set required level of mastery before moving from one item to the next as in PSI. Still perhaps more importantly, self-paced learning is an aspect that is emphasized in Peura's approach much like in PSI. Nonetheless, the common underlying behind these three approaches would seem to be viewing learners as active, participating individuals with diverse learning needs.

2.2 Foreign language learning research

This section moves the focus from Peura's approach itself to how his approach relates to foreign language learning research. First, the concept of learner autonomy will be discussed with reference to FLL. Next, the concept of individual differences in language learning will be covered with a focus on language aptitude and language learning motivation.

² Bangert et al. (1983) refrain from using the term PSI as the study included systems that differed from PSI in some aspects.

2.2.1 Learner autonomy in foreign language learning

Learners taking ownership of their learning can be seen as the main goal for Peura's personalized learning approach (Mäenpää 2016: 41). In order for them to achieve this, learners need to develop their autonomy, which is seen as one of the main concepts for the present study and the focus of the present section. Benson (2010: 58) defines autonomy "as the capacity to take control of one's own leaning". The terms 'take charge of' and 'take responsibility for' have also been commonly used in literature with regards to the definition of autonomy (Holec 1979; Little 1991) and in the present study these terms are used interchangeably. The literature on autonomy is quite extensive and there are numerous definitions and models of autonomy which can be seen, not as mutually exclusive, but as different perspectives on the same issue (e.g. O'Rourke and Schwienhorst 2003, Oxford 2003, Ribé 2003, Smith 2003). It is clear that the research on autonomy is unable to provide a single definition and what it means for language learning education. The theories and viewpoints described in this section are by no means a comprehensive presentation of the field but aim to provide the reader with some understanding of what is meant by autonomy in FLL and how it relates to Peura's approach. This section will begin with Holec's (1979) original definition of learner autonomy from which the progression will be made to the definition and model by Dickinson (1994) with some reference to the viewpoints of Smith (2003) and Benson (2010). Finally the section is concluded with a short discussion of why encouraging learner autonomy can be beneficial for language learning.

As implied above, Holec (1979) was the first to define autonomy in the context of language learning, in which he used Schwartz's (1973) general definition of autonomy as a basis. He saw autonomy as the "ability to take charge of one's own learning" (Holec, 1979: 3). According to him, autonomy in language learning is something that needs to be attained, either through what he calls natural means or through conscious practice. He emphasizes that autonomy is a capacity or an ability rather than a type of behavior. An autonomous learner is capable of making decisions about his learning objectives, contents and progression, learning methods and techniques, as well as monitoring the learning process and evaluating its results. A clear distinction is made here between self-directed learning with support and unorganized self-directed learning, as well as between self-directed learning and distance or programmed teaching. Holec (1979: 4-5) refers to the learning process of an autonomous learner as self-directed

learning, which can take place either in a classroom setting with the support of a teacher, or in an unorganized, independent setting with no external support. It is important to note here that, as stated by Holec (*ibid.*), an autonomous learner does not necessarily choose to execute his capacity for self-directed learning at all times, and the degree to which learning is self-directed can vary. He claims there to be a distinct difference between self-directed learning and distance learning, which is that in the latter the learner is typically not provided with the opportunity to make decisions about his learning objectives or the contents, for example. In fact, in the case of distance learning, most often the learner is only given the chance to make decisions about the practical organization of his learning, including factors such as time, place and rhythm. Holec (1979: 9) stresses that for an autonomous learner to execute his ability to make decisions about his learning, he needs to be given the opportunity to do so.

Interestingly, Holec (1979: 7-8) discusses the relationship between self-directed and individualized teaching. He considers autonomy and individualized teaching to be similar in regards to the aspect that they both bear in mind the idea that all learners are different. Yet, according to him, autonomy and individualized teaching are different in all other aspects. Individualized teaching is viewed as a teaching method, which, in spite of taking into account individual differences and preferences, produces an environment where the learner is still reliant of the teacher. As was concluded in the very beginning of section 1, the personalized approach promoted by Peura is not the same as individualized learning.

Let us consider how the personalized approach reflects upon the issues of autonomy. It can be argued that in Peura's approach, the learner has some choice in all the aspects of learning defined above. Firstly, with the restriction of attaining the minimum expected final level of skills set by the curriculum (LOPS 2015), students are allowed to set their objectives for learning where they feel is appropriate for them. This becomes clear from the fact that more advanced learners are allowed to progress even further than the course objectives would imply and that slower learners are given enough time to learn the basic constructs properly. Secondly, the students are also allowed to choose the appropriate content to some extent, as Peura's (2014) learning paths include both mandatory and optional exercises. Therefore, learners can choose to focus more on the content that is new or difficult for them. However, the organization of teaching into courses of specific topics as set by the Finnish upper secondary school curriculum (LOPS: 2015) limits this

choice in some ways. Thirdly, the selection of learning techniques is completely in the hands of the student, with the only constraints being those set by the construction of the subject studied. Fourthly, as with the selection of learning techniques, the time and pace of learning is not set by the teacher, but learners are given the liberty to choose when and at what pace to study (Perna and Peura 2012). The classes take place at a time specified in the curriculum, but the students are not limited to the classroom and they have the authority to decide how they want to study. This aspect is facilitated by Peura's use of educational videos, which students can watch whenever necessary (Peura 2013b). Lastly, as Peura's assessment is almost fully based on the self-assessment of the students, the last aspect provides no issue either (Peura 2013a). It can, therefore, be concluded that issues of individualized teaching not allowing self-direction in learning does not apply to the application of personalized learning by Peura.

Similarly to Holec (1979), Dickinson (1994) views autonomy as something other than a method of learning. He sees it as an attitude to learning and a more general goal of education. According to him (Dickinson, 1994: 4-5), autonomous learners are capable of taking responsibility for their own learning, optimally in all areas of decision making. This implies that learners need to be given the opportunity to be involved in the decision making process. Dickinson does, however, acknowledge that autonomy on its own is not an insurance of effective learning. He believes that autonomy needs to be informed in such a way that learners' are able to make informed decisions about their language learning. Developing this ability, of course, takes time and practice, and it needs to be integrated into language teaching. In order to be effective, autonomy requires learners to be actively and independently involved in their learning of the target language (Dickinson 1994: 6-7). Based on a wide selection of studies in this area, he identifies five skills that informed autonomous learners possess: (1) recognizing teacher's objectives, (2) formulating their own objectives, (3) selecting and implementing appropriate learning strategies, (4) monitoring and evaluating their use of those strategies, (5) and monitoring their own learning (e.g. Ellis and Sinclair 1989, Dickinson 1987, Wang and Peeverly 1986). The similarity between these skills and those portrayed by Holec (1979) is clear, but it seems that the focus in this definition of skills is in the context of a classroom.

In order to achieve the educational goal of producing learners who are capable of making decisions about their learning and thus eventually capable of learning on their

own, it is unavoidably necessary to practice these decision making, monitoring and evaluating skills (Dickinson 1994: 3). As pointed out above, becoming an autonomous learner does not happen without a conscious effort in part of the language learner with the support of the teacher. Dickinson (1994: 7-8) suggests four ways in which a language educator can aid learners' with this process. Firstly, it is crucial that teachers make it known to their students' that independency in language learning is encouraged. Secondly, learners' need to be convinced that they are capable of learning independently, which can be facilitated through positive experiences. Thirdly, learners' should be given opportunities to make decisions about their learning in a controlled, gradually increasing manner. This means that the practice should begin with smaller tasks and slowly progress to fuller autonomy. Fourthly and lastly, effective learning strategies need to be in place so that autonomous learning can become possible. Therefore students' need to be made aware of different strategies and assisted in finding ones that suit them and their varying learning purposes. Dickinson (1994: 12) raises the important point which was raised by Peura (2012a) as well that autonomy should not be seen as a threat to the role of teachers. It does not make the necessity of a teacher obsolete but it merely modifies the role as the responsibility for learning becomes shared between learners and teachers.

A distinction has been made between 'weak' autonomy and 'strong' autonomy (Smith 2003: 130-131). Essentially the difference between these is that in the weak version, there is an assumption that students lack autonomy and they be trained in it. In the weak form, autonomy is also perceived as a goal for education, exactly as defined by Dickinson (1994: 5). In the strong version, students are regarded as already possessing the capacity for autonomy to varying degrees. Benson (2010: 64) points out that even though both versions are recognized as legitimate by most researchers, there is a tendency to regard the stronger versions as more legitimate. The criticism of the weaker form focuses generally on the issue that with the gradual progression of autonomy, the more advanced levels of autonomy are impossible to reach. As a result, the weaker forms may in fact prevent autonomy rather than encourage it as is concluded by Benson (2010: 64)

In addition to attempting to define autonomy in language learning, it is essential to take a critical look at the construct and discuss why autonomy can be considered beneficial for learners. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, the goal of education must be to

create learners who are able to learn without the assistance of a teacher. As put by Bruner already in 1966 “Instruction is a provisional state that has as its objective to make the learner or problem solver self-sufficient” (Bruner 1966: 53). Creating self-sufficient learners is the main goal of developing learner autonomy as stated above. Therefore, it is possible to infer that autonomy would be beneficial in fulfilling this goal. Secondly, one of the goals of primary and secondary education as set by the Finnish National Board of Education (Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteet (POPS) 2014: 17, LOPS 2015: 4) is to encourage lifelong learning. This means that not only should the end-result of the educational path be individuals who are capable of independent learning, they should also possess the desire to do so. It has been shown that in a classroom where perceived autonomy is high, students are more interested and learning-goal oriented, and they exhibit higher levels of self-efficacy, which are all determinants that have been demonstrated to promote lifelong learning (Lüftenegger et al. 2012: 33-34). Thirdly, one of the variables that have been proven to strongly affect the efficacy of language learning is motivation (see section 2.2.2 for further information). Research on motivation has shown that taking responsibility for and control of one’s learning, as well as having one’s learning results (be they strong or weak) be dependent on one’s own actions and strategies instead of exterior factors have a great impact on accomplishing successful learning and on increasing motivation (Dickinson 1995: 173-174).

2.2.2 Individual differences in foreign language learning

The underlying idea behind Peura’s personalized approach is that learners are all individuals and therefore the needs they have for the teacher and the learning process vary as well (Peura 2012a). This section focuses on how this individualistic view has been adopted by foreign language learning (FLL) research. In the context, the notion of learner diversity has been accepted for some decades, as individual differences (IDs) in second and foreign language learning have been the focus of several studies (see e.g. Skehan 1989, Robinson 2002, Dörnyei 2005, Ellis 2008). Dörnyei (2005: 4) defines ID’s as “dimensions of enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree.” Lists of what these characteristics are have varied to a certain extent according to different researchers. Yet, there are some factors that are consistently present in these lists (for a clearly structured presentation of these see Ellis 2008: 643-645), such as language aptitude, motivation and anxiety.

Skehan (1989) and Dörnyei (2005) have both included language learning strategies as important factors in ID, whereas Robinson (2002) has focused more on the impact of intelligence, working memory and age. Skehan (*ibid.*) also considered other cognitive and affective factors, such as extroversion or introversion, risk-taking, intelligence and field independence to be factors of ID. As for Dörnyei (*ibid.*), personality, learning and cognitive styles as well as creativity, willingness to communicate, self-esteem and learner beliefs are present in his list of ID factors. As the research on IDs is so extensive, it will not be covered in the present study to its full extent. This section will focus on the two core IDs of language aptitude and language learning motivation, as these are generally accepted as the most fundamental ones (Dörnyei 2005: 6), as well as being of the highest relevance for the present study.

Even though aptitude, ability and intelligence are often used interchangeably, it is important to be clear of what is meant by these terms in the context of SLL. Language aptitude is typically regarded as a particular ability to learn a second language, which consists of separate abilities such as auditory ability, linguistic ability and memory ability (Ellis 2008: 652). In this sense, language aptitude is, in fact, the same as the ability to learn a new language. Intelligence, however, is typically used to refer to individual's cognitive abilities in a broader sense, not to abilities in a specific performance area (Dörnyei 2005: 32). According to Dörnyei (2005: 45-47), there is a connection between general intelligence and language aptitude as the two share attributes, yet they might not be in full congruence as they are both complex constructs.

In its early days, the study of language aptitude was focused on aptitude tests, such as Carroll and Sapon's Modern Language Aptitude Test (1959) and the Pimsleur Language Aptitude Battery (Pimsleur 1966). The purpose of these tests was to identify people who would most likely benefit from instruction. Later on, Wesche (1981) was the first to propose that aptitude tests could be used for educational purposes in that instruction could be adapted to fit the students' aptitude. According to the findings of his study, when the instruction provided for learners was differentiated to match their aptitude, they reported overall satisfaction with the method of teaching, as well as feeling more comfortable during the lessons. Later research has supported this view. For example, Skehan (1989) attested that a differentiated view of aptitude testing could be utilized to provide more effective teaching. He asserted that this could be succeeded if aptitude tests were focused on discovering the individual's strengths and weaknesses in the

separate auditory, linguistic and memory abilities. More contemporarily, SLA research on language aptitude has continued in the direction proposed by Wesche and Skehan, focusing on the different cognitive abilities underpinning aptitude such as working memory (Dörnyei 2005: 50-64). For instance Robinson (2001) presented a dynamic conceptualization of aptitude through a framework which takes into consideration its situational dependence and the combined impact of its different underpinning abilities. He proposed that different tasks demand the processing of different cognitive abilities, which means that learners with different abilities would benefit from different tasks (Robinson 2001: 386). This information could be used to benefit formal language learning environments where, if the group is not particularly selected for their specific abilities, there is inevitable variation in this respect.

Furthermore, the stability of language aptitude is an important issue to be discussed. According to Ellis (2008: 658-659), research on this is not in complete agreement. Traditionally language aptitude, much like intelligence, has been considered a trait that is practically stable throughout a person's life (see e.g. Kiss and Nikolov 2005, Harley and Hart 1997). There is, however, some evidence that a compositional view of language aptitude combined with purposeful training may improve certain ability components of aptitude as proposed by Sparks et al. (1995), or at the very least persistent training in the different components of aptitude can improve proficiency even if aptitude itself remains unaffected (Robinson 2001, Skehan 1998). Moreover, in section 2.1.3 which presented Bloom's theory of mastery learning (Bloom 1968, 1971), the topic of aptitude was briefly touched upon. It was suggested that Bloom's theory was based on Carroll's Model of School Learning (1963), which stated that language aptitude is in fact not a determinant of the level of language that can be attained, but of the time necessary to attain a certain level. This notion that language aptitude does not determine the depth of learning but rather its rate is, according to Dörnyei (2005: 43), generally accepted in the field of SLL research.

Moving on to the issue of language learning motivation, it is important to remark that the number of studies on motivation in SLL research is immeasurable. As put forward by Ellis (2008: 677) "No single individual difference factor in language learning has received as much attention as motivation." Therefore, the present study contents itself to focus on the issues related to motivation most relevant for its purposes. However, an attempt at a concise definition of motivation is in order. In an introduction to his manual

for motivational strategies, Dörnyei (2001: 1-2) states that there is, in fact, no such thing as motivation. More precisely, the concept of motivation is abstract in its attempt to explain people's behavior, whereas the term itself is an umbrella term that is used to refer to motives that range from financial incentives to idealistic beliefs. The difficulty, when discussing motivation, is therefore the vagueness of the term. As Dörnyei suggests, it is certainly easy to imagine what is meant by a motivated student (eager to learn, committed to doing the work, etc.) and an unmotivated student (uninterested, lazy, etc.), but actually defining of what these terms consist is much more complex. Attempting a more tangible view, Williams and Burden (1997: 120) have described motivation as "a state of cognitive and emotional arousal, which leads to a conscious decision to act, and which gives rise to a period of sustained intellectual and/or physical effort in order to attain previously set goal (or goals)". This has been generally accepted as one of the few elaborate definitions of motivation, as it combines rather well both its static and process-oriented natures. Motivation has consistently been found to be a core ID factor that has a significant impact on the success or failure of language learning. It is also especially important because of the time and effort-consuming nature of language learning, which might at times seem tedious (Dörnyei 2005: 65).

There are two points of view on motivation that are at the heart of most discussion on motivation: orientation, and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Originally, Gardner and Lambert (1972) argued that motivation originated to attain either instrumental or integrative goals. Instrumental orientation refers to a scenario where learning a language is a means to reach another goal, for example learning German to improve employment opportunities in companies that do a lot of business with Germans. As for learners with integrative orientation, the focus is on integrating themselves in the social and cultural tissue of the target language group. Brown (2007a: 171) points out that high or low motivational intensity can be found within either orientation. Later on research has immersed itself deeper into the context of orientations i.e. reasons for language learning, adding three most common reasons to the list: knowledge, travel and friendship (Ortega 2009: 173). Moreover, another perspective that has been present in the discussion on motivation is that of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Extrinsic motivation is originated by the promise of reward outside learners themselves, for example the anticipation of a reward of some type or, on the other hand, the fear of punishment (Brown 2007a: 172). Intrinsically motivated learners find their rewards from completing activities and learning itself. The reward most important for intrinsically motivated

learners comes from within, from for example the feeling of competence and self-determination (Deci 1975: 23).

Research seems to be in agreement on that intrinsic motivation is preferred over extrinsic motivation, most prominently as it has been shown to produce higher achievement (e.g. Dörnyei 2001, Vansteenkiste et al. 2006). Even though responsibility for learner motivation cannot be laid entirely on the shoulders of teachers, teachers who are at all concerned about the long-term development of their students will attempt to take motivation into consideration in their teaching (Dörnyei 2001: 27). In order to provide teachers with information on increasing learners' intrinsic motivation can be achieved, Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) completed an empirical study, the results of which were collected to create "ten commandments for motivating language learners" presented in figure 3 below. It can be argued that Peura's personalized approach potentially provides direct and concrete solutions to promoting learner autonomy, personalizing the learning process, and increasing learners' goal-orientedness, all found to have a positive impact on learners' intrinsic motivation.

1. Set a personal example with your own behaviour.
2. Create a pleasant, relaxed atmosphere in the classroom
3. Present the tasks properly.
4. Develop a good relationship with the learners.
5. Increase the learners' linguistic self-confidence.
6. Make the language classes interesting.
7. Promote learner autonomy.
8. Personalize the learning process.
9. Increase the learners' goal-orientedness.
10. Familiarize learners with the target language culture.

Figure 2 Ten commandments for motivating language learners, adapted from Dörnyei and Csizér (1998: 215).

In sum, the research on language aptitude presented above support some type of individualization of the language learning process. When combined with the arguments relating to language learning motivation, research would seem to suggest that teacher-centered individualization of language learning is not sufficient in responding to the needs of diverse learners. As a consequence, implementing Peura's approach might

assist teachers in their task of helping their student be and become motivated in their task of language learning. It is essential to remark, however, that even though feelings of autonomy and mastery have been shown to increase intrinsic motivation, motivation also necessary in order for learners to practice their autonomy (Little 2004 as cited in Hall 2011: 156-157). Hence, motivation and autonomy are mutually interdependent. In conclusion, as argued by Finkbeiner (2008: 138) “An ‘all-inclusive’ package is not an option in language teaching and learning once we take personal and cultural diversity into account. There is neither one single method nor one theory that can predict students’ learning success in a comprehensive way and still do justice to the miscellany of learners in our classrooms or other learning situations.” Thus, without attempting to provide a simple one-size-fits-all method, the approach developed by Peura has potential to turn teachers’ attention to the array of individuals in their classroom and give them some tools to cherish and build on that diversity.

2.3 Classroom practices

This section concerns itself with classroom practices that are relevant to the implementations of Peura’s approach studied in the present thesis. The reviewed procedures have to do with assessment, group work, technology and homework. These practices were examined from the point of view of the present study, thus often linking them with Peura’s practices and the essential concept of autonomy.

2.3.1 Assessment and autonomy

This first subsection focuses on how the assessment procedures of Peura’s personalized learning relate to the concept of autonomy. The transformation of assessment procedures from assessment *of* learning, i.e. summative assessment, to assessment *for* learning i.e. formative assessment, or even to assessment *as* learning i.e. sustainable assessment (Everhard 2015:16) can be argued to be one of the main elements in Peura’s approach to personalized learning. Therefore, it is essential to briefly review this aspect of teaching. According to Mäenpää’s conceptualization (2016: 41), the ultimate goal in Peura’s personalization of learning is that students take ownership of not only their learning, but also their assessment. As presented in section 2.3.1, Everhard (2015) has looked at assessment from the point of view of autonomy. She points out that already in Holec’s (1979) original definition autonomy encompasses the self-monitoring and

evaluation of learning. Therefore, if learners are to become truly autonomous, they need to be provided the opportunity to practice sustainable, process-oriented self- and peer-assessment (Everhard 2015). Oscarson (1997: 184) suggests that learners' progress goes through three distinct stages when moving from external assessment to self-assessment: (1) dependent stage, (2) cooperative stage, and (3) independent stage. In the dependent stage learners are fully dependent on external assessment, whereas in the cooperative stage they rely on the collaborative effect of self- and external assessment. In the final, independent stage learners are able to base their learning fully on self-assessment.

The National Core Curriculum (2014: 46-61) discusses the topic of assessment quite extensively. Assessment culture in secondary schools, according to the curriculum (POPS 2014: 46) is supposed to be diverse, encouraging, promotive of learner participation, interactive and transparent. Assessment also needs to be fair and ethical. Even though the curriculum emphasizes the nature of assessment for learning and the role of self-assessment (POPS 2014: 46), it still requires numerical assessment of skills, in secondary school at the latest (POPS 2014: 51). Thus the core curriculum encourages the use of self-assessment, but requires the use other means of assessment as well. Therefore, even if the goal were to have learners be able to practice autonomy also with regard to assessment, in reality teachers may still opt to use traditional assessment procedures, for example exams, to ensure fair and ethical numerical summative assessment. As mentioned in a previous section, Holec (1979: 9) stresses that for an autonomous learner to execute his ability to make decisions about his learning, he needs to be given the opportunity to do so. As a result, assessment procedures may easily disallow learners to progress to the independent stage identified by Oscarson (1997). Therefore it can be argued that the core curriculum might in some way limit learner autonomy in terms of assessment.

2.3.2 Technology, language learning and autonomy

In this section, the discussion will focus on the use of technology and how it relates to language learning and autonomy. As stated in section 2.1, the studied approach makes use of technology at least through the use of educational videos, online materials and online tests (Peura 2013b, Peura 2014). As technology plays a rather significant role in this approach, it was viewed necessary to give it some attention as well. Due to the immense developments in computer software and hardware in recent years, the use of

technology in language education as well as education in general is common a common trend. In the new core curriculum, it is stated that information and communication technology is an essential part of providing diverse learning environments for students (POPS 2014: 28). According to the curriculum, technology is supposed to be used to enforce student participation, to learn collaboration and to support students' personal learning paths. It can be argued that Peura's use of technology to facilitate the personalized approach is perfectly in line with the core curriculum. The use of technology to facilitate or mediate language learning is often referred to as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), which is the term that will be used here as well. Let us consider how CALL relates to learner autonomy, which again is considered to be a central concept in Peura's personalized learning.

Reinders and Hubbard (2012: 359) assert that the increased interest in the role of learners in their learning process has turned the attention of educators to the potential of technology. This, of course, is a positive development for the sake of outside-the-classroom as technology can make independent learning much easier. Yet, this has some important implications for formal language education as well. As discussed in the previous section (section 2.2.1), it is and must be the objective of education to assist learners in ultimately becoming self-sufficient in their learning, so that they are not only willing but able to continue their path of learning after leaving formal education. Therefore, the most prominent implication, at least for the purposes of the present study, of the increased emphasis on CALL on formal language education is its connection with developing learner autonomy. According to Reinders and Hubbard (2012: 359-360), reality has proven early estimates of the positive effect of CALL automatically increasing learner autonomy to be fairly optimistic. However, with the conscious help of teachers, learner autonomy can benefit from the affordances of technology. Reinders and Hubbard (2012: 362) argue that the potential benefits of CALL are either organizational or pedagogical. The potential organizational advantages relate to the following issues: (1) access to materials, (2) storage and retrieval of materials and learning records, (3) sharing and recycling of materials, and (4) cost efficiency. As for the pedagogical advantages, they are connected with the following areas: (1) authenticity, (2) interaction, (3) situated learning, (4) multimedia, (5) new types of activities, (6) non-linearity, (7) feedback, (8) monitoring and recording of learning behavior and process, (9) control, and (10) learner empowerment.

However, what Reinders and Hubbard (2012) emphasize is that these potential benefits are not automatic and come with constraints. For instance they argue that technology offers the possibility for new types of activities that would be difficult to reproduce without it. However, these activities need to have a valid pedagogical foundation in order to be beneficial. In addition, the usefulness of these activities is limited if learners are not aware of them or able to find them on their own (Reinders and Hubbard 2012: 369-370). Another example could be that of access, for which CALL is often praised. In order for learners to appropriately take advantage of the unconstrained access to materials prompted by CALL, they need to have the knowledge of how to use those materials (Reinders and Hubbard 2012: 366-367). Reinders and Hubbard (2012: 371-373) suggest four paths that can be employed to overcome these types of constraints: training learners in the efficient use of technology, providing materials in a more accessible form for learners of different levels, building communities of practice through social networking sites, and technological initiatives targeted for the promotion of autonomy. As the last three paths are focused for larger sense, it would seem logical for the practitioners of personalized learning the first path to focus on the first path in their attempt to increase their students' autonomy. Thus, it can be concluded that the use of technology can be beneficial for autonomy and therefore for the studied approach. However, for these benefits to be actualized, its constraints need to be taken into consideration in an appropriate manner.

2.3.3 Group work and zone of proximal development

Next, the issue under consideration is the practice of using group work in EFL classrooms. Even though the goal in personalized learning is for learners to attain a level of autonomy where they are able to take responsibility, and finally ownership, of their own learning, it does not mean that learning has to take place in isolation. According to Peura, personalized learning can be either fully independent, fully collaborative (the collaborating members being students, teachers, parents, etc.) or anything in between (Perna and Peura 2012). In practice, Peura's students are encouraged, though not forced, to utilize peer support through student-to-student discussions and collaboration. Group work has been used in L2 classrooms for quite some time and it is supported by both pedagogical and L2 acquisition research. Already in 1985, Long and Porter (1985) found that in a L2 classroom, effective use of group work can have a positive influence on (1) quantity of practice, (2) variety of practice,

(3) accuracy of student production, (4) correction, (5) negotiation, and (6) tasks. Thus, in a language learning context using collaboration through group work might not be such a big change. What is different between the traditional use of group work and Peura's approach is that group work is often used in a way where it is enforced by the teacher. In Peura's view, however, learners are allowed to find a balance that is the most appropriate for their learning (Perna and Peura 2012).

A theory that is often connected with Peura's personalized learning (e.g. Mäenpää 2016, Toivola 2015, Toivanen 2012) is Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). According to him, ZPD refers to "*the distance between the actual development level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers*" (Vygotsky 1978: 86, original emphasis). To put it simply, the idea is that with the aid of a teacher or higher achieving peers, a learner is able to achieve a level of development they would not reach (at least as quickly) on their own. This development, however, necessitates that learning is occurring on this particular zone, thus making tasks and aid that are either too easy or too difficult be ineffective for learning (Haapasalo 2012: 88). In the personalized learning approach, the goal is to have the learners working at their own particular zone of development (Mäenpää 2016: 29). However, in order to benefit from being at this zone, learners need scaffolding (Haapasalo 2012: 89) that assists them in reaching the next level of development. This is relevant to the issue of group work in that when working on their own learning in a group-setting, students are able to make use of peer collaboration. Thus the opportunity for scaffolding is multiplied in learner-centered group work when compared to teacher-led practices.

There are some practical issues to group work that might be beneficial to address, most notably the size and formation of groups, and their heterogeneity. The term group work generally refers to small-group work where there two to six members (Brown 2007b: 224). Vuorinen (2001: 97-99) emphasizes that group size should be appropriated to its purpose. He suggests that groups of two to three are appropriate for example for gathering information, whereas groups of four to six are good for, for example, problem-solving. Vuorinen (2001: 101-102) also discusses the formation of groups with regards to their solidity. He points out that people tend to feel the most comfortable in groups when they have had some say in their formation. Yet, letting students completely

choose their own groups might not be practical, as the expectations of group members might be conflicted. Moreover, self-chosen groups can cause some students to feel left out, which of course is undesirable. However, these decisions of group size and formulation should be made to fit the needs and purposes of the group (Vuorinen 2001). Finally, the heterogeneity of learners' skill levels is an issue to be addressed by teachers using group work. Although heterogeneous groups are often assumed superior to homogeneous groups (Wing-yi Cheng et al. 2008: 206-207), there are arguments that can be provided for both practices. The most prominent argument for heterogeneous groups is that they are beneficial for high and low achievers because the quantity and quality of interaction is higher (e.g. Webb 1982, Slavin 1991). However, it has been argued that heterogeneous grouping only benefits low achieving students, whereas high achievers would benefit more from homogeneous groups (e.g. Robinson 1990, Fuchs et al. 1998). As there is no clear resolution provided by research, it can be concluded that it is in the hands of the practicing teacher to find a solution that fits the needs and purposes of the particular students.

In sum, the use of group work can be highly beneficial for language learning for pedagogical as well as SLL reasons. It can be argued that group work facilitates learner scaffolding, which is necessary for learners to reach their level of potential development. Thus, using learner collaboration as a part of personalized learning is highly encouraged also when applying the approach to EFL teaching. How these groups are constructed, however, should take into consideration the group and its particular needs. In some scenarios the use of self-constructed skill-wise homogeneous groups might be the most beneficial, whereas in others the formation of groups should be done by the teacher, and their members should be heterogeneous in their skill levels.

2.3.4 Homework

The final classroom procedure covered in the present section is the use and necessity of homework in SLL. As Peura emphasizes the liberty of learners to determine when and how they study (Perna and Peura 2012), it appears that the assignment of homework in his approach is left to the hands of students. In the learning diary used by Peura's students he does, however, ask them to mark down the exercises they have done at home (Peura 2014). From this it can be inferred that he does encourage his students to

return to the material at home. In addition, he states that the educational videos he uses can be used for learning at home (Peura 2013b).

Homework can generally be defined as work that teachers assign to their student that is designed to be done outside school hours (Cooper 2007: 4) The eight variables of homework as presented in a model by Cooper (2007: 4-8) include (1) amount of work, (2) its difficulty, (3) its purpose, (4) the skill area used, (5) degree of individualization, (6) degree of student choice, (7) completion deadlines, and (8) social context. The amount of homework can be viewed from two perspectives: how often homework is assigned and how much time is required per assignment. It has been discovered that consistent assignment of homework is more effective than when they are assigned occasionally (Paschal et al. 1984). The difficulty of assignments may also vary in that some are meant to be easier and others more challenging. The same assignment can have parts that vary in difficulty, and obviously its difficulty may vary between different learners. Homework can be designed for instructional or non-instructional purposes. Instructional purposes often find themselves to be either to practice or review already presented material, to prepare learners for future materials, to extend attained skills to new situations, or to integrate several attained skills to produce a single product. Non-instructional purposes may involve issues such as facilitating communication between students and their parents, informing parents about what is taking place at school, or punishing students. Naturally different types of tasks involve the use of different skill areas. Still, customarily some form of written product has been a requirement to prove that the homework has been completed. Perhaps here the recent developments in technology can aid teachers in varying the task types used as homework.

Moreover, according to Cooper's model (2007) teachers may want to individualize the assignments given to fit the learners' needs, either for individuals or groups of learners. They may also give the learners' choice in whether or not to do an assignment (compulsory vs. voluntary) or give a selection of tasks so that the learners' themselves can decide which tasks are most appropriate for them. This type of learner choice in homework would seem appropriate for the personalized learning approach, again providing learners with the opportunity to practice autonomy. What is more, homework can be either short-term, which are expected to be completed before the next lesson, or long-term, which are given a longer time for completion. Finally, the social contexts of

homework assignments may vary as homework can be expected to be completed alone, with assistance of for example a parent or a friend, or in a group (Cooper 2007: 8).

From the extensive use of homework, it is easy to infer that teachers see homework as an essential part of successful learning in foreign language education. However, the effectiveness and necessity of homework might not be as clear as its frequent use would lead us to believe. Cooper (2007: 8-12) has identified both positive and negative effects that may result from assigning and doing homework. On the one hand, he sees positive effects of homework that can be divided into four categories: a. immediate academic effects, b. long-term academic effects, c. non-academic effects and d. parental involvement effects. Immediate effects can be, for example, better retention of information and increased understanding whereas long-term academic effects include factors such as better attitude towards school or improved study habits. The positive effects can, according to Cooper (ibid.), reach beyond academic scenarios as well. When doing homework students practice skills such as time management and problem-solving. Homework can also strengthen the link between home and school with increased parental involvement.

On the other hand, homework can be seen to have negative consequences as well. Even though the list for negative effects is shorter, these should be taken into consideration as well when deciding whether to assign homework and what type of homework to assign. Excessive homework can cause physical and emotional fatigue and copying from other students, denied access to leisure time activities, and with the increased parental involvement it can also cause parents to put unnecessary amounts of pressure on their child. It is not uncommon for positive and negative effects to take place at the same time. For example homework can improve learner's understanding and problem-solving skills while it denies him access to leisure-time activities.

To conclude, it can be noted that assigning homework can be realized in diverse ways by differing the emphasis laid on the eight variables identified by Cooper (2007). The positive effects of homework would seem to outweigh the negative ones. Thus the use of some type of homework can be encouraged also in personalized learning. However, it might be beneficial to include for example learner choice in the assignment of homework when applying the personalized approach. The negative effects should also be retained when determining the type and amount of homework assigned.

2.4 Teachers' view

Finally, the theoretical framework concludes with a discussion of how the outcomes of implementing the personalized learning approach can affect the teacher.

2.4.1 Teacher-student relationship

This final subsection is dedicated to discussing the effects teacher-student relationship can have on the wellbeing of a teacher. The topic of this section was not introduced to the present study directly by Peura's approach itself, but by the outcomes it had had on the implementing teachers participating in the present study. The impact of teacher-student relationship on students' learning and development is a topic that has been widely researched (see Cornelius-White 2007 for a synthesis of the area of study) and it has been found to be extremely important for students. However, the focus of this section is the impact of this relationship on teachers, a perspective that has been studied far less but is of significance for the present study. Despite the relatively small number of studies, the research from this point-of-view has, nonetheless, been able to demonstrate that this connection has a substantial influence on the teachers' professional and personal development and wellbeing (e.g. Hargreaves 2000, Mashburn et al. 2006, Shann 1998, Yoon 2002).

Let us begin by discussing the concept of stress, a term with an abundance of definitions. Kyriacou (2001: 28) depicts the feeling of stress as an experience of "unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration or depression". Traditionally stressful events have been defined with respect to three characteristics: controllability, predictability and the level of threat they pose to one's capabilities or self-concept (Nolen-Hoeksema 2004: 469). Some have seen it as an unbalance between the demands made on a person and their ability to cope with those demands (e.g. Kahn and Byesiere 1992, Kahn et al. 1964). In the context of teachers, a model by Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) regards stress as a negative emotional experience that is elicited when a teacher perceives a work situation to cause a threat to their self-esteem or well-being.

Research has indicated that teachers' consider their job to be considerably stressful (e.g. Travers and Cooper 1996, Kyricaou 2000) The causes of stress are, of course, always individual but the main sources seem to include factors such as teaching unmotivated students, maintaining discipline, pressures of time and workload, and coping with change (Kyricaou 2001: 29). There are two types of ways of dealing with stress: direct action techniques and palliative techniques (Kyricaou 2000: 72). The former essentially refers to steps that are taken in order to eliminate or diminish the cause of stress, whereas the latter is concerned with mechanisms that assist with coping with stress without actually dealing with the source itself. Primarily, if the identification of the source of stress is possible then direct action techniques should be used (Kyriacou 2000: 73). If, however, dealing with the source is for some reason impossible or one is unable to identify the source, utilizing palliative techniques is the more appropriate solution (Kyriacou 2000: 81).

It has been revealed that the relationship between a teacher and his students is the most important factor in creating enjoyment and motivation for both primary and secondary school teachers (Hargreaves 2000). For secondary school teachers it can, however, be more difficult to build a personal relationship with their students due to the fact that the number of students they teach is much higher and the time they spend with each student is quite minimal when compared to elementary teachers. As a result, these teachers may feel alienated from their students which in turn can pose a threat to the teachers' professional and personal wellbeing. Furthermore, this relationship has been determined as the most important variable for teachers and if perceived positive, it is one that creates the most satisfaction (Shann 1998). Moreover, if the relationship is perceived negative, it can cause stress and other negative emotions for the teacher (Yoon 2002).

As depicted in above, according to Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) stress i.e. a negative emotional experience is elicited when a teacher perceives a work situation to cause a threat to their self-esteem or well-being. The opposite can be argued as well in that when a work situation boosts a teacher's self-esteem or well-being, they have a positive emotional experience. Therefore, in order for teachers to have either a positive or negative experience rising from a teacher-student relationship, they must assign some value to it. From this it is possible to conclude that positive teacher-student relationships can help decrease teachers' stress. Hence, adapting a teaching approach which ameliorates this relationship could be considered a direct action technique. This relates

to the present study in that, if the participating teachers were found to perceive an improvement in their teacher-student relationships, it could suggest that implementing Peura's personalized approach may increase teachers' professional wellbeing.

3 THE PRESENT STUDY

The focus of the present study is on examining the experiences EFL teachers have had on the process and product of implementing Peura's approach into their teaching. This section is dedicated to presenting the data and methods of the present study. It begins with a presentation of the four research questions on which the present study has been constructed. This is continued with a discussion of the three methods with which the data of the present study has been collected: interviews, observation and blog analysis. To finish the section, a brief description of the analysis process is provided.

3.1 Research questions

The primary goal of the present study was to determine how the participating EFL teachers had implemented personalized learning into their teaching. In addition, it was of great interest to the present study to define advantages and disadvantages the participating teachers had found to be of relevance to their implementation. These primary research questions were defined as follows:

1. How have the English teachers participating in the study implemented the personalized teaching approach?
2. According to the teachers participating in the study, what advantages and disadvantages are there to this approach?

The secondary interests for the present study were in relation to the reasons the participating teachers had for beginning to implement a personalized approach, and to the reactions towards the approach they had encountered from other affected parties. These interests were articulated as follows:

1. What factors have motivated the participating teachers to use a personalized approach in their teaching?
2. How have others, such as students, parents and colleagues responded to the approach, according to the participating teachers?

3.2 Data collection methods

The data collection process began with interviews of four teachers who are currently implementing the approach in their teaching. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the implementation of the approach in EFL education, it was decided to include observation as a data collection method. Furthermore, an addition of a prominent blog by an English teacher implementing the approach was seen appropriate or even necessary for an adequate presentation of the topic. Next, each of these collection methods as well as the background data that arose from them will be examined.

3.2.1 Interviews

The presentation of data collection methods will begin with perhaps the most influential one, interviews. This section commences with a discussion of why and how the interviews were executed. After this, the section concludes with a characterization of the background information of the interviewed teachers. As mentioned, one of the three data collection methods of the present study was semi-structured interviews. The decision was made to interview EFL teachers that have implemented the approach of personalized language education in their teaching. This was done to gain an understanding of how the approach has been applied to fit the particular nature of language learning. Interviews were also an essential element in determining the perceived advantages and disadvantages of the approach. In addition, there was an express aspiration to understand the teachers' motivation behind this choice, and what the response has been from their students, parents and colleagues. The main reason why interviews were chosen as a data collection method is the fact that they enabled me to ask directly about the thoughts, experiences and motivations of the participants (Richards 2009: 187). Another method that was considered in the place of interviews was a questionnaire as it would have allowed for a larger sample size. However, as the number of English teachers practicing the approach in Finland is fairly small, the option of a quantitative study was not truly realizable. Therefore this advantage of a questionnaire was not seen to be sufficient to overrule those of an interview. Compared to a questionnaire, an interview is much more flexible (Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2009: 73). Unlike with questionnaires, in an interview it is possible to repeat and reformulate a question, clear misunderstandings and have an open discussion with the respondent, all qualities perceived important for the present study.

The type of interview chosen was semi-structured as the topics that were to be covered were clear, but unexpected directions and additions were also welcomed (Richards 2009: 185-186). Before the interviews could take place, it was necessary to create an interview a guide, which can be found from appendix 1. This process required developing, grouping and timing the themes (Cousin 2009: 82). The interview guide of the present study included interview questions that were not too strictly worded. This allowed the interviewer to adapt the formulation of questions for each interview, add clarifying questions and even to omit questions which had already been answered, as suggested appropriate for semi-structured interviews by Cousin (2009: 72). The problem with this might be, however, that the questions were not necessarily exactly the same for each interviewee which might have prompted different responses from them. The themes for the interview were defined from the research questions and they were grouped accordingly. The order of topics was set so that the interviews began with background information, such as the participants' education background and their teaching experience as a number of years, and from there moved on to more content focused topics. Even though the order of topics was somewhat set, the organization of the interview permitted both the interviewer and the interviewee to return to topics if necessary. Moreover, before the interviews took place the questions were discussed with the instructor of the present study and with a colleague. A traditional piloting of the interview proved to be difficult to carry out as it would have required a pilot interviewee with knowledge of the topic. As indicated by Cousin (2009: 83), the interview guide developed in advance to the interviews is often amended in the course of interviews, which was also the case in the present study.

The interviewees were approached through the Facebook page appointed to the topic of personalized learning in foreign languages. Cousin (2009: 80) suggests that prior to the interviews the participants should be given some information on the topic and purpose of the study as well as its ethical framework. Accordingly, in the interview invitation, the topic and purpose of the present study was stated as well as the promise of confidentiality and anonymity. These ethical issues are assured by three steps as proposed by Kalaja et al. (2011: 22-23). Firstly, only the interviewer has access to the interview recordings and transcriptions. Secondly, in reporting about the interviews, pseudonyms are used when referring to the participants. Thirdly, any possibly identifying markers such as references to localities have been excluded from the

examples given in the report. The issue of whether or not to give the interviewees the tentative questions in advance was debated. As pointed out by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009: 73), it might be beneficial to do so when the aim of an interview is to gain as much information on a topic as possible. Nonetheless, it was decided that if the questions were given in advance, it might affect the received answers in an unwanted way. For example it was thought that if the participants knew they were going to be inquired about the sources of information they had utilized, they might have made attempts to improve their knowledge in this respects. In retrospect, the interviews might have produced even more beneficial information if the questions would have been given to the interviewees in advance. The problem of it influencing answers undesirably could have been avoided by omitting these questions from the list given to the participants.

Four English teachers implementing the approach agreed to be interviewed for the present study. The interviews took place during April 2016. Dufva (2011: 138-139) proposes that if circumstances do not allow for a face-to-face interview, interviews can be completed with the assistance of information technology. The interviewees of the present study were from different parts of Finland and it was not seen practical to travel hundreds of kilometers to conduct the interviews. Due to these logistical reasons, the interviews were carried out via Skype. They were recorded with a program designed for such a purpose, MP3 Skype Recorder, and these recordings were transcribed with the aid of another program, Audacity.

The four teachers interviewed for the present study were Maria, Helena, Johanna and Anneli (pseudonyms). Table 1 below demonstrates the background information of the interviewees in the following aspects: years of teaching experience in general, years of experience with the personalized approach, languages taught by the teacher, level of school in which the teacher is working, and finally the size of personalized groups.

Table 1 Background information of the interviewees

Name	Teaching experience in general	Experience with personalized approach	Languages taught	Level of school in which taught	Size of personalized groups
Anneli	10 years	less than a year	English, French	secondary	19-20
Maria	6 years	less than a year	English, French	secondary	13-22
Johanna	3 years	less than a year	English, German	secondary	15-22
Helena	15 years	2 years	English, French	upper secondary	13-?

All of the interviewed teachers were females with master's degrees and they had majored in one or more of their respective languages and minored in pedagogy. As can be seen from table 1 above, Maria, Helena and Anneli had specialized in English and French, Johanna in English and German. The amount of teaching experience varied quite a lot among the interviewees, with the most recent graduate, Johanna, having three years of teaching experience and the most experienced, Helena, having fifteen. Less variance occurred in the amount of experience in teaching through a personalized approach. The most experienced teacher, Helena, was in her third year of experimentation and the other three had begun their implementations during the ongoing schoolyear. There was some variation in the groups with whom the teachers had implemented a personalized approach as Maria, Johanna and Anneli taught in secondary school, Helena in upper secondary school. Group sizes ranged from 13 to 22 with no reports of group size affecting either the decision to attempt a personalized approach or its implementation.

3.2.2 Observation

Next, the present section will focus on the second data collection method: observation. Again, the section begins with a discussion of the reasons for choosing observation as a

data collection method, and how the observations were executed. From this follows a brief depiction of the background information of the observations. According to Grönfors (2015: 150), it can be particularly beneficial for a qualitative research to combine interviews and other data collection methods with observation. He suggests that this can be done, for example, by interviewing a larger group of people and then choosing a smaller sample from this group to be observed, which is exactly the approach taken in the present study. There are several benefits to including observation as a data collection method alongside with and an interview (Grönfors 2015: 149-151). Firstly, observation can help to understand information gained from other sources of data. In the case of the present study, some information on how the personalized learning approach had been implemented with these groups had already been acquired through interviewing the informant. However, observing the lessons was a key factor in fully understanding this information. Secondly, the observation method can be employed to provide a more comprehensive view on the matter being studied. Observation assisted the present study in building a more versatile understanding of what type of activities take or can take place in a personalized language classroom. Thirdly, observation is a valuable method when very little information exists on the studied issue. This is exactly the case with the topic of the present study as demonstrated in sections 1 and 2.2. For these reasons, it was chosen to include short observation sessions of two times 45-minute lessons in the data of present study.

Grönfors (2015: 151-153) defines three different types of observation that are generally seen as ethically valid, ranging from non-participant to full-participant. In non-participant observation the observer does not participate in the activities of the informants or interact with them in any way during the observation. With full-participant observation, the observer is a member of the studied community but the informants are aware that they are being studied. Between these two extremes is a participating observer who can at times be just an observer, and at other times interact with the informants. For the present study, participating observation was the most logical choice. With full-participant observation method the observer is an existing part of the studied community, therefore naturally precluded from being an option. Non-participating method could perhaps have been a possibility, but it generally takes a while for informants to become accustomed to the presence of the observer so that it does not affect their behavior (Grönfors 2015: 152). As established below, it was not possible to offer such time for accustoming to the situation, and for this reason it

seemed unfitting to choose this approach. In addition, as participating observation offers the possibility to interact with the informants, it was presumed that this interaction might provide information that would not become available for the study with non-participant observation in such a short observation period.

The main purpose of the observation was to acquire a deeper understanding of what the general atmosphere in a personalized classroom seems to be, and how the organization of such a classroom seems to function. The secondary purpose was to attain some knowledge of the participating students' opinions on the personalized learning approach. Unfortunately, the present study is only able to present a noticeably marginal view on this due to the limited amount of resources. During the observation sessions, field-notes were taken on the observer's perception of the students' opinions on the matter, but the students were not directly interviewed per se. The thoughts and feelings of the informant (the teacher) were uncovered through an in-depth interview that took place four days ahead of the observation sessions as well as a short interview between the two sessions.

When preparing for observation, foreshadowing problems is an important task (Cowie 2009: 196, Grönfors 2015: 154-155). Issues such as choosing the participants, entering the field, getting permissions and, sample size and time in the field as well as the anonymity of the informant and the participating students need to be addressed before the observation can begin. For the present study, the informant i.e. the teacher was chosen due to the geographical proximity of the research site, i.e. the school, to the observer. Access to the site of the present study was given by the teacher whose lessons were being observed. As indicated by Grönfors (2015: 155), it is often necessary to attain a research permission from a leader of the community. In order to obtain this permission, it is common to have to give the following information: the purpose, method, time, publication channel, whether or not the study is a thesis, and supposed participants of the study. In the case of the present study, this permission was received from the principal of the school via email after a permission request, which included such information. As the students participating in the classes are underage, interviewing them either orally or in a written form with a questionnaire would have required research permissions from the students' parents (Kalaja et al. 2011: 22-23). As the data does not come directly from the students but from the perceived observations of the observer, it was considered sufficient to have the permissions of the teacher and the

principal. Kalaja et al. (2011: 22-23) emphasizes the importance of anonymity of research subjects. The anonymity of the participating students' was guaranteed by not enclosing the observer the full names of the students. Moreover, the anonymity of the informant was ensured through the use of a pseudonym and exclusion of information from the research paper that might allow the informant to be identified.

In preparation for observation, it might be beneficial to consider the skill of observation. According to Cowie (2009: 170-171), it is possible to improve observation techniques in order to become a more aware and skillful observer. This can be achieved deliberately through regular observation and awareness practice. As for the present study it was necessary to gather the data from only two 45-minute sessions taking place during a single day, it was crucial to be well prepared for them. Therefore, to be well equipped for the observation sessions, the researcher practiced her observation skills approximately 10 minutes every day for three weeks by means of conscious awareness exercises.

Observation data can be collected through several instruments, such as video, audio-recordings and many different types of artefacts, which can be, for instance, photographs and maps (Cowie 2009: 168-169). For the present study, however, field notes were chosen as the only data collection tool for the observation as the research gathers plenty of data from other sources as well. Field notes are considered as a fundamental instrument for research data gathered through observation (Cowie 2009: 171, Grönfors 2015: 156, Pitkänen-Huhta 2011: 96). Nevertheless, the process of taking notes is not entirely straightforward as underlined by Grönfors (2015: 156). Even though the observer cannot rely too much on his/her memory and field-notes should be written as soon as possible, it might not be considerate to do it during the observation, especially not while the observer is interacting with the participants. The observer must acknowledge and retain the fact that the participants might be affected by the act of taking notes and thus restrain it to situations where this effect is minimized. Ahead of the observation sessions, it was decided that the field-notes would be written during the times when the observer was being non-participatory and directly after the sessions. The transcription of the field-notes into electronic form was also done during the same day to ensure that as little as possible would be forgotten or misunderstood.

Just as important as when the field-notes are written is how the notes are taken and what is being observed and noted down (Cowie 2009: 171, Grönfors 2015: 156-148). On the one hand, after acknowledging that taking field-notes is a highly personal task, Cowie (2009: 171-173) offers some practical suggestions that might aid an unexperienced observer with these choices. Grönfors (2015: 156-158), on the other hand, looks at this by classifying different types of field-notes and emphasizes building these choices on an analysis of what is necessary for the purpose of the observation. As concluded above, the main purpose of the observation was to determine how a personalized classroom can be organized and function, and the secondary purpose was to build an idea of what the participating students' opinions are on the approach. Therefore, it was selected to divide the notes into two types: the first was to take notes from observations made during non-participation concerning the main purpose, the second was to note down the observations made from non-participating observation as well as from interaction with the participating students.

The observation sessions took place in a Finnish comprehensive school of approximately 760 students. Both of the observed English as a foreign language lessons were for 9th grade students and the participating students had taken English for seven years. The first one of the classes had 20 students, the second 19. The teacher implementing the personalized education approach had taught both classes since 7th grade, hence having an extensive knowledge of their skill level, learning strategies and level of motivation to learn English among other affecting factors. The observer and the purpose of her presence were introduced at the beginning of the classes. The students were also made aware that the observer would take notes on her impressions of the students' opinions, which would become a part of research data. As set forth by Tuomi and Sarajärvi (2009: 81), observation, either as a sole means of compiling data or amongst others, is always a quite laborious and time-consuming enterprise. For this reason, the choice was made to observe only one of the four interviewees, Anneli, with only two 45-minute observation sessions. It is essential to note here that as the time for observation as well as the sample size in the present study were quite limited, it is necessary to view the observations and their outcome as mere examples of the possibilities the approach offers. However, as put forward by Cowie (2009: 170), it is necessary for observation for a master's thesis to be remarkably more limited in time than in a traditional participant observation due to fewer resources.

3.2.3 Blog analysis

The final data collection method used in the present study was content analysis of blog texts. When getting familiarized with realizations of the personalized learning approach in language learning settings through, for example, the Facebook page assigned for this purpose, the work of one teacher in particular stood up from the rest, Minna Ala-Akkala's. As mentioned in section 1, in addition to being active on the Facebook page, she had been involved in a project called HackED (HackED n.d.), the purpose of which is to implement promote the approach across different school subject. For this purpose, Minna had written a blog called Individual English, in which she discusses the approach and describes her implementation and experience of it. The present study was interested in analyzing these aspects. In addition to being interesting on its own merits, three out of the four interviewees for the present study mentioned reading the blog when creating their own implementation of the approach. Therefore it is highly valuable for the present study to relate the ideas presented in the blog with those of the interviewees. Another advantage of including the blog as part of the data was that it enabled the study to have a more long-term view of an implementation of the approach. As the interviews and the observation were each performed only on a single occasion the focus in them was necessarily short-term. With the blog, it was possible to see the arch of applying a new approach in language education. Thus all five of the blog entries (Individual English, Individual English: What do you think?, Choose your goals - tavoitteena tavoitteet, Individual English: A bunch of stolen ideas, and Individual English: Syksyn satoa) available at the time of analysis (2 July 2016) were chosen to be incorporated as data for the present study.

3.3 Methods of analysis

The analysis process followed the steps commonly found in qualitative content analysis: reading and memoing, describing and classifying (Gay et al. 2006: 469-471). In the first stage of the analysis process, reading and memoing, each piece of the multi-sourced and varied the data was studied separately and some initial themes were identified. In the second stage, the background information, as well as the implementations and experiences of all the teachers were described individually. Finally, the data was synthesized to present and evaluate the themes that were found from the separate analyses. However, in order to maintain clarity when presenting the five

implementations of the approach (blog author's and those of the interviewees) in subsection 4.2, the decision was made to present each of the implementations individually. Connections and comparisons are nevertheless made when appropriate throughout the individual presentations. The findings are portrayed in combination with a discussion on how the themes link to the theories and research presented in section 2.

4 FINDINGS

Next, it is time to focus on the findings of the present study. This section is organized so that it begins with a portrayal of the reasons the interviewed teachers had had for choosing to personalize their teaching and the routes that had led them to Peura's approach. Following this, the implementations of the participating teachers will be described to a certain detail. From there, the discussion progresses to cover the advantages and disadvantages of the approach as portrayed by the participating teachers. Finally, this section concludes with an examination of how the approach has been received by students, their parents and colleagues, according to the participating teachers and the observation. These following subsections rely on the data gathered from the three sources with different emphases. Minna's blog naturally does not cover all of the topics presented here and thus the contribution from her blog is only referenced when relevant. Furthermore, the observations only concern Anneli's implementation and experience, thus only contributing to her point-of-view. The presented findings are connected to the theoretical background in section 2 whenever appropriate.

4.1 Reasons for and paths to personalized learning

As mentioned above, this first subsection focuses on why the participating teachers had felt the need to begin to implement the personalized approach. In addition, this section explains how the interviewed teachers had become aware of Peura's approach. Finally, a brief discussion of why the interviewees had restricted their experiments to English classes, even though they all teach another language as well. Even though the routes which had led the interviewees to apply a personalized approach were varied, all of the interviewees reported some type of frustration behind the desire to change their

approach to teaching. For Johanna the frustration came from the conventional way of teaching the whole class together, as she felt unable to focus if she noticed that even one student was clearly doing something else and not paying attention. Therefore she saw the appeal in an approach where it was not necessary to teach the whole class at once but she could focus on teaching individual students or small groups at a time. As for Maria, Helena and Anneli, they all revealed that their motivation came from a source of frustration in attempting to apply traditional techniques to teaching groups that were highly diverse in their skill levels as well as motivation. Helena explained that in their school there are students from both ends of the proficiency continuum. Therefore, when the whole group is proceeding at the same pace, some students just sit there and wait most of the time and others still do not seem to have enough time to process the information. She explains that her sympathies lay mostly with the advanced students that were not able to work at their own level and at their own speed. Remembering her own school days when she was in a similar situation, she had felt that something needed to be done. Thus she began developing a different type of approach.

(1) V: et meil . on välil . ihan hirvittävän heikkoja mut sit toisaalt meil on ihan huippujakin . ja tota alko . tympäännyttään se et . mennään sil samal tahdil ja ne muutamat siel . istuu ja ihmettelee suurimman osan aikaa . ja toisil menee silti sit niinku. yli . yli tota . ymmärryksen ... kaikki et . lähinnä niitten lahjakkaitten puolesta alko harmittaa . et ne ei saa niinku omaa . omaa tota . omal tasollaan ja omaa vauhtiaan tehdä muistaa itte kouluaikinsa kun . istu ja istu ja istu ja suurin osa . koulust oli opo- odotteluu . ni mä aattelin et jotain täytyy tehdä ja sit mä aatte- . rupesin sit kehrittelemään itekseni sitte . (Helena)

(1) IR: sometimes we have . extremely weak students but then again we have top students as well . and well it began . to frustrate me that . we go at the same pace and those few there . sit and wonder most of the time . and others still don't . well . understand anything so . I started to feel bad mostly for the talented students that they did not get their like . their . to work at their own level and at their own pace . I remember when I was in school and I just sat and sat and sat and most of the time was just waiting so I thought that something has to be done and then I thou- . began developing on my own then . (Helena)

Maria was in agreement with Helena on this, voicing her frustration for those students who would have been eager to study but were held back by the energy spent on struggling with uninterested students. Maria also expressed her annoyance with the students' passivity when teaching with teacher-led approaches. As suggested by Finkbeiner (2008: 138), if teachers are interested in and willing to take into account the diversity of their students, a one-size-fits-all approach is not an option. This objective of responding to the various needs of students with vast diversity in their aptitude and motivations is highly supported by research (e.g. Robinson 2001, 2002, Dörnyei and Csizér 1998).

This dissatisfaction caused Helena to begin developing an approach on her own without resorting to any external assistance. However, although initially developing her practices by herself, Helena stated that she has later learned about other teachers applying similar ideas through media, building her confidence on the practices she had developed. In addition, her Swedish teaching colleague has since then experienced with this type of an approach as well. Maria initially proceeded similarly to Helena, beginning to develop a more personalized type of approach. She admitted that this experiment was, however, less than successful. A while later, when working with a particularly challenging group Maria felt the need to seek for outside help. She therefore turned to the internet for help, searching for information on personalized learning in languages. This led her to Peura's webpage (maot.fi) where she found a blog post by a language teacher on her experiences on proficiency tests in language teaching. Maria stated that she had heard about Peura's approach before this, but had felt it had little to contribute to the teaching of languages.

(2) V: no oikeestaan ku se se on (tullu) tietyl taval jälkikäteen . olihan . Pekkahan on . oli ollu jo sillon olikohan . oliko Suomen Kuvalehes vai missä oli ollu siitä juttu . mutku se . keskitty nii paljon siihen matikkaa . et mäki jotenkin ajattelin et ku . ja ne matikan ne . oppimispoluhan on ihan . ku nehän on niinku tehtävälister . et tämän mukaan et mäkin olin sillee et ei toi toimi en- kielissä et kielet on niin monimutkasia et ku pitää ottaa huomioon sitä ja tätä ja tota . et ei ei pysty tollee ollenkaa opiskelee ku pitää ottaa ne suulliset ja mites kuuntelut sitte tehää ja kaikki tällaset . et siihen oikeestaan tartti . tartti kyl sen et joku toinen kielten opettaja kans vähä avas sitä niinku omaa systeemiään . ja . ja sai sieltä sit niitä ideoita sit toteuttaa . [toteuttaa

H: joo .]

V: sitä omaa juttua . (Maria)

(2) IE: well actually in a way it's only come afterwards . sure . Pekka was . had already been was it . was it in Suomen Kuvalehti or where it had had an article about it . but it . focused so much on the math . so even thought that because . and those math . learning paths are just . because they're like exercise lists . like do this so even I was like that won't work in Eng- languages that languages are so complex because you have to take into consideration the oral and how about listenings how do you do them and things like this . so that it really needed . needed another language teacher who . opened up her system . and . and from there I got those ideas to carry out . [carry out

IR: yea .]

IE: my own thing . (Maria)

Maria explained that she had felt that as the approach had been applied to mathematics, the learning paths are just lists of exercises and that it could not be applied to the teaching of languages. According to her, teaching languages is much more complex than that because you have to take into consideration issues such as oral practice and listening comprehension. Thus, Maria admits that it required the help of another

language teacher who was able to clarify how the approach could be implemented to languages for her to let go of this critical attitude. With this in mind she contacted the language teacher that had written about her experiments on Peura's webpage and, after some back and forth, visited her school with some other teachers. From this visit she gained valuable information and materials to begin her own experiments. Both Helena and Maria thus acknowledge the positive influence of media supporting their change in teaching practices, but maintain that it was the personal experience of insufficient means to teach heterogeneous groups that initiated their change process.

Furthermore, Johanna and Anneli claimed media and other outside sources to have had a stronger influence on their process. More strongly, Anneli reported that without the media coverage, it is unlikely that she would have modified her way of teaching. She got acquainted with the approach online, first finding Peura's article which led her to the Facebook groups intended for teachers interested in the approach. This, finally led Anneli to Minna's blog which inspired her and her colleagues to attempt an implementation of the approach in their teaching.

(3) V: no mää ensin syksyllä luin ton . jonkun Pekka Peuran artikkelin tuolta netistä ja sitte siellä oli mainittu tää facebook ryhmä . johon mä sitte liityin ja sitte sitä kautta löysin tän rinnakkaisryhmän joka on kielen opettajille ja sitten . niitä tekstejä kun lueskeli nii sitte löyty tää . tällanen yks enkun opettaja joka siellä on . paljon postailu . omista kokemuksistaan ja laittanu linkkiä sinne . blogiinkin ja sieltä sitten lueskelin niitä kiinnostuneena ja huomasin et käyttää vielä samaa kirjasarjaa ku mekin ja . sitte tota . sitte mä juttelin noille kahelle kollegalle että mitäs jos meki kokeiltas ja ne oli heti ihan innostuneita niin sitte me vaan päätettiin kokeilla .

H: joo . eli medianäkyvyys on kuitenkin . sun . kohdalla aika paljon vaikuttanu .

V: joo todellaki että . et varmaa ei ois niinku . koskaan tätä tapahtunu ellei ois sattunu sit jossain facebookissa silmiin . (Anneli)

(3) IE: well in the fall I first read . one of Pekka Peura's articles in the internet and it mentioned this Facebook group . which I then joined and through there I found this parallel group which is for language teachers . and when I read the texts there I found this . this one English teacher who's . posted a lot about her own experiences there and given a link to the blog too and with interest I read them from there and . I noticed that she uses the same series of books as we do and . well . then I talked with my two colleagues about whether we should try it too and they were right away really interested so then we just decided to try .

IR: yea . so the media coverage has . in your case . influenced quite a lot .

IE: yea totally . this probably wouldn't even have happened unless I were to see it on Facebook or something . (Anneli)

This new information came at an opportune time because, as mentioned above, Anneli claimed to be battling the same issues as Maria and Helena. She attested to the same type of thinking as Helena, explaining that it struck her as sad that some particularly skilled students would go through secondary school without really learning anything in

their English classes. This, in her view, was because they were taught at the same pace as those with learning difficulties and motivational issues. When learning about a more personalized approach, Anneli therefore saw the possibility of it providing an answer to this problem.

Moreover, Johanna had initially heard about the approach from a biology teacher substituting at her school who himself/herself was extremely interested in the approach. That, along with articles in *Opettaja* -magazine (a monthly magazine distributed to all unionized teachers), motivated her to familiarize herself with the approach. In addition, she stated that she gained a great deal of valuable information on the approach from this year's Educa -event³, a yearly event dedicated for education and training with an exhibition area and various seminars. At the time of the interviews, Johanna and Anneli were the only ones to have attended any sort of seminars or training related to the personalized approach, though Maria expressed plans to attend such events in the future. Helena felt confident in trusting her professional experience and common sense in developing her approach also in the future. None of the interviewees had felt the need to turn to published literature related to the topic.

Despite the fact that all four of the interviewees teach another foreign language in addition to English (French or German), all of them had concentrated their implementations of a personalized approach on their English classes. This decision had been made for various reasons. Firstly, Helena stated that the group sizes in her French classes are so small that she saw no point in applying a specially designed personalized approach, implying that in a small group teaching is in any case bound to be somewhat personalized. Anneli and Maria stated to have based their decisions on the level of the students, saying that there has not been a need for personalization in their French classes as all of the learners have been beginners.

(4) V: no . ehkä noi ranskan ryhmät on sellasia kun ne on niin . niinku sillalailla . alussa viä siinä . kielen opiskelussa . että tavallaan siä ei oo semmosia tasoeroja kauheesti että ne . ne kaikki on . kaikkien kanssa on käytävä ne samat perus niinku semmoset jutut ja näin ni siä mä nyt en oo ehkä hirveesti kokenu niinku . tarvetta tähän et tietenki sitte voi olla että . seki on nii ryhmästä kiinni että sitte . jossain kohtaa seki vois olla mutta . ja sit tommosessa

³ For further information about the event see educa.messukeskushelsinki.fi.

niinku . ranska on sellanen kieli mitä ei kuule oikee missään . niinku muualla kauheesti ja se on muutenki vaikee ja näin nii . mä en jotenki siinä oikee nää sitä että . et miten pystyis ihan vaan niinku itekseen sitten niinku . jotenki eteneen samalailla ku enkussa taas . se o ihan eri asia . (Anneli)

(4) IR: well . I think maybe those French groups are so . like . still in the beginning of . their language learning . that in a way there aren't a lot of differences in levels that they're all . you need to go through all like the basic things with everyone and so . I haven't maybe really felt . the need for this like of course it can be that . it depends so much on the group that . at some point it could be but . and in like a . French is the kind of language that you don't really hear anywhere . like else and its difficult too and stuff so . I don't somehow see that . how you could just by yourself . somehow proceed the way you can in English . it's completely different . (Anneli)

To explain further, Anneli said that as her French students are all beginners, the differences in the students' skill levels are not very big and therefore it is necessary to go through all the basics with everyone. She added that this does, however, depend on the group and it is possible that the need for a more personalized approach would occur in French classes as well. Moreover, Anneli talked about the difference between the learners' familiarity with the language and its difficulty. She pointed out that it is quite uncommon to hear French outside the classroom and that, in her view, it is a rather difficult language to learn. Therefore, she concludes, it would be more difficult for learners to progress through the coursework in a more independent manner in French than it is in English.

In sum, all of the interviewed teachers had begun to experiment with the approach due to a frustration with previous approaches. Johanna's reasons were more personal, whereas the other three felt a self-paced system could help with teaching students at both ends of the proficiency continuum. Moreover, all of the interviewed teachers reported media to have had some type of positive influence on their path to personalized learning. Of the interviewees, this influence had been the greatest for Anneli and the smallest for Helena. Colleagues were another important factor in learning about the approach, especially for Maria and Johanna. Finally, the choice of implementing the approach only to English classes despite teaching other languages as well was credited to group sizes and the diversity of learners' skill levels. In other words, as the group sizes in other languages was smaller and the skill level somewhat same in other languages beside English, personalization had been deemed unnecessary.

4.2 Implementations

The primary goal of the present study was to determine how the participating English teachers have combined the particular nature of language learning with the idea of a personalized teaching. As demonstrated in the previous subsection, three of the four teachers sought assistance for this task from external sources, such as colleagues more experienced in the topic, Peura's webpage, the Facebook groups intended for the topic, and seminars. Helena, however, embarked upon this road on her own and only later noticed that others have applied similar concepts, thus reinforcing her confidence in her professional abilities. It is important to recognize and be aware of these different paths as they strongly affect the realizations that have emerged. This section attempts to describe those realizations and link some of the topics to the theoretical perspectives presented in the theoretical background presented in section 2. I will begin with a description of Minna's implementation, as it has been a source of information on the approach for at least one of the interviewees. This description is perhaps somewhat more detailed than the others, as the form of data enables us to view also the process behind developing the implementation instead of only the end-result. After this, the implementations of the interviewees will be presented in the following order: Anneli, Maria, Johanna and Helena. The topics discussed include the implementations' general portrayal, practical issues such as providing instructions and seating arrangements, as well as assessment procedures. Finally, it is important to bear in mind that due the relative novelty of the approach and the constant flow of new information concerning it, the implementations presented by the participating teachers are only representations of a particular time and might in fact have already been revised.

4.2.1 Minna

As has been established in previous sections, Minna's experience of implementing the approach has been discovered through her blog posts. The first post in Minna's blog *Individual English* is from April 2015 (Ala-Akkala 2015a) and the most recent one from January 2016. Throughout the five blog posts she discusses her implementation, which naturally evolves with time and increased experience. In her school's English classes they use Sanoma Pro's book series *Spotlight*, a series that is in wide use in secondary school EFL education across Finland. In the first blog post (Ala-Akkala 2015a), Minna describes how she began the process on personalizing her English

classes for her 8th graders. Initially she divided two units of the workbook (unit 8 and 9) into three sections. She then determined that the first two of these sections should be studied by everyone and the last should be studied by those looking to get grades 9 or 10 (on the Finnish scale from 4 to 10). Under each section there was a list of topics to be studied and exercises to be completed. The lessons then consisted of independent work⁴ on these exercises and topics as well as oral and listening comprehension exercises completed together with the whole class. When students felt they had understood and retained the content of that chapter, they were to do a test on it. The tests were checked by the students themselves after which they decided whether or not they were ready to move on.

In a modified version of Minna's application (Ala-Akkala 2015b) there were three levels: Survival, Standard and Expert, which roughly correspond to grades 5 through 7, 7 through 9 and 9 through 10. These levels were utilized so that in the beginning of a course, students chose a level most appropriate for them based on presented assessment criteria drawn from the new curriculum (POPS 2014: 400-402). In the Survival level learners were allowed to choose the easiest tasks and focus of the fundamentals with an emphasis on understanding rather than producing. In the Expert level students were required much more production and completion of some additional exercises. In this developed version she included more listening and oral exercises as part of the self-paced coursework. Some exercises, such as pronunciation practice, oral tasks and games, maintained to be completed together with the whole class. Overall, with the alterations, there was more room for the learners to choose on what they wanted to focus and how they preferred to work. Minna acknowledges that this not a finished model, but an approach that is constantly changing and evolving (Ala-Akkala 2015b). She asserts that she would like to emphasize even further the importance of the students' own role in setting their goals and being active learners.

In her latest blog post from January 2016 (Ala-Akkala 2016), Minna describes a further developed system that she was planning to implement during this past spring term. In this latest version students would be given set amounts of work that they need to finish in a specified timeframe. Some of the bulks would be completed alone, some with a

⁴ The term independent or individual work in this and future context of the present study refer to the work students are allowed to complete either alone, in pairs or with the small-group in which they are sitting.

partner and some in groups. If the work was finished well ahead of schedule, those students would be rewarded with more relaxed lessons. This type of an approach to enhancing learners' time management is supported by Reiser (1984), who found rewards to result in early submissions of work in self-paced learning. In addition, with grammar items Minna's students had requested that she would teach each issue for a group of students who felt the need for it, a practice that can also be found in Peura's approach. As Minna has not yet updated the blog with her experiences on this experiment, it is impossible to determine whether or not this was successful.

Already in the first blog post (Ala-Akkala 2015a), Minna asserts that her goal is to combine individual work with pair and group work, operative learning and student-produced material. In her final post of year 2015 (Ala-Akkala 2015c), Minna also talked about the fact that she wishes to add more student choice in both content and study methods. She found this to be rather simple to realize in the case of advanced students, but had more difficulty in determining how this would be done with those having problems with the language. Moreover, she stated that she wanted to combine personalized learning with project-based work. In addition, she claimed to want to move from learning being determined by the workbook to the workbook being used as a source for learning. Furthermore, Minna identifies one of the aims in her implementation to be that her students learn to set goals in their language learning and, later on, assess how they have met those goals (Ala-Akkala 2015d). This idea is consistent with the concept of learner autonomy as identified by Holec (1979: 3) and Dickinson (1994: 4-5). They see fully autonomous learners to be able to take responsibility for all areas of the decision-making process, including the setting of learning objectives and the evaluation of the success in the attainment of those objectives.

The practical applications of how to provide instructions for the coursework was one of the issues that Minna had to resolve. Initially she created exercise lists, which she had divided into Words and Grammar. These exercises were expected to be completed by everyone, but in addition to these she included additional exercises which were steered at her advanced students. These worksheets functioned as both checklists and documentation of work done. After each of the covered chapters was a test, of which the score was marked on the worksheets. Minna's students had the possibility of improving their scores by retaking the tests, the results of where were also marked on the sheets.

On the worksheet there was also space for a self-evaluation of skills and work, as well as the grade agreed upon in the discussion sessions. In the developed version (Ala-Akkala 2015d), Minna did not want to be giving out paper worksheets for each chapter, but opted for more general instructions, which were the same for all groups. These instructions were paired with a checklist simplified from the general instructions and a grade-specific sheet that specified the actual content (i.e. topics to be covered). Links to all the sheets discussed here can be found from the blog entries (Ala-Akkala 2015a, Ala-Akkala 2015d). This system was, however, deemed too complex and she was forced to return to worksheets, provided for the learners both in electronic form in Google Classroom and in paper form. After a while, however, Minna came to the conclusion that a paper version was more practical in supporting the students' learning process and devoted Google Classroom for sharing files and links to the students.

Minna's blog sheds also sheds light on how her assessment practices evolved through the development of a personalized approach. Already in the initial stage of Minna's implementation, assessment was based on self-evaluation and assessment discussions. As concluded in sections 2.1.1 and 2.3.1, these practices can be determined as cooperative stage means of sustainable assessment (Everhard 2015, Oscarson 1997). Purely formative assessment, i.e. assessment for learning purposes (Everhard 2015: 16), was realized through the tests done after completing the two to three sections in each unit. In addition, with her 7th and 8th grade groups, Minna administered a grammar exam at the end of the school year (Ala-Akkala 2015c). In the exam the students were allowed to have "cheat-sheets", which they had written themselves. Minna asserted that writing the cheat-sheets helped students understand grammar and language as an entity. For this reason, she supposed that even though she had mostly given up traditional exams, she would continue to administer this final exam. However, as the final blog post is from January 2016, it is impossible to say for certain whether this is, in fact, the case. Presumably, in addition to being perceivably helpful for students, administering this test also provided her with assurance in that the students were still learning the content set by the curriculum. Thus, the exam can be seen to service both a formative and a summative purpose.

In the developed version (Ala-Akkala 2015b), Minna asserted that she wanted to emphasize that the tests were meant for purely formative purposes in that they were to provide her students feedback on their learning. Furthermore, she had gotten an idea

from a colleague to develop the unit test so that the questions and tasks begin from the easiest and gradually become more difficult. After each part Minna had marked the grade to which passing that part constituted. Students checked the tests themselves and, if they did not achieve the level they had set as their goal, they were to practice that unit more. She found that with the exception of one student, the grades from the tests corresponded to the grades set in the assessment discussions. Moreover, in order to keep the parents of the students updated on their progress and to provide the students with additional motivation, Minna decided to write up short individual comments in the school-home correspondence network Wilma, describing the grades and how they matched the goals set by the students.

4.2.2 Anneli

Of the interviewees, Anneli's implementation was most strongly influenced by that of Minna's and thus bears the most resemblance to it. Therefore, the decision was made to follow Minna's implementation with that of Anneli's. The information for this section was gathered from the interview with Anneli, the observation sessions and the short discussions before and after those sessions. Similarly to Minna, Anneli has divided the material to be learned into three levels: Survival, Standard and Expert. In her application the levels roughly corresponded to grades five through seven, seven through eight and nine through ten. As with Minna, the students are given the choice of which level they wish to pursue.

(5) joo . eli ihan me alustettiin tää homma sillälaila että . että . kaikki saa niinku itse . määritellä sen tasonsa ja siellä alimmalla tasolla niin . tavoitearvosana on se viis viiva kuus . me ollaan sitä nyt vähän muutettu et se olis niinkun viis viiva seitsemän koska kovin moni ei halua asettaa tavoitteeksees ees kuitenkin viis viiva kuus vaikka se se sit . monesti tulee ehkä oleenki mut et se viis viiva seitsemän on jotenki sopinu nyt paremmin . ajatusmaailmaan sitte se . keskitaso ois niinku seiska viiva kasi ja sitte se ylin taso ois ysi viiva kymppi ja ihan siis . tosi hienosti ne osas kyllä ne . ne . niinku omat tasonsa sieltä löytää et ihan muutama on ollu sellanen et ku on vähän aikaa tehty niin sit mä oon saattanu sanoo et no kannattasko sun nyt kuitenkin ehkä siirtä tonne . yks ylempäs tai alemmas . (Anneli)

(5) yea . so we introduced this thing so that . that . everyone gets to like themselves . define their own level and at the lowest level so . the target grade is five to six . now we've changed it a little so that it would be like five to seven because not very many wants to set their goals at five to six even if it . often turns out to be that but the five to seven has somehow fit better . their way of thinking so then the . middle level would be seven to eight and the highest level would be nine to ten and like really . they've been able to really find really well . there levels from there only a few've been like after we've been doing it for a while and then I've might have said like well maybe you should transfer to . one higher or lower . (Anneli)

Anneli praised her students for their ability to choose an appropriate level, saying that only with a few of her students has she had to suggest a level higher or lower than the student's original choice. This ability to make decisions about their learning objectives can perhaps be a sign of an existing early form of autonomy (Holec 1979).

For each of the three levels, Anneli with her two colleagues, have created separate study paths realized through worksheets that are provided for each unit. At the moment, the exercises for each path come mostly from the workbook they use (*Spotlight*), but Anneli states that in the future she as well would like to be less focused on the workbook. For the Survival level the exercises focus on the very basics, whereas in the Expert level they have left out the more mechanical exercises and focused on more production-requiring tasks. This variety of exercises and tasks was seen during the observation sessions. As the students continued from where they had left off three weeks before the observation, they were focused on very different topics. Yet, all of four of the language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening) were seen to be practiced during both of the lessons. The actual exercises ranged from quite mechanical grammar and vocabulary practice to tasks that required free production, such as an essay to be attached to the students' portfolios or writing a comic. Some students were also witnessed to play academic board games. According to Anneli, in order to ensure that the students do not go on without checking the exercises they have completed, students are not allowed to mark the exercises as done before checking them. In addition, some of the oral exercises require the teacher's signature.

Anneli stated that her lessons often begin with the whole class doing an exercise such as a listening comprehension, pronunciation practice or an oral task. After the joint session, students begin working on the tasks from their worksheets, continuing from where they left off during the previous lesson. This, according to Anneli, has not always worked as intended as the students have been so eager to begin working on their exercises that it has sometimes been difficult to get them to focus on the joint activities. As a solution, Anneli has considered changing the logistics for example so that they would have a longer joint session once a week or so. In the observation sessions the structure of the lessons followed the same pattern as reported in the interview by Anneli, with one exception. The scenario during the observations was somewhat unusual in that the past three lessons for both observed classes had been spent on practice on and administration of a national English test. Therefore, in the beginning of

the lessons some time was spent on discussing how it had gone and showing students the grades they had received. After this both classes had a similar joint session in which the teacher shortly explained a grammar item (tag questions and intonation) and its basic rules and the whole class did a listening comprehension exercise and an oral pair exercise. After the joint session the lesson progressed to the individual work. The students went to find their workbooks and worksheets from a drawer at the back of the class, in which they were left after each lesson. The fluency of the transformation period varied immensely, some beginning their work extremely independently and some being only able to begin after being strongly urged by the teacher.

The practicality of storing the students' workbooks in the classroom can be seen to have two sides. On the one hand it was seen to take unnecessary time away from the classroom to have the students go find their own books. On the other hand, the practice eliminates the possibility of students coming to the class without their books thus making it impossible for students to refer to the absence workbooks as a reason for not being able to work. However, having the students leave their books in the classroom also eliminates the possibility of students returning to the materials at home, which can be seen as problematic. Taking into consideration both the positive and negative effects of doing homework (Cooper 2007: 8-12), it would seem unprofitable for the students to be deprived of the opportunity to study the topics from their workbooks at home. Still, this is not to say that Anneli had completely dismissed the use of homework as she had given students assignments that were to be completed within a longer timeframe. This assignment included different options for students to choose from, so in Anneli's case the degree of personalization extended to homework as well.

Moreover, the classroom in Anneli's case is organized so that the tables are in groups of four and the students are allowed to sit with whom they choose to. During the observations there were two to four students in each group. According to Anneli and as seen during the observations, the students go fluently from working on some exercises alone to working on others with a partner (the person sitting next to them or someone completely different) and discussing the tasks with their group during the extent of one lesson. This could suggest that the learners are actually working in their zone of proximal development and using each other for scaffolding (Vygotsky 1978). In the first observed group, of the 18 students all but four students worked mainly alone (the four worked in pairs). Still, even those working mainly working alone asked their group for

help when needed and did pair work together with someone sitting in their group. In the second group of 18 students only three preferred to work mainly alone whereas four students worked in pairs and the rest in groups of three to four people.

The assessment procedures in Anneli's implementation were quite straightforward. Most significantly, she has abandoned traditional course exams but maintained summative vocabulary and grammar tests, which, along with the materials and the exercises and tasks, have been differentiated for each level. In practice this means that at the Survival level there might be less words to study for a vocabulary test, and that at the Expert level the test requires more free production. Anneli also asserts that work done during the lessons is greatly emphasized in the assessment. Occasionally she has used other avenues of assessment as well. For instance, she described an oral exam in which the students were to present a dialogue to her in pairs. One of these oral tests was performed in the second group during the observation. Finally, Anneli also used written assignments to some extent.

Due to logistical reasons, it is not possible for Anneli's students to leave the classroom to find another place to work. A positive consequence of this is that it is quite simple for Anneli to circle the classroom to help and observe all of the students. Compared to her previous, more traditional way of teaching, in the new arrangement Anneli attested to feeling more involved and active during the lessons. This was supported by the evidence from the observations, as Anneli was seen to work multiple roles in the classroom in the span of a one lesson. As the lessons began with teacher-led sessions, Anneli acted as a lecturer and a director of actions, strongly in control of the classroom. When moving on to the independent work, however, Anneli began to go around the classroom giving support to those who needed it, verifying the student's work and listening to them. In addition, during the first lesson she directed her resources to making sure that a student who was supposed to do a vocabulary test started it in time so she was able to finish it in peace. She also reminded the class of an outside-the-classroom task (i.e. homework) that they were supposed finish, and made efforts to keep the class focused on the work they were supposed to be doing. Furthermore, during the second lesson she held an oral test for one pair as noted above.

4.2.3 Maria

It seems logical to follow Anneli's section with Maria's, as her initial implementation was in fact quite similar to those of Minna and Anneli. Initially her implementation functioned so that her students set their goals according to the same three levels (Survival, Standard and Expert), after which they proceeded to study the chapters one by one, being provided separate instructions for each chapter. She, however, was not satisfied with this, and neither were her students. The criticism from students was that the work was too monotonous and seemed endless. Maria also noticed that the extrinsic motivation of aspiring for a certain grade was not sufficient was not enough of an incentive to sustain students' motivation.

Maintaining the concept of the three target levels from which her students choose the appropriate one, Maria began developing the implementation further so that the focus was not the chapters of a workbook, but on the themes presented in them. At the time of the interview, Maria's implementation was organized so that she chose the themes deemed most important for the students and directed her efforts on how to best go through them. In addition to making use of the workbook they have (*Top*) and its online-material, Maria searches the internet for appropriate sources and uses older workbooks they still have at their school after changing their book series. She explained that she wants to provide her students with as many sources of materials as possible, pointing out that the internet is full of videos and audio tracks suitable for educational purposes if one is willing to spend time looking for them. Additionally, Maria states she makes some materials herself, especially for assessment purposes.

(6) V: sit mä lähin siit vähän kerii- kehittäään taas eri suuntaan et nyt mä oon yrittäny lähtee niinku enemmän teemalähtösesi sitte että . et ottaa niinku sieltä . kappaleesta poimii niitä . opiskeltavia vaikka viestintäteemoja tai sellasia. ja niitä on voinu sit opiskella sieltä kirjasta tai mä oon ettiny paljon niinku . tota . niinku rinnakkaislähteitä et. meil on just vaihettu kirjasarja nii mul on viel niit vanhojaki kirjoja .

H: okei .

V: ja sielt löytää kato sitte niit samoja . teemoja tai netistähän löytää sit ihan älyttömästi erilaisii videoita ja kuunteluita ja sellasii ku vaa viittii että et mä oon yrittäny mahollisimman paljon nyt . niinku saada sellast erilaisia . niinku lähteitä että ei opiskeltas niinku kirjaa vaa kirjaa käytettäs . sellasena manuaalina tavallaa enemmänki . (Maria)

(6) IE: then I began to dere- develop it in another direction so now I've tried to begin from like a more theme-based perspective so . that . I take from the like . chapter I pick the . studied for example communication themes or something like that . and they've been able to study them from the book or I've tried to search for a lot of alternative sources so . we've just changed the book series we use so I still have some of the old books.

IR: okay .

IE: so you can find the same themes there you know . or on the internet you can find oodles of different videos and listening exercises and stuff like that if you just take the trouble to look for them so I've tried to get as many sources as possible so that we wouldn't just be studying the book . but that we would use it kind of more like a manual . (Maria)

When beginning a new topic or a theme, Maria gives her students the instructions for that theme. If that theme includes a grammar item, Maria has a joint session with the whole class where she explains its core material. After this students are given the opportunity to choose the order in which they want to proceed and which parts they want to prioritize. The students in her classroom are encouraged to work together. Furthermore, the pace at which students progress through the worksheets is individual, but Maria felt the need to set some deadlines in the developed version so that even her less motivated students would be forced to work at a certain minimum pace. Similarly to Anneli, Maria spends her lessons helping students, observing them and encouraging them to work. She also states to be active in checking that the students actually understand the things they are studying and correcting them when necessary, especially with grammar items. Contrary to Anneli's logistical situation, Maria is able to let her students choose where they prefer to work, be it the classroom, couches on the corridor, or the computer room. This has at times caused some controversy with the other teaching personnel as they have felt uncomfortable having her students roam around the school freely, making noise and being unsupervised.

Moreover, again similarly to Anneli, Maria has replaced traditional exams with other assessment methods. She explained that this action was taken mainly because she wanted to stress to all her students the value she put on the work they do, not only how well they do on an exam. Maria's assessment practices are extremely diverse as she has her students complete a number of tasks that they hand in such as essays, recorded discussions or readings. She also has short tests on for example grammar items that are used for both summative and formative purposes. The use of diverse assessment practices are encouraged by the National Core Curriculum (2014: 48). In order to keep clear on which tasks each of her students have completed, Maria has check-lists where she marks grades and comments on the students' work. She highlights the necessity of this as, at least for her, it would be impossible to remember it all. In addition, Maria uses self-assessments and takes time from her lessons to have one-on-one discussions with the students in which they talk about how well they are doing, what the students have enjoyed doing and what their strengths and weaknesses are. In Maria's view, this

practice has been essential because being removed from the classroom setting has enabled her students have to be quite genuine and honest, presumably with the teacher as well as with themselves.

4.2.4 Johanna

Moving on from the two implementations that had used Minna's work as a starting point, the focus of this section is on the implementation by Johanna. As described in section 4.1 Johanna's motive for altering her education towards the personalized approach was somewhat different than with the other three interviewees. Johanna began developing her approach on the basis of the realization that perhaps it was not necessary for her to teach the whole class at once as it did not seem natural to her. As opposed to the three implementations described above, hers is quite different. She explained that the idea that she would make exercise lists which students are supposed to complete seemed foreign to her. Therefore, she chose to offer her students more freedom to take responsibility for their own learning.

(7) en tiä mulle vähä tuntuu taas sitte vieraalta tosi tarkat sellaset niinku . jotkut monisteet johon on vaikka listattu että tee tää ja tää ja tää tehtävä . ja . sit saa niinku mennä eteenpäin että . mä annoin aika paljon vapautta . kyllä oppilaille sitte siihe omaan oppimiseen . (Johanna)

(7) I don't know it feels a little strange to me to have really precise like . some handouts where you've listed do this this and this exercise . and . then you get to move on so . I gave quite a lot of freedom . to the student for their own learning . (Johanna)

Johanna gave her student the liberty to determine type of work was best suited for them for majority of their English lessons. Hence, what actually takes place during her lessons differs quite a lot depending on the group. Generally she still uses the materials of the workbook they have (*Spotlight*), and she explains that one group has opted to spend a lot of their time completing exercises from there on their own. With another group the approach has led to a completely opposite direction as they have preferred to learn through discussions. In addition, with this group they do a lot of work in small groups in which they also play academic games, etc. She has, however, kept one to two fifths of the lessons as teacher-led, joint lessons in order to make sure that the students do not completely ignore some avenues of the language. In these lessons they practice for example listening comprehension, and with the groups that prefer to work alone,

there is also some practice of oral skills. Furthermore, similarly to Anneli in terms of space, Johanna is limited to her classroom.

Johanna had given the responsibility of assigning homework to the students themselves and stated that she did not supervise whether the students had returned to the work at home. Taking into consideration the positive and negative effects of doing homework (Cooper 2007: 8-12) and the pursuit of learner autonomy, the validity of this practice can be debated. There are numerous positive effects that have been found to accompany the completion of homework. Therefore, even though homework can vary in the way it is realized in the eight variables suggested by Cooper (2007: 4-8), some sort of intentional language learning outside of school hours can be beneficial for the learners. This can be accomplished, for example, with larger assignments that have a longer timeframe of completion as in Anneli's case. Furthermore, the end-goal of personalized learning can be seen to develop students' ownership of their learning which necessitates the practice of autonomy (Mäenpää 2016: 41). However, as pointed out by Dickinson (1994: 3), in order to be able to practice autonomy over their decision making, learners need to practice this skill. Hence, some sort of gradually increasing practice of autonomy over homework could be beneficial for learners' development of decision-making skills.

Assessment-wise Johanna has still remained somewhat traditional. She has maintained summative assessment practices that consist of vocabulary and grammar tests as well as larger exams. She has, however, included her students in the assessment process in that they check and score them themselves, which she had found to be a particularly profitable practice. This was because, as the students checked their work themselves, they were forced to pay closer attention to the mistakes they were making, which helped them to see the importance of properly learning the vocabulary as each letter in a word has its significance. When discussing the idea of having some sort of division of target levels of attainment similar to the ones by Minna, Anneli and Maria, Johanna expressed her interest in developing her approach in this direction. She had heard about the idea in the Educa -fair that she had attended past January and from the Facebook groups dedicated for the approach, but had not yet had the time to familiarize herself properly with the concept. She did, however, express her plans to spend some time on the topic during the following summer, possibly creating her own version of the target level concept.

4.2.5 Helena

Finally, as depicted above in section 4.1, Helena's path to personalized learning was somewhat different to the other teachers as she had begun developing her approach without being aware of Peura's model for personalized learning. Therefore, it is clear that the actualization would be somewhat different from the others, but also that the thinking behind it might not be consistent with the ideas put forward by Peura. In addition, her experiments were limited to one upper secondary school course (course 5) in particular, which she had found especially suitable for this type of an approach⁵. She explained that as the course is already constructed from four different themes (visual arts, music, cinema and literature) it is rather easy to divide the course into separate units. Helena has made worksheets for each of the themes, which she shares to her students as hard copies, but also soft copies through the network Google Classroom that they have in use. Through this network, as well as the online material of the workbook they are using (*Open Road*), she shares most of the material for the course, which the students are then able to use when appropriate. This material consists of, for instance, exercises, listening and reading material, and the correct answers to the completed exercises. In addition to using the electronic platforms, they also have physical versions of the workbook that they use consistently.

In Helena's application, she has assigned her students pairs in which they complete the assigned work for each theme. The pairs are arranged so that the person they work with is relatively close to their own skill level, determined by Helena herself. As mentioned above, Helena gives her students a worksheet in which she has articulated what she would like for the students to complete. The students are, however, given the liberty to determine for themselves the pace and the learning strategies they apply to their studies.

(8) niin . työparin kans he etenee sit omaa tahtii he pystyy . kirjan nettisivult kuunteleen kappalee ja . ja tekemään . tekemään sit niit tehtävii . ku he nyt on jo monta kurssii mun kans . käyny lukio . englantii ni he tietää työtavat kuitenkin et mikä . mikä on sellai järkevä ja mitä kannattaa tehdä . et he saa sit omaa tahtii tehdä he saa valita vähä et . et mikä . mikä heit enemmän kiinnostaa ja nopeimmat tekee kaikki ja sit mul on semmosii ylimääräsii . kirjoitustetävii tai jotai muita . muita siin sit . mitä tekevät sit omaa tahtiin sen . sen yhde

⁵For a description of the course see LOPS 2003: 117. In the new curriculum the culture course is course 3, of which you can find information on LOPS 2015: 117).

kokonaisuuden aikaa sit meil on . jossain välis on aina . semmosii yhteisii hetkii tunnin alussa et saattaa olla jotain yhteis aktiviteettii tai sit on . kielioppi esimerkiksi nin . käydään niit . pikkasen . hankalat asiat . tavallaan luennoin koko ryhmälle . ja tarkistetaa jotai tehtävii ja katotaa niit vaikeit kohtii . mut muuten he . tekee sen työparin kans . etenee sit omaa tahtii aina sen yhden kokonaisuuden . (Helena)

(8) so . with their partner they move on at their own pace they can . from the book's website listen to a chapter and . and do . do the exercises . when they've already worked with me for many courses . been to upper secondary school . English . so they now the study techniques and what . what's like useful and what they should do . so they get to work at their own pace they get to choose a little that . that what . what they're more interested in and the fastest ones do everything and then I have these extra . writing assignments or other stuff . other stuff there then . which they do at their own pace for the . the one unit then we have . at some point always . these joint moments at the beginning of a lesson so we can have some joint activities or then we have . grammar for example so . we go through those . a little . the tricky things . I kind of lecture to the whole group . and then we check some exercises and look at the difficult parts . but otherwise they . work with their partners . and proceed at their own pace for the one unit . (Helena)

Some freedom is also given content-wise so that the students are able to focus more on the topics in which they are most interested. Helena stresses that as the students attending the course have already attended several of her upper secondary school English courses (she is the only English teacher in their school), they should by now be able to determine what type of activities can be deemed as a sensible use of their study time. As with the other interviewees, Helena has some joint sessions with the whole group on particularly tricky grammar items and such. At times they also do activities that engage the whole class.

Helena's assessment procedures consist of vocabulary tests after each unit, written assignments and pair and/or self-assessment. From the essays and other written work that she collected from her students during the course, she stated to have noticed that the students had actually learned quite a lot, and had been able to apply those things in their writing. Much like in Johanna's case, in Helena's implementation homework is assigned and checked by the students themselves. With regards to the physical setting, Helena is in the same fortunate position as Maria that she is able to let her students leave the classroom and find a suitable working place for example on the couches located in the corridor.

To conclude the presentation of implementations, let us briefly discuss their differences and similarities. Clearly, as Anneli and Maria had leaned on Minna's work to develop their actualizations of the approach, theirs were the most similar. They shared the element of the target level division which was not present in the implementations of Helena and Johanna. Yet, their implementations were not completely identical, as Maria

had moved further from the chapters of the workbook and focused her implementation on themes. This focus on themes was shared by Helena. All of the participants used some form of small group learning, even though it manifested in various ways. All of the interviewees also attested to using joint sessions to some extent. Maria and Helena were able to let their students work outside the classroom as well, whereas Anneli and Johanna were restricted in this sense. None of the participants seemed to use homework in any consistent manner, although Helena, Anneli and Maria did mention using take-home assignments in their assessment. Assessment practices were varied in the implementations, Johanna's being the most conventional with a strong emphasis on traditional testing. Smaller summative tests were used by Anneli and Helena, whereas Minna used small tests purely for formative purposes. Assessment discussions were used by Minna and Maria, whereas self-assessments were used by these two and Helena. Actual oral tests were reportedly only used by Anneli.

4.3 Advantages and disadvantages according to the teachers

Attempting to respond to the second of the primary research questions, this section is dedicated to present the advantages and disadvantages of a personalized approach as identified by the participating teachers. The emerged advantages and disadvantages are synthesized so that they are presented through the themes or concepts with which they are in connection. The themes that arose are the following: (1) self-paced learning, (2) autonomy, (3) motivation and concentration, (4) small-group work, (5) technology, (6) outcomes, (7) target level system, (8) teacher-student relationship, (9) availability of teacher's assistance, and (10) demands on teacher resources. These findings are based on the data from all three sources, although interviews can be seen to have had the greatest role for this section. It is important to note that all of the participating teachers were quite excited about their experiments and thus might be inclined to present their experiences in a highly positive light. All of the interviewees expressed their plans to continue to apply and develop the approach.

4.3.1 Self-paced learning

With the exception of Johanna, all of the interviewed teachers were strongly of the opinion that the most prominent advantage of a personalized is that students are given the freedom to proceed at their own pace. Therefore, it seems logical to begin the

presentation of teacher stated advantages and disadvantages with self-paced learning. This aspect of personalized learning was deemed advantageous for all students, as it allows the more advanced ones to focus their time and energy on learning new things and to advance as far as they want in the subject, and the less advanced ones to learn the basics properly. This property of self-paced learning has generally been viewed as its most essential advantage (Eyre 2007: 317). Maria exemplified quite well both sides of this advantage.

(9) V: et mä oon tykänny hirveesti . tai niinku se että et ni . siel on niit hyviä . joitten ei tarvi odotella nyt sitä että. et nää yhet ke- kaivaa vartin kirjaa siel- . niinku laukustaan . vaa et nää pääsee saman tien tekee hommia ja etenee . etenee eteenpäin . ja . ja tota sit toisaalta . mul on esimerkiks yks sellanen jolla on aika paha lukivaikeus . ja hänel oli niinku aina ongelmana se et hän ei ikinä kerrenny tehä normaalisti niinku hän kerkes alottaa tehtävän siin vaiheessa ku muut on jo tehny aikaa sitte sen tehtävän ja . sit hänel oli aina sellain olo et . et ku hän on niin hirveen hidas ja hän ei kerkee oppii mitään . niin nyt ku hän on saanu tehä omaa tahtia niin ne on ne niinku tuloksetkin menny niinku huikkeesti eteenpäin . et ku saa sillee rauhassa . rauhassa opetella ja . ja tehä niitä . (Maria)

(9) IE: so i've really liked it . or it's like . there's those good ones who no longer have to wait around for these other guys to spend fifteen minutes finding their books. but that they can start working right away and . move . move on . forward and . and then again . I have for example this student who has a pretty bad dyslexia . and for him/her the problem was that she normally never had the time to like when she got started on an exercise the others had done it a long time ago . and it made him/her feel like he's/she's really slow and he/she doesn't have time to learn anything . so now that she has gotten to do them at his/her pace she has made so much progress because she can study and do them in peace . (Maria)

Maria stated, on the one hand, that those who are eager to begin working are able to do so without being slowed down by those who are not. On the other hand, she described the situation of one of her students who is dyslexic. Maria stated that she was previously unable to give enough time for this student to finish the given exercises, as they as a group had to move forward. Now, with the facilitated individualization of pace, this student is able to take her time to actually learn. Helena has also noticed this effect on both sides quite strongly. According to her, especially her advanced students have rejoiced this advantage as they are now committed to doing even more work than is asked of them. Then again, she stated that also the students who need more time have now been able to take their time and are more inclined to ask for help when they need it. As a result, learning is improved for students at both ends of the continuum. This, according to Anneli, becomes especially highlighted in English where the differences between students' skill levels can be extreme and differentiation within a group is necessary no matter what type of approach is used.

However, the interviewed teachers had also noticed the most often cited downside of self-paced learning: problems with time management (e.g. Eppler and Ironsmith 2004, Eyre 2007). Perhaps at least partly due to a lack of autonomy and intrinsic motivation, students' inability manage their time efficiently had manifested itself as a problem for Minna, Maria and Johanna. They all stated that due to the fact that students are not accustomed to be given the responsibility of scheduling their own work, some of them were unable to complete the required work in time. Johanna noted that it is therefore her task to somehow provide additional support for these students while they get accustomed to the new practices. The three recourses to do this suggested by research are (1) teacher-set deadlines (Eppler and Ironsmith 2004), (2) learner-set deadlines (Roberts et al. 1988), or (3) reward and penalty system (Reiser 1984). Of the interviewees, Helena and Maria stated to have used teacher set deadlines. Minna had considered using a reward system to encourage learners to finish their work ahead of schedule. In addition, Maria had contemplated the use of learner-set deadlines at least to a certain extent. This practice is supported by the findings of Roberts et al. (1988), who discovered that self-scheduling caused accelerated pacing rates without detriment to academic performance.

Moreover, Helena stated that had not had any problems with students spending lesson time for other activities. She suggested that this might be because the students are given the same worksheets with an extensive amount of tasks and encouraged to do as much as they can in the given timeframe. As a result they attempt to get as much done as possible. It is necessary to remark here that Helena's students are older than the other interviewees' as she teaches in upper secondary school and the other teachers teach in secondary school. Helena as well had noticed similar problems of procrastination with self-paced study when attempting a personalized approach with her first-year students. Therefore it might be that age has some claim in students' capability for pacing own learning.

More specifically, Maria stated to have noticed that depth and scope of learning had changed when the students were given the power to determine how much time they spend on a topic.

(10) ja mä luulen että . että monella se oppiminen on syventyny . et . se ehkä on tavallaa se laajuus kaventunu koska . näitten . oppilaitten oma tahti on . käytännös aina . aika paljon hitaampi ku mikä olis se mun normi opetustahti jos mentäs sillee . sillee niinku koko

luokkana ... mut mä luulen että se sit taas korvautuu sillä . et sit ne myös ku ne tekee niit omaa tahtia ne myös ehkä työstää niit vähä sillee niinku syvemmin . ja he . ehtii niit opiskellaki tai oppia vähä paremmin kanssa . ainaki mä luotan siihe ((nauraa)) (Maria)

(10) and I think that, that for many students learning has become more deeper . that . maybe in a way the scope has become more narrow because . these . students' own pace is . practically always . quite a lot slower than my normal teaching pace would be if we were going like . like as a whole class ... but I also think that it's replaced by that . that then they also when they do them at their own pace they also maybe work on them a little like deeper . and they . have time to study or learn a little better as well . at least I trust that ((laughs)) (Maria)

According to her experience students practically always spend much more time on a topic that they would with a teacher-led approach, studying the themes more thoroughly than they conventionally would. Maria assesses that this might not only be a negative outcome, as she saw it highly likely that their learning has also become deeper. If this were proven to be true, it could be argued that these learners are attaining a level of mastery they would not have attained through conventional teaching techniques. Nevertheless, as the total amount of time available is set, this inevitably also means that they are able to cover a smaller number of items. As presented in association with theory on mastery learning in section 2.3, the effect of a diminished number of covered items might only be caused by an adjustment period and very likely be reversed after the period is over (Arlin 1973, Fitzpatrick 1985). What is more, according to the findings of Arlin (1973) and Fitzpatrick (1985), after the adjustment period, time might actually be better directed at learning, therefore making it more efficient. Still, even if there was no detectable increase in the covered number of items after the adjustment period, its negative impact might not be as self-evident as it might seem. With the new National Core Curriculum (2014), teachers are increasingly less restricted in this respect as it does not identify any specific topic to be covered in secondary school. This means that teachers are now more free to judge themselves whether this change in learning depth and scope is an advantage or a disadvantage.

4.3.2 Autonomy

Another advantage strongly emphasized by the participating teachers is that with a personalized approach, students are allowed to practice and increase their learner autonomy. As pointed out by Minna, in personalized learning it is at least equally important to learn to take responsibility for one's own learning as it is to learn the content of the subject (Ala-Akkala 2015b). She stresses that being able to take responsibility for their learning will help the learners much more than learning a

particular grammar item. Johanna commented on this topic as well, stating that she felt that if students were able to take responsibility for their learning, it might help them with the concept in general. Furthermore, Maria asserted that those who are willing and able to adopt the approach have a strong chance of learning to be more autonomous. She even goes on to state that to her, building the students' autonomy might be the most important feature of this type of an approach as it can, hopefully, provide the students with the necessary tools to learn a language later on in life.

(11) H: et mun mielest se on ehkä se kaikkein tärkein . tärkein juttu mikä täs on että sitte . sitte on niinku . on se sellane valmius siellä myöhemminkin vaikka sitten itsenäisesti opiskella kieltä . jos sielt vähän jotenki saa sitä että no ku mä teen tällasia juttuja ni sit . sillehän mä opin sielläkin ni . en tiedä . ehkä tää on toiveajattelua . (Maria)

(11) IE: so I think its maybe the most important . important thing in this is that then . then you have like . have a kind of preparedness there to later on even if it was independently to study a language . if you get a little something that when I do these things then . that's how I learned there too so . I don't know . maybe this is wishful thinking . (Maria)

As observed by Lüftenegger et al. (2012: 33-34), providing students with the possibility to practice autonomy over their own learning has been shown to increase students' interest towards learning, learning-goal orientation and present higher levels of self-efficacy. These determinants have been shown to increase the prospect of lifelong learning, which has been set as a goal for English teaching by the National Core Curriculum (2014: 401). In addition to being able to take responsibility for their learning, Maria states that students who have adapted well to the new practices have been increasingly confident in assessing their own learning in different areas. This progress is not only seen positive by the participating teachers, it is also in accordance with the National Core Curriculum (2014: 401), which states as one of the goals of English teaching to encourage students to assess their learning independently and in collaboration with others.

Moreover, Anneli, Maria and Johanna all stress that in the personalized approach it becomes highlighted that it is impossible for a teacher to make students learn anything, but that they themselves need to be receptive to the information provided to them and be willing to spend the time and effort necessary for learning.

(12) V: että . ne on ollu . se on ollu huvittavaa justii että . monet on just sitä tajunnu että tää yksilöllinen oppiminen niinku pakottaa o- . niinku . oppilaan sillee niinku oppimaa enemmän . et jos oikeesti siis opiskelee että siis . niinku . et . opettaja ei enää sillee . kaadakkaa tietoo niinku päähä . vaa että niinku oppilas ite joutuu oikeesti niinku . oppimaan . iteki että . sen oon kyllä niinku huomannu . (Johanna)

(12) IE: so they've been . it's been amusing that . many students have realized that this personalized approach like forces to l- . like . the student to learn more . that if you really study so that . like the teacher doesn't like . pour information into their heads . but that the students themselves have to like . learn . themselves that . that I've noticed . (Johanna)

Johanna explains that she has found it somewhat amusing that with the introduction of a personalized approach, some students have realized that they actually have to study and do the learning themselves, and that the teacher does not, and in fact cannot, pour the information into their heads. Learning therefore truly becomes the responsibility of students, whereas it is the responsibility of the teacher to provide the students with appropriate circumstances for learning. Johanna had also noticed a certain relief that accompanied this realization on her part. As the responsibility for learning is now more on the shoulders of the students, student's failure to learn is no longer necessarily due to her own shortcomings, but might be because the learner did not put in enough effort.

Finally, Johanna, who had opted to give her students quite a lot of liberty in regards to what they work on and how, detected that perhaps some students could benefit from more precise instructions on what to do.

(13) ja sitte toisaalta myös nyt ku mul ei ollu mitään sellasia niin tarkkoja että nää ja nää tehtävät pitää tehdä . ni sitte . huomasi että tietyillä oppilailla oli ongelmia niinku . sitte niinku välillä että ne ei oikee tienny mitä ne sitte niinku tekis koska kyllähä . työkirjastaki löytyy nii paljon tehtäviä että . että . sit just rupes miettimään sitä että jotkut oppilaat vois kyllä selkeesti hyötyä jos ois sellaset . yksityiskohtasemmat ohjeet . tai niinku . jotenki enemmän sellasta niinku . tietyllä tapaa et ois pakko tehdä jotain että . just ku mul oli aika vapaata se kuitenkin . (Johanna)

(13) and then again also now that I haven't had any precise like these and these exercises must be done . so like . noticed that some particular students had problems like . then like at times they didn't really know what they should do because . there are so many exercises in the workbook that . that . then I just started to think that some students could clearly benefit from having . more detailed instructions . or like . somehow more of like . in a way that you'd have to do something that . because I had it quite free . (Johanna)

As the workbook is filled with exercises, it was difficult for some to determine for themselves which ones would be useful for their learning purposes. On the other hand, Johanna expounded that she had been working with the same students for some time now so they should be familiar with the amount and manner of completion expected of them. Therefore, she stated that she feels they should, by now, be in possession of the tools necessary for them to make these choices independently. This discovery would, however, suggest the learners' need for more supported practice in this respect before

the learners' can be expected to exercise autonomy over their decision-making (Dickinson 1994: 3).

4.3.3 Motivation and concentration

An issue that has been raised by several of the interviewees is that this type of approach asks quite a lot from the students, and might not be suited for everyone. This section focuses on problems the participating teachers had had with learner concentration and motivation. Maria had identified two groups of students she has had the most problems with regarding the new working arrangement: those who have problems with concentration and those who have problems with motivation. Students of the first type, according to her, require more attention from the teacher, as they might have problems choosing where to begin, remembering where they were, misreading instructions, and so forth. Maria claims that whether an approach like this works well with this types of students it is very much in the hands of the students themselves. She stated to have students who have this type of problems but who have been willing and able to adopt the new practices, but also those who struggle with it. This experience of having problems with concentration was shared by other interviewees as well. Johanna, on the other hand, had had some problems with the rising noise level with one of her groups, which had caused some problems with concentration. Unfortunately it is not possible for her to let her students work outside the classroom but she had, however, been able to somewhat limit this with having a discussion with the students about keeping their volume a little lower. Still, she later stated that there were some who had problems with concentration that demonstrated a drop in the score they attained in the exams. Anneli on the other hand stated that she herself has not really had to deal with either type of students, but she was aware of a situation of one of her colleague's students who is quite skilled in English but has been unable to get any work done during the lessons. As a result, he/she had been transferred to spend his/her English lessons working in a smaller classroom with his/her own personal space so he/she could concentrate.

In addition to having problems with concentration, some of Maria's students had had problems with finding motivation for doing the necessary work. It is clear that this type of an approach requires students to participate more actively in their learning process and to take more responsibility for their learning. Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) suggest ten ways with which teachers can help learners become more motivated in their learning. A

personalized approach offers direct means to put at least three of these into action: promoting learner autonomy, personalizing the learning process, and increasing students' goal-orientedness. However, even though it has been shown that practicing learner autonomy can increase motivation, it also demands it (Little 2004, cited in Hall 2011: 156-157). It is understandable that an approach that requires this much of them can be difficult for some students to adopt.

Consequently, Maria doubts the effectiveness approach with these students, admitting that in conventional, teacher-led classes they might accidentally learn something as they are forced to pay at least minimal attention when checking exercises and such. Currently she has no real solutions to offer in regards to these students and identifies this as something she needs to develop further. For now Maria has contented herself with reminding these students what they are supposed to be doing ones or twice during a lesson. Helena on her part pointed out that because of the amount of work and responsibility that is required from students with this type of an approach, it might not be wise to apply it consistently into all teaching. She explained that even though she is very content with this type of an approach for this one particular course, she does not and would not apply it to all of her courses. Helena sees the approach as sort of a refreshment from the traditional teaching in other courses.

To conclude, it must be acknowledged that it is unfortunate that there are students who do not benefit from the personalized approach. However, as presented by Anneli, it is impossible to find a system that would work for absolutely everyone.

(14) mut että tota . niihän se on et ei mikään systeemi nyt niinku . sataprosenttisesti sovi että ainahan on sitte joku . joka ehkä . enemmän hyötyis jostain toisesta systeemistä mutta kyllä me ollaan koettu että tosi isolle osalle tää on niinku hyvä . (Anneli)

(14) but well . it's a fact that no system can like . fit a hundred percent that . there's always someone who . who maybe . would benefit more from some other system but we've felt that this works for a really big portion of students. (Anneli)

Anneli points out that even though some students might be more comfortable with some other approach, for most of her students this type of approach has been well suited. Furthermore, all of the participating teachers had had mostly positive feedback from their students, supporting the perception that this type of a personalized approach can be beneficial for most learners. For a more detailed discussion of teacher viewed student reception see section 4.4.1.

4.3.4 Small-group work

As all of the participants had, at least partially, organized their students to work in pairs or in small groups, this practice is another issue that requires consideration. As noted above, Anneli let her students choose their groups themselves. She claims this liberty to have both a positive and a negative side. On the one hand, she had noticed that the students work well when they get to work with people with whom they get along. As pointed out in section 2.3.3, Vuorinen (2001: 101-102) states that learners' often feel the most content with groups they have been able choose, at least to some extent, themselves. On the other hand, Anneli acknowledges that for some it is difficult to constrain themselves to stay on topic when working with friends. However, even with groups that at times succumb to this, Anneli has chosen to let them work together in order to provide them with the opportunity to practice taking responsibility for themselves. Nevertheless, she acknowledges that this means she has to spend more time supervising them and reminding them to work, and that with some groups this solution might be impossible to carry out.

Anneli also admitted to being concerned in advance that her students would divide into working only with those that have chosen the same level as them. This concern, however, was proven unnecessary as the students were more interested in the social texture of their group than the academic one. Consequently, the groups that emerged were extremely heterogeneous in their skills, which enabled the stronger students to help the weaker ones. This, according to Anneli, is advantageous to both parties and, as discovered during the observation sessions, happens naturally and frequently during the lessons. This is in accordance with the findings of Webb (1982) and Slavin (1991) for example, who argue that heterogeneous groups benefit both low and high achieving students due to the increased quality and quantity of interaction. Maria also applauds her students in this regard, describing in detail the actions of one group in particular.

(15) H: siel on niinku tosi hyviä sellasii porukoita jotka on löytäny tosi hyvii sellasii systeemeitä (mullon) kasiluokkalaisten poikien porukka jotka tota. he haluaa aina tarkistaa kaikki testinsä niinku . keskenään ite . niin niillon ihan mielettömän hienoi keskusteluja siitä että . hei sä et oo muistanu nyt ollenkaan niinku laittaa näitä 's' (että) nyt sä oot jo niinku (tehny nää) . taivuttanu verbit ihan väärin . etkö muista että ehtolauseessa sä et voi [käyttää

H: ((nauraa))

V: tota] muotoo tai . hei nyt sul on tuplakielto täällä et voi laittaa kahta kieltoo yhtee lauseeseen ja . ihan älyttömän hienoja keskusteluja . koska . siis nehän oppii ihan älyttömästi

siitä kun ne korjaa toisiltaan sitä ja osaa perustella sen et miks sä oot väärässä ((nauraen))
tässä asiassa ja miks mä oon oikeessa . nii ihan älyttömän hienoja . (Maria)

(15) IE: there's these really good groups who've found these really good systems (I have)
this group of 8th grade boys who . they always want to check their tests like . together by
themselves . so they have these really incredible conversations about that . hey you didn't
remember at all to put these 's' that you've done like . conjugated these all wrong . don't
you remember that in a conditional clause you can't [use

IR: ((laughs))

IE: this] form or that . hey now you've got a double negative here you can't have
two negatives in one sentence and . like ridiculously amazing conversations because . they
learn so much from correcting those for each other and being able to justify why the other
person is wrong ((laughing)) on this issue and why I'm right . so they're just amazing .
(Maria)

Maria explained that this one particular group always wants to check their tests themselves and, perhaps more importantly, they prefer to do it together with their group. As a result they, correct each other's mistakes, and are able to have quite accomplished discussions validating their corrections with grammatical rules.

Moreover, Johanna had had a similar experience to that of Maria, stating that now that the students are encouraged to work together more than before, they are able to learn from each other. She also described the experience she had had with one group in particular, in which a student had taken the task of being teaching four other students.

(16) ja sitte . se oli kyllä hauskaa myös siin mun kasiluokan kanssa ni . siinähan muodostu sellane . yks joka on tosi hyvä englannissa ni . hän sitte otti itteelleen sellasen . neljän hengen porukan ja hän rupes niinku heille opettajaks et hänel oli heille niinku . no melkeen niinku tuntisuunnitelmat aina tehtynä että . tällä tunnilla käydään nää ja nää asiat ja . nii ja tosiaan mulla oli myös se et oppilaat sai ite tehä ne sanakokeet ja muut millo ne halus . et ne vaan sano mulle että nyt tehään tänään niin ne sitte teki ne et ei oo ollu mitään sellasia . päiviä valmiiks valittu et millo ne pitää tehä että . että tota . ne sitte ite päätti ni . se ju- . huomasi just silleensä että tää . yks oppilas joka nyt sit toimi opettajana ni . hän ite nautti tosi paljon siitä ja oppi varmasti paljon ja . ja . selkeesti huomasi sitten että ne . hänen oppilaansakin sitte niinku tykkäs siitä . tosi paljon että ... (Johanna)

(16) and then . another thing that was fun in my 8th grade group was that . there was this . one student who was really good at English so . he/she took upon himself/herself . this group of four people and became their teacher so that he/she like . well almost like lesson plans always prepared for them that . during this lesson we'll do this and this and . oh yea and I also had that students could do the vocabulary tests and others whenever they wanted to . we didn't have like . set days for them so . so well . they chose themselves so the ju- . you could see that this . one student who was now working as a teacher . he/she really enjoyed it and surely learned a lot and . and . you could really tell that the . his/her students really liked it to so ... (Johanna)

Johanna explained that this rather achieved student began to plan lessons for these four other students, deciding what they would cover during each lesson and when they would do the vocabulary tests for each section. She expressed her belief that this student and the four other students greatly enjoyed this way of studying, and that it was also

beneficial for their learning. In addition to the special case of this particular group, Johanna appreciates the fact that the students are able and willing to work together and help each other when needed. She pointed out that making use of pair and group work is in accordance with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the zone of proximal development as the students are in this sense able to benefit from the scaffolding provided by each other instead of only benefitting from the support of the teacher.

In Helena's application, she has assigned her students pairs in which they complete the work for each theme. The pairs are arranged so that the person they work with is relatively close to their own skill level, determined by Helena herself. The use of homogeneous groups is supported by Robinson (1990) and Fuchs et al. (1998) who have found homogeneous groups to be particularly beneficial for high achieving students. However, Webb (1982) argues against the use of homogeneous groups, stating that in these groups low achievers are unable to help each other and high achievers communicate ineffectively as they expect the other group members to have the same understanding as them. According to Vygotsky's (1978) thoughts on the ZPD, in order to achieve their level of potential development, learners need to have support of a teacher or more capable peers. His ideas therefore argue against the use of homogeneous groups.

(17) et tota . mä . tunnen ne oppilaat nii hyvin ku mä olen jo neljä kurssii niil jo kaikil opettanu ja . tiedän heidän tasonsa . tosi tarkkaan . ja . se on ollu kauheen palkitsevaa heijänki mielest et se saa sen omantasosen työparin . et joskus ku kurssi alkaa ku mä sanon et mä määrään teil parit ni he on vähä sillai et . aijaa . ja sit ensmäise . tota sen kokonaisuuen jälkeen ni mä saatan kysyy et haluutteks te vaihtaa parei . ei haluta . on yleensä se vai- vastaus . et kyl he sit . nauttii siit ku he saa (se) tehdä vaik ei se nyt olis se paras kaveri joka on sit . kans saman tasonen et yleensä sit . koitan löytää jonkun muun . (Helena)

(17) so . I feel like I know the students so well because I've already taught all of them for four courses and . I know their level . very precisely . and . it's been awfully rewarding in their opinion as well that they get a partner that is on the same level as them . sometimes when the course begins when I say that I will assign you your partners they are a little like . okay . and then after the first unit I might ask that do you want to change partners . no we don't . is usually the answer . so they really . enjoy it when they get to do even if it wasn't their best friend who's . at the same level so usually then . I try to find someone else . (Helena)

Helena, however, justifies her decision for being the one to choose the pairs with the fact that she has gotten to know the students' levels quite precisely during the past courses she has taught them. Moreover, this practice, according to Helena, has been found extremely rewarding by the students. She states that even though they might not

be working with their best friend, they enjoy the cooperation they have with a person that is on an approximately same level as them. She admitted that in the beginning of the course when she announces that she will be assigning their partners for the course, students have often been somewhat hesitant. However, when after the first unit she has asked if they would like to change partners, usually the answer has been no.

The freedom promoted by Perna and Peura (2012) for learners to choose whether to work alone or in pairs or groups might also be in some ways problematic with respect to language learning. Minna stated her concern that even though working on the exercises together is encouraged many choose to plough through them alone. As a result, in her experience finding a partner for the oral exercises has often proven to be difficult, thus causing students to dismiss them. As diverse communication and interaction is part of language learning and emphasized in the curriculum (POPS 2014: 399), it is necessary to have learners practice their oral skills. Therefore, some sort of forced cooperation might in some scenarios be necessary. Minna's experience is in some ways shared, but also opposite to the experience of Anneli. When discussing her students' feedback on having too many oral exercises, Anneli stated that some of her students would prefer to only do exercises from the workbook. Then again, Anneli also claims that even if a situation occurs where all but one of her students have completed an oral exercise, someone would offer to redo the exercise. In addition, she argues that her students are conscientious in that they actually do the exercises they claim to have done. She applauds her students for their flexibility and responsibility in this respect, recognizing however that this might not be the case with all groups. Anneli is able to identify two factors that might have assisted in building such an ideal scenario. Firstly, in the very beginning Anneli set ground rules with her students, one of which was that if someone asks you to do a pair exercise, you have to agree. Secondly, she argues that the atmosphere in her groups is so positive that it is unlikely for anyone to begin misbehaving on their own.

4.3.5 Availability of teacher's assistance

An issue that might also be of concern is whether teachers have enough time to help those who need it, which is the focus of the present section. The interviewees had had different experiences with this, Helena, Anneli and Maria claiming that this was rarely a problem, and Johanna stating that she had at times had a problem with this. An aspect

they were all in agreement with was that the solution to the limited teacher resources is to allow and encourage the students to help each other. Helena even stated that there had been times when she had felt a little unneeded during the lessons as the pairs had been working so independently. Maria expounded on the topic quite well.

(18) ja sit toisaalta myös se että . et vaikka niinku jotenkin kuvittelis että . et opettaja ei mitenkään voi ehtii sitä kahtakymmentä oppilasta siellä nyt niinku neuvoo kaikkia . nii se todellisuushan on oikeestaan se että ihan . isoin osa niistä ei . kaipaakaan sitä neuvomista . ei ainakaan samanaikaisesti . ja sit siel on ne sellaset jotka . jotka ei ikinä siit yhteisestä opetuksesta hyödy . niin nyt niitten kans on sit ihan oikeesti aikaa . niitä käy siel läpi ku mun ei tarvi niinku . hallita koko orkesteria . vaan . osa menee omaa tahtia eteenpäin ja tekee tehtäviä ja tarkistaa tehtäviä ja sit mä voin mennä sinne ja neuvoo niitä jotka sen kuitenkin tarvii sen henkilökohtasen neuvomisen . et must oli . tosi ihana . mä olin just ysien palautteita kirjoj- . tai niinku . niitten itsearvioita käyny läpi ja kirjottanu niille välipalautteita nii . siel oli yks tyttö joka oli laittanu sinne niinku kommentit opettajalle kohtaan et ihanaa et sul on ollu aikaa neuvoo et vaik meit on kaksytäkaks ni . oot kerenny aina tulla neuvomaan ku en oo ymmärtäny mä olin silleen et aa voi vitsi jes tosi ihanaa . nii nää on mun mielest sellasia jotka siin niinku toimii . jutussa . ja niihin oon tosi tyytyväinen . (Maria)

(18) and then again that . that even if you'd imagine that . that a teacher can't possibly have the time to advise all those twenty two students . but the reality is that . most of them don't . need the assistance . at least not at the same time . and then there's those who . who never get anything out of the whole class teaching . so now with those you really have the time . to go through those things because I don't have to like . conduct the whole orchestra . and . most of them just go through exercises and check exercises and then I can go there and help the ones who'd need the personal assistance anyway . so I thought it was . really amazing . and I had just written 9th graders feedback . or like . gone through their self-assessments and written them their middle feedbacks so . there was this one girl you had put there like comments to the teacher section that it's great that you've always had time to help even though there's twenty two of us . you've always had time to come and help when I haven't understood so I was like aww yay that's amazing . so I think these are the type of things that really work . in the thing . so I'm really pleased . (Maria)

Maria attested that in reality many of the students do not need the teacher's help, especially not simultaneously. She explained that now that she does not have to spend so much time controlling the group, she has time to help those who would need personal guidance no matter how much time she spent teaching the whole class at once. This feeling of sufficiency was supported by a feedback she had received from a student, admiring the fact that she always seems to have time to come help her when she had needed it, even though there were over 20 other students in their class. Moreover, Anneli had discovered that this was not a problem mainly because the students are now encouraged even more to use one another as a resource. With the new arrangement, if someone is faced with a problem, it is easier to turn to the group for help and, in the event that they are not able to help, the group would turn to the teacher. Anneli stresses, however, that this does not mean that she would have any excess time, as she still has to

spend the lessons helping the groups when necessary and, for example, listening to the oral exercises that require her signature.

4.3.6 Technology

Even though having technological equipment available for students and being able to use them productively is not entirely necessary for a successful application of a personalized approach, some of the participating teachers reported that it does greatly facilitate it. Therefore, this section is focused on why the participating teachers view technology to be or not to be important for their implementation, and how it has been utilized. It will also cover some of the practical problems the participating teachers had had with technology, and finally conclude with a discussion on the use of educational videos. The idea that technology can support the personalization of language education has been supported by research. As concluded in section 2.3.2, Reinders and Hubbard (2012) suggest that when careful attention is being paid to the related constraints, technology can help learners become autonomous. Maria and Helena felt quite strongly about the topic, stating that it is quite crucial, even a prerequisite, for applying the personalized approach to language teaching to have at least computers at the students' disposal.

(19) me otettiin toi Google meil on oppilail on . henkilökohtaset . koneet . meil on täl hetkel abeil on . iPadit . ja sit ykkösil ja kakkosil on läppärit ja tota . toimii . toimii hyvin ja sillee nyt . sen mitä tarvii niite . itte osaa käyttää . et . se on tietysti ehdoton edellytys et . et tätä . täl taval pystyy toteuttamaan et oppilail on se kone minkä kans he pystyy sit . hakemaan ne . tehtävien ratkasut ja . lisätehtävät ja muut ni . muuten ei onnistuis . (Helena)

(19) we took that Google your students have . personal . computers . we have at the moment the seniors have . iPads . and then the freshmen and sophomores have laptops and well . it works . works well and stuff now . what they need . they can use them . so . it's of course a prerequisite that . so that . you can carry it out like this that student have the computer with which they can . look for the . answers for exercises and . extra exercises and stuff . without it you couldn't do it . (Helena)

Helena discussed the matter in some detail, explaining that as students in her school have either personal iPads or laptops at their disposal, she is able to use Google Classroom to share materials, such as correct answers to exercises and additional tasks, etc. Additionally, her students are able to do listening exercises and additional reading from the online material of the workbook as well as from the internet in general whenever necessary. This argument of access to and sharing of materials is one of the main cited organizational advantages of using technology in language teaching (Reindes

and Hubbard 2012: 362-363). Maria explained that as a result of her and her colleagues' choice to adopt this type of approach, their school had to buy more headphones so that listening tasks could be included in the individual work. She acknowledged that if necessary they could be doing these together with the class. However, she explained that this would be impractical as the students are allowed to choose the order in which they work, and therefore joint listening would inevitably be fruitless for some. Minna discusses this issue in her first blog text (Akkala 2015a), where she points out that the one advantage of technology is that it would allow for a development of more wide-ranged individually completed tasks. She argues that with electronic devices, she could have individually done listening comprehension exercises, and make use of educational videos and recordings from pair discussions.

Contrariwise, Anneli and Johanna did not see technology to be a prerequisite for a personalized approach. Anneli stated that they have been able to implement their ideas just fine without the consistent use of any electronic devices. Johanna, on the other hand, discussed her use of technology in connection with explaining her reasoning for retaining some collectively organized lessons.

(20) mulla taas ei oo sitte itellä ollu rahkeita ja aikaa ruveta mitään kehrittelemään eikä meillä oo koulussa niinku . käytössä tarpeeks noita tabletteja tai sitten . läppäreitä et pystyis sillee että vois netistä esimerkiks kuuntelut ja kaikki . oppilaat pystys tekee millon haluaa että . siinä mielessä ei oo ollu . mitenkää sataprosenttisesti kyllä tää . yksilöllinen oppiminen että . on ollu niinku . opettajajohtoisia tunteja siellä myös välissä . (Johanna)

(20) I haven't had the energy and time to start creating anything at in our school we don't have like . enough tablets or . laptops available that you could have listening exercises and everything online . students could do whenever they want to that . in that sense it hasn't been . like a hundred percent personalized learning that . we've had like . teacher-led lessons too in the middle . (Johanna)

Johanna stated to have maintained the use of joint sessions for listening comprehensions partly due to the small number of available electronic devices. The other part, she admits, is because she has not had the energy and time to begin developing her implementation in this regard. She concludes that for these reasons her implementation has not been fully personalized.

A practical problem that Maria had experienced with the use of technology was that the equipment, such as iPads, and online networks, such as Pedanet, often lack the necessary space to record and save students' output. Maria had had to go through a number of unsuccessful trials before finding a working solution. Finally she had,

however, found a creative solution to this with WhatsApp. She has utilized this program for assessing students' oral skills as they have used it to record and send their pair discussions to her. Another practical problem with the use of technology might be that schools are sometimes obligated to use one network instead of another due to a decision made in their municipality. For instance Maria explained that as they are using Microsoft accounts, she cannot utilize Google Classroom as it would require students to have Google accounts.

Furthermore, Minna was currently the only one of the teachers participating in the present study that had used educational videos in her teaching (Ala-Akkala 2015c). Johanna did, however, express her interest towards the use of educational videos in the future if it were made possible by an increase in the number of available devices. She supposed that these could be particularly beneficial with grammar items so that students could watch them whenever necessary. The use of educational videos can be beneficial in terms of learner control, which is necessary for autonomy, as it allows learners to choose how and when to access the information so that it is suitable for their learning process (Reinders and Hubbard 2012: 366). Minna shared some of her thoughts on this topic in the context of presenting feedback she had received from her students.

When asking her students specifically about the grammar videos Minna had made and posted on Google Classroom, about 44 percentage of them admitted to not having watched any of the videos. In fact, only about 14 percentage of Minna's students had watched all of them. Despite the fact that 14 might seem like a small percentage when considered the imaginable effort that had to be made to create the videos, Minna was not discouraged. In the feedback she collected one student said that the videos were useful as they worked as a replacement for the teacher explaining the grammar items for the whole class. Furthermore, some of the students stated that they had not watched the videos as they had not had the need for them but would watch them if they did not understand something. One student asserted that he/she watched one, but did not need to watch the others as he/she already knew the other grammar items. Minna noted that these points pinpoint what she had hoped to accomplish with the videos. She also argued that the use of the videos might become more popular in the future when her students become more confident in using the electronic equipment and platforms, as some of the students claimed they had had problems with using Google Classroom. Moreover, Minna concludes that she wishes to develop the videos further, making them

both in English and in Finnish and, again, moving away from the constraints of the workbook.

4.3.7 Outcomes

Next, it is essential to consider the outcomes of implementing the approach. This section highlights particularly the difference between outcomes of traditional, teacher-led techniques and those of personalized learning. Furthermore, Anneli, Maria and Helena point out that with traditional teaching techniques it is all too easy to mistake the fact that a topic has been taught to everyone to mean that it has been learned by everyone. This, of course, could not be further from the truth as can be seen from the discussion of individual differences (see e.g. Skehan 1989, Robinson 2002, Dörnyei 2005, Ellis 2008). Helena suggested that with an approach where students have to take more responsibility for their learning and where they were forced to process the learned topics themselves, learning might be in some ways more efficient. She claimed that in a conventional classroom it might be easier for students to be present physically without actually paying any attention.

(21) H: joo se . nii no on se tietysti . vois kuvitella että se on tehokkaampaa siin kohtaa ku joutuu itte . niin paljo enemmän prosessoimaan niit asioit ja . ja . on suurempi vastuu siin ja . miettimään et . tarkemmin ku . kuitenkin luokas o- . on sit niin paljo helpompi . olla vaan hiljaa ja funtsii muita asioita kun opettaja puhuu . (Helena)

(21) IE: yea it . well yea it's of course . you could imagine that it would be more efficient when you have to yourself . process these things so much more and . and . you have a bigger responsibility in it and . think that . more closely when . in a classroom i- . it's so much easier to just be . like silent and think about other stuff when the teacher's talking . (Helena)

Additionally, Helena stated that along the years she had noticed the students' inability to follow the written instructions in the matriculation examinations they take at the end of upper secondary school. Hence she concluded that having to practice reading and following the written instructions might be beneficial for the learners.

Furthermore, Maria emphasizes that because with her current approach where she actively looks at the exercises her students are doing, she is actually able to see who has truly understood, for example, the grammar item being studied. It is then easy to focus the teacher's time to explaining it to helping those who need it. Checking exercises is traditionally done together with the class so that the students take turns in answering, be

the turn appointed by order or the teacher. Therefore it might be easy to assume or to be under the impression that everyone has understood the issue or that they had had enough time to finish, even though the correct answers might only be provided by a small portion of the student. In the implementations of personalized learning presented by the participating teachers this type of misbeliefs are less likely to occur.

4.3.8 Target level system

As three of the participating teachers had used some type of division into target levels learners were to pursue, the topic warrants some consideration as well. Minna had found that dividing the material into the three levels presented above has been motivating for students, especially those who are less advanced in English as they are no longer expected and expecting to learn everything (Ala-Akkala 2015b). Maria supported this argument, stating that especially in the 9th grade there are grammar items, such as the passive voice or reported speech, which are simply too complex for everyone to grasp. According to her, these students have been given relief by the fact that they are now clearly presented what they are expected to learn and thus go about learning those things with zest. Even though Johanna had not applied a division into levels as such, she had also seen that students who were now able to focus on the more basic elements to be learned were more accomplished in their learning. This had also translated directly to the scores they had received from the conventional exams she had administered. Helena so far had not made any such divisions, but had contemplated it. She stated, however, that this type of a level division might be more suitable for secondary school than upper secondary school.

(22) en mä oo sillai niit . semmosii . eri tavoteportait heil laittanu . ku lukios on kuitenkin sillai vähän . eri ku peruskoulus et peruskoulus voi . voi vähä pienemmälläki . vaatimustasol periaattees . mennä ja pärjätä mut et lukiolaisen jokaisen sietäis ne . tietyt asiat kyl sit käydä et . sen takii se ehkä kans vähän arveluttaa . (Helena)

(22) I haven't set any . like . different target levels for them . because in upper secondary school it's a little . different than in secondary school because in secondary school you can . can with a lower . requirement level basically . go and get by but that every upper secondary student should those . go through some things so . because of that I'm a little skeptical . (Helena)

Helena saw that in secondary school it is possible to manage with even with a lower expected level of learning, whereas in upper secondary school there are some things that are necessary for everyone to sift through. She continued that setting some sort of

minimum standards might cause some students to limit their efforts and be content with doing the minimum amount of work necessary to pass. It is her experience that when giving students the same worksheets with an extensive amount of tasks and encouraging them to do as much as they can in the given timeframe, they attempt to get as much done as possible.

Moreover, Maria points out that with the three-level division, differentiating her teaching for advanced students has become much easier as well. She admitted that previously for her differentiation often meant more exercises for the stronger students and less for the weaker ones. Now that the division of materials is done with purpose beforehand, Maria states that differentiation has become more meaningful. Finally, in addition to being helpful for the learners, the division of levels has also been helpful for Maria herself, as it has forced her to think closely about what it is she wants to stress in her teaching. She admits that in the past she has taught some things as units without any reflection on what she would like different levels of students to learn about the topic. Now she is obliged to determine in advance what she sees as important for everyone to learn, what is expected at an average level, and what information is only expected to be processed and understood by the most advanced students.

One of Minna's concerns was how well this division into levels is suitable with the idea of mastery learning (Ala-Akkala 2015b). However, in her view the idea of mastery learning is perhaps accomplished to a sufficient extent if the learners attain the level of learning they set for themselves. As she points out, this is of course assuming that it is ensured by the teacher that even the lowest level is set so that it is safe for the learners to proceed in their studies. It is true that this type of a solution is conflicted with the claim made by Bloom (1968: 1) that most learners are able to master the content of education when provided with appropriate conditions for learning, most crucially enough time. However, the reality of the day-to-day life of a teacher is that resources, including time available for learning, are limited. Therefore, it might be understandable that teachers have to make compromises, such as the level-division by Minna. The solutions proposed by Bloom (1984) to the problem of limited resources of classroom education consisted of, for example, enhancing out-of-school learning processes and improving instruction materials. It must also be concluded that one of the outcomes of the level-division is that learning and assessment are based on clearly defined objectives, of which learners are very aware. These are issues not only stressed by

Bloom (1968: 8), but also the National Core Curriculum (2014: 47). Finally, the level system can, perhaps, be beneficial in ensuring the learners are working on their own zone of proximal development (Vygotsky 1978).

4.3.9 Teacher-student relationship

In addition to changing learning for students, the interviewees stated that applying a personalized approach had changed their feelings toward teaching. Anneli, Maria and Johanna reported that they find their job less stressful and draining with the personalized approach, as less time and effort needs to be spent on getting students' attention and keeping them silent. Anneli and Maria both asserted that after students understand what is expected of them with the new approach, managing them and the lessons requires less effort than with previously used approaches. Maria had found it extremely advantageous that the time and energy that was previously spent on classroom management and waiting around for some students can now be spent on learning and teaching. Furthermore, according to Anneli's experience, the resistance from less motivated students has decreased as they apparently feel that the lessons are now more relaxed. She points out that this is despite the fact that these students in fact do quite a lot of work during the lessons, even more so than they did before. As for Johanna, her satisfaction lay with the fact that unlike before when she was teaching the whole class at once, she is now able to fully concentrate on the task at hand when she is teaching something to individual students or small groups.

Furthermore, as in this type of approach the teacher is liberated from the board and the constraints of managing the classroom in the traditional sense, Anneli and Maria have found that teaching has become more enjoyable. This, according to them, is because they are able to get closer to their students. Anneli explains that even though she is quite busy during the lessons, she enjoys the things she does. Moreover, she highlights that now that she spends the lessons working side by side with the students rather than being tied to the front of the class by the board, she is able to get to know the students better.

(23) H: et semmosta niinkun . aika puuhakasta mutta ihan se- semmosta mielekästä ja sit tuntuu et jotenki . oppilaisiin tutustuu paljon paremmin . kun sitten . siellä . on niinku niitten vieressä ja . lähellä ja sillälaillla . verrattuna siihen et sitte sää siellä taululla jotain selität koko tunnin ja . ne istuu sit siellä pulpetissa pulpeteissansa . (Anneli)

(23) IE: so it's quite . busy but it's still enjoyable and it feels like . you get to know the students much better when you're like . next to them and close to them and stuff . compared

to when you're standing by the board the whole lesson explaining something . and they're just sitting at their desk desks . (Anneli)

Maria attested to having had similar experiences with her students. She stated that not only does she feel closer to the students now than she did before, she has noticed a difference in this respect between groups with which she uses the approach and those with which she does not. She explains that it feels like it is somehow more justifiable for her to go and ask the students what they are working on and how they are doing than it would be in a conventionally organized classroom. According to her it has also made it easier for her to talk to students about things outside the classroom, which she claims to have enjoyed tremendously. Previous research (see for example Hargreaves 2000, Mashburn et al. 2006, Shann 1998, Yoon 2002) has found that a good teacher-student relationship can have a strong, positive impact on teachers' wellbeing and perceived level of stress. If it was found to be consistently true that implementing this type of an approach has a strong chance of making teachers feel closer to their students, it could provide important insight into improving teachers' professional and personal wellbeing.

4.3.10 Demands on teacher resources

Finally, the section on the advantages and disadvantages is concluded with a discussion of how the implementation of the approach has affected the amount of time and effort required from the teachers. One of the downsides of reforming teaching practices, be it to any type of system, is that it requires resources to make those changes. This was found to be the case when developing their implementations at least for Anneli, Maria and Helena. This is conflicted with the findings of Guskey (1989) concerning the implementation of mastery learning practices. He asserted that accomplished teachers were already using many of the elements of mastery learning, and that others needed little effort to combine the elements of mastery learning with their previously used teaching strategies. Moreover, Guskey (1989) also suggests that sharing the task of developing new procedures with colleagues decreases the time and effort needed for developing the new procedures. This was found true by Anneli, who had the advantage of working together with two of her colleagues as a team to develop their implementation of the approach. Still, when the interviewer commented the amount of time spent going through the material to find appropriate exercises for each level, Anneli admitted that it has indeed taken her a lot of time to create the path even though she has been responsible for only one of the levels. She even proposes the idea that she

would not have been able to do it on her own but that being able to share the workload has been essential to her.

(24) H: joo . seki vie varmaan aika paljo aikaa se että . tavallaan tunnistaa sieltä . ja tutkii sitä materiaalia että .

V: joo . et kyllä iha ehdottomasti niinku . tähän ei ois mitenkään pystyny jos ois yksinään . alkanu niinku tekeen . että ku nytki tuntuu jo että tää on tällee alussa vie tosi paljon aikaa sillee vaikka onki vaa ollu sit omalla vastuulla se yks . yks tavallaan yks semmonen polku siinä mut että . että kyllä . ihan ehdotonta on ollu toi että on ollu tommonen tiimi . (Anneli)

(24) IR: yea . I bet it takes quite a lot of time to . kind of recognize from there . and go through the material .

IE: yea . absolutely . like you wouldn't have been able to do this if you had started . doing it on your own because . even now it feels like in the beginning this takes a lot of time even though you're only responsible for like one . one of the paths but that . yes . it's been crucial to have a team like that . (Anneli)

Maria admitted that the workload was quite significant, especially when beginning implementation with the first groups. She identified that the planning phase naturally required a lot of effort, but that the new experience of continuously collecting assessed material and trying to build an overall picture from those was quite straining as well. Maria therefore concluded that it does require some personal interest towards the approach to continue to be committed to it in spite of the amount of work. In an effort to keep some limits on the amount of work and time spent, Maria has strictly defined her working hours.

However, despite the amount of work and time put into developing the new system, Anneli claims that the total amount of work has not necessarily increased but it has merely been spread differently. As the planning takes place before beginning a new unit, during the weeks dedicated to studying it the time allotted to planning individual lessons is minimal. Helena expressed similar feelings.

(25) H: mites sitte sun oma työmäärä . onko se muuttunu .

V: en mä tiä toisaalt se ehkä . ehkä tota . painottuu vähä eri taval et ... tietenkin näillä . virkavuosilla ja . ja tota . kokemuksel nii se tuntien suunnittelu ei enää oo niin tuskaa ja saati sit kun on kirja jota nyt on riittävän monta vuotta tos käyny jonka . olis aivan valmis . nakkaamaan jo . takkaan . onneks ens vuon tulee uudet opsit . niin tota . se . se . tuntuu suunnittelu ja tämmönen ei . niin hirveesti sitä työtä vaadi et nyt sit kun on . kurssin tällai . täillai toteuttaa . niin . se . vaatii sitä valmistelutyötä aika paljon . ja . ja sit tietysti niitten tuntien aikana ei välttämättä . niin hirveesti niinku sanoin et välil he tekee hirveen . itsenäisesti . mut et toisaalt sit . tällasen kurssin aikaan . on ehkä enemmän sitä . jotai kirjoitustehtävii tai muita mitä he sit . on palauttanu et . et tota . niitten kans . menee aikaa mut . eei se välttämättä sit ehkä se . on suurinpiirtein sama . riippuu tietysti sit et . jos saman kurssi toteuttaa seuraavan vuon samanlaisena uudestaan niin . nii . sit se on taas kohtuullisen helppo ... mut aina . aina siihen hakee jotai uutta . et en mä . en mä . koskaa pysty sitä tekemään . edes vaikka niinku vaik ois viime jaksossa ollu s- . nyt se vitoskurssi ja nyt se menee nyt täs taas nii ne on aika erilaiset . loppujenlopuks et sitä lisämateriaalia

hakee . hakee kuitenkin aina jotain uutta ja . korjailee niitä tehtäviä et ei tää ollukaa hyvä ja . haluu vaihtaa ja . aina on jotain säätämistä ni . semmoseen tietty kuuluu . (Helena)

(25) IR: how about your own work load . has it changed .

IE: I don't know in a way it's maybe . maybe well . divided a little differently so ... of course with this seniority and . and well . experience so the lesson planning is not so agonizing and let alone when you have a book that you've used for many years which . you're ready . to through already . into a fireplace . luckily next year we have new curricula . so well . it . it . lesson planning and these things don't . take so much work so now that we have . a course like this . carried out like this . so . it takes quite a lot of preparation work . and . and then of course during the lessons no so much . so much like I said that sometimes they are working awfully . independently . but then again . during this type of course . you maybe have more of . some writing assignments and stuff which they . have handed in so . so well . those take time but . it doesn't necessarily maybe it's . about the same . it depends of course . if you do the same course the next year the same way then . then . it's reasonably easto ... but you always . you always look for something new . so I'm never . I'm never . able to do it . even if . like if I had had it last semester . the fifth course and now I have it again so they're pretty different . at the end of the day and the extra material you look for . always look for something new and . correct the tasks that this wasn't good after all and . want to change it and . there's always something to tune so . that of course takes time . (Helena)

Helena stated that planning a course that is arranged in this manner takes quite a lot of time but during the course there is less work. Also, as she suggests, when having the same course again with a similar approach, the amount of effort needed for planning is reduced. She admits, however, that she rarely maintains the course exactly the same as the previous year and therefore spends some time improving her materials and such. Then again, Helena states that as she uses quite a lot of written assignments that are handed in, she spends quite a lot of time reading and correcting those assignments.

Furthermore, Maria points out that in addition to requiring teachers for quite a lot of resources when developing the new practices, it also requires students to have some patience when testing them in action for the first time. This is surely not new to any teacher who has ever tried any new task or activity, but it might be highlighted when changing the system and focus of teaching altogether as all suddenly everything is new. Maria states that she is quite open about her uncertainties with her groups when attempting something completely new and asks them for their patience and collaboration.

4.4 Teachers' views on students', parents' and colleagues' response

The final research question of how the participating teachers have seen other affected parties, such as students, parents and colleagues respond to the participating teachers' experiments is answered by the present section. As the present study focused on the

point of view of the implementing teachers, this viewpoint is also reflected in this section as the information for this section came from the blog analysis, interviews and observation. As the affected parties were not directly questioned, one should be cautious when making deductions based on these findings. Most attention here is given to the students' response as this aspect was discussed in the most detail by the participating teachers.

4.4.1 Students

This section on affected party response begins by focusing on the participating teachers' students. The information presented in this section relies on all three of the present study's data sources. Minna's findings were the most accessible and presumably untampered as she had published the results of her questionnaires in her blog and therefore had a great impact on the present section. Yet, important information for this section was also uncovered both through observations and interviews. All of the participating teachers claimed to have asked their students feedback on the new teaching approach, either quite formally with anonymous questionnaires directed specifically for this purpose, or in less formal ways such as asking for comments along with the students' self-evaluation forms. Two of Minna's five blog posts are dedicated to presenting the thoughts and opinions of her students on this learning approach. First of these (Ala-Akkala 2015c) was published in May 2015 and the second (Ala-Akkala 2016) in January 2016. On both occasions she had asked feedback from at least almost all her English students through an anonymous questionnaire, from which the feedback had been primarily positive.

Moreover, Anneli stated that after about half a semester she and her colleagues had their students answer an anonymous feedback questionnaire, based on which the reception from their students was determined to be predominantly positive. More precisely, over 90 percent of Anneli's students had reportedly stated that they would like to continue with the new arrangement either partially or completely. In addition, one of the goals of the observations was to determine some of these students' thoughts on the approach as they are voiced to an outside perspective. The results of Anneli's questionnaire were supported by the observation findings, according to which most of the students appeared to be positive towards the approach. Yet, naturally there were also some students that expressed their dissatisfaction.

Johanna had also asked her students for written feedback, but whether it was anonymous or not was not discussed. She stated that the feedback her implementation had received was extremely positive, with only one student expressing a desire to return to the previous way of teaching. Helena as well had always asked her students for course feedback at the end of the course. From the feedback she had concluded that consistently about 90 percent of her students have been pleased with the approach and the change it brings to the practices of other courses. Moreover, Maria had used more informal ways of determining the students' opinions. As described in previous sections, in the students' self-evaluation forms she utilized was space for comments, but she also took the time from her assessment discussions to ask her students' for their opinions.

Furthermore, from being actively involved with the students during her lessons and discussing the topic with a colleague, Maria attested to detecting a general pattern in students' response to personalized approach. According to her experience, in the very beginning of applying the approach students are extremely excited as they feel they are allowed to do whatever they want. After a while, they begin to realize that as they were under the impression that they can do whatever, they ended up doing nothing. This in turn causes a drop in excitement, which is regained when they get used to the new approach. On her part, Helena had noticed that as there was another language teacher in her school applying this type of an approach, students, even though initially enthusiastic, had shown some signs of fatigue due to the increased amount of individual work.

As mentioned above, this subsection is devoted to presenting both positive and negative feedback received from the students being taught through a personalized approach by the teachers participating in the present study. Attention must, however, be given to the fact that as these issues were reported by the participating teachers and discovered through observation, the validity and reliability of these results can be debated. Therefore, in order to truly determine the opinions and attitudes of students, further research is encouraged to focus directly on this topic through, for example questionnaires or interviews of students. Moreover, the focus of the section is not to present the thoughts of any particular students, but to identify the viewpoints the participating teachers' students had raised in general. Therefore, it was not seen necessary to consistently establish the sources of the comments. Finally, the

presentation of this section is similar to the previous one, as the positive and negative feedback is divided into themes. These themes are (1) self-paced learning, (2) autonomy, motivation and concentration, (3) applied learning techniques, and amount and quality of learning, (4) small-group, pair and independent work, (5) suggestions for improvement.

4.4.1.1 Self-paced learning

As in the participating teachers' own opinion, the most prominent advantage that the students of the participating teachers had pointed out was that the students were allowed to work at their own pace. This point was raised several times in the questionnaires presented by Minna, by the students with whom the observer spoke during the observation sessions, and in the interviews with Anneli, Johanna and Helena. On the one hand, several students had stated that they were happy they no longer had to wait for others, but that they were able to focus their time and energy on learning new things instead of working on topics that they already knew. On the other hand, some had expressed a relief that they were no longer rushed to go from one exercise and topic to the next feeling they were not learning anything. This, according to Minna's questionnaires (Ala-Akkala 2015c, Ala-Akkala 2016), meant that for some the quality of learning had improved as they were given enough time to understand an issue and practice it before moving on to the next one.

Additionally, some of Minna's students pointed out that it is now easier to return to an issue if and when necessary. This aspect of benefitting both quicker and slower learners has generally been viewed as the most essential advantage of self-paced learning (Eyre 2007: 317). In addition, it was seen positive by the participating teachers' students that self-paced learning allowed them to determine themselves when to do more work and when to do less. For example, it was stated to be beneficial that they are able to focus less on English when another exam was coming up, and more when there was less other work from other subjects. Another example of this was in the case of fatigue, as students were able to work more when energized, but also less when tired. The classroom had also been viewed more relaxed and free, as they were allowed to listen to music from their headphones and to take breaks every once in a while.

However, also the most crucial disadvantage of self-paced study was highlighted by the students: it requires quite a lot of self-discipline from students as it is easy to postpone the work and the tests i.e. procrastinate (Eppler and Ironsmith 2004, Eyre 2007). As concluded in the discussion on self-paced learning in section 2.1.3, there are at least three ways with which teachers can alleviate this symptom: teacher-set deadlines (e.g. Eppler and Ironsmith 2004), learner-set deadlines (e.g. Roberts et al. 1988), and rewards for early and penalties late submissions of work (e.g. Reiser 1984). As discussed in a previous section (section 4.3.1) Helena had already used teacher-set deadlines and Maria had considered the use of both teacher-set and learner-set deadlines in the future. In addition, some students felt that without any deadlines it is difficult to determine how fast their pace of work should be.

Additionally, it was mentioned in the observations as well as Minna's blog that missing school might cause tests and work to pile up. As in many of the implementations there are numerous small tests that in a way replace the final exam of an earlier assessment approach, this is more of an issue now than it was before. Relatedly, the topic of homework was touched upon by some students. Now that the work is self-paced, the responsibility of returning to it at home was given mostly to the students by several of the participating teachers. This again demands quite a lot of self-discipline from students, which some saw as a problem. On the other hand, some students felt that the absence of homework was a positive aspect of the approach. As suggested by Cooper (2007: 8-12) the necessity of homework can be debated as the effects of homework are not purely positive. However, as the positive effects would still appear to be at least more numerous than the negative ones, perhaps some attention should be given to the aspect of homework in the implementation of personalized learning.

4.4.1.2 Autonomy, motivation and concentration

Themes that had often been raised by the participating teachers' students were autonomy, motivation and concentration. As these themes can be deemed to be in connection with each other, they are presented here under one section. The expectation of practicing learner autonomy was viewed as positive by some students and negative by others. For instance, a pair of students from one of Anneli's observed groups quite maturely stated that it is good that they are given the chance to practice taking responsibility of their own learning. They saw it beneficial for their future studies in

either upper secondary school or vocational school, as it was thought to be expected of them there. This is quite an important point as it has been shown that developing autonomy requires practice (Dickinson 1994: 3). Furthermore, the observed students reported to enjoy the fact that they were now more involved in determining how teaching is organized as their teachers had listened to their feedback and made appropriate changes based on them. In addition, some students had felt that the freedom to choose the order in which to proceed was a positive aspect, but others had had difficulty remembering where they were and what to do next.

Furthermore, as many students had noticed, the importance of motivation becomes highlighted in this type of an approach. Some had admitted that it was easy to be lazy and do minimal amount of work as they did not seem to have external motivations for studying. Others had had difficulty in beginning to work and in continuing after stopping for a while. It was also mentioned that with this type of an approach, the amount of work the students are expected to do was quite large. One of Maria's students had been able to be perceivably honest with her, explaining that he does not like the approach as he is somewhat lazy and likes doing as little as possible in all of his classes. It might be safe to assume that this is the case with many other students as well who express dissatisfaction against the approach. However, one of Minna's students stated that he/she had been a little lazy, but does like the approach and will try to improve in the future. Thus, this supports the idea of a necessary adaptation period emphasized by Mäenpää (2016: 42) and the need for practice in developing learner autonomy (Dickinson 1994: 3). However, research has shown that taking responsibility for and control of one's learning, as well as having one's learning results be dependent on one's own actions and strategies can have a strong influence in accomplishing successful learning and on increasing motivation (Dickinson 1995: 173-174). As a consequence, implementing the personalized approach might assist teachers in helping students be and become motivated in their task of language learning. It is essential to remark the interdependency between autonomy and motivation (Little 2004, cited in Hall 2011: 156-157). Even though feelings of autonomy and mastery have been shown to increase intrinsic motivation, motivation is also necessary for learners to practice their autonomy.

Finally, students had had different experiences in terms of concentrating on their work with the new approach. Some stated that it was now easier to focus and the lessons were

deemed calmer. Yet, others felt there were too many temptations around drawing them away from working. In a relatively small classroom where there are a number of different things happening at the same time the noise levels may rise quite high, which was reported as a problem by some of Anneli's students.

4.4.1.3 Applied learning techniques, and amount and quality of learning

Some of the topics that students had commented most on were the amount and quality of learning as well as the learning strategies that were employed as a result of the personalized approach. Generally students seemed to be of the opinion that they had learned as much as or even more than before with previous teaching approaches. Some students felt they had now had more time to spend on learning as time was spent on direct teaching only when needed. Another positive aspect was seen to be that the quality of learning was better when they were forced to look for the information themselves instead of it being given to them. This was also emphasized with regards to checking the exercises, as the correct answers were no longer given to them straight away. Helena noted that her students had mostly reported to working either as much as before or even more. As about 90 percent of them had also reported to be happy with the approach, she had concluded that the work they do must therefore be deemed rewarding. One of Minna's students admitted to having learned a lot despite doubting the approach in the beginning.

However, some students had stated that they are not learning as well or as much as with the more teacher-centered approaches that were used before. This was clarified to be either because they were not able to or did not have enough time to go through everything as well as they would have liked to. Some students also claimed leaning to be more fun than with traditional teaching, but that they learn less. Again, here the solution might be to have some sort of homework so students would spend some more time on learning. Bloom's (1968: 3) main argument for mastery learning is that if learners are provided with necessary resources, of which time is seen as the most important, it is able to minimize the effect of aptitude. However, the limited amount of resources, especially time, creates the "2 sigma problem" which suggests that only 70 percent of students are able to reach a level of mastery under a mastery learning program (Anania 1981, 1983 and Burke 1984, cited in Bloom 1984). One of the suggestions to this problem presented by Bloom (1984) is the enhancement of out-of-

school processes. Thus, perhaps here the efficient use of homework could provide some assistance.

Moreover, Maria stated that some of her students are persistent in claiming that they would learn better with a more teacher-led approach. She, however, expressed her doubt in this, as these students are also those who pay the least amount of attention in the joint sessions, forcing her to re-explain to them what she has just explained to the whole class. More specifically, learning some grammar items without them being explained by the teacher was sometimes deemed difficult. There were two paths the participating teachers had taken to respond to this feedback. For example Minna had resorted to teaching grammar items to small groups more consistently, whereas others, such as Anneli, had chosen to hold teacher-led lessons on grammar items, after which students continued with individual practice on the topic. With respect to the division of levels, most of Anneli's students appeared to appreciate having the three levels and being able to choose themselves which one they wanted to pursue.

One of the issues as identified by Minna (Ala-Akkala 2015b), is that eventually studying in this manner becomes monotonous and mundane, even when providing choice in study methods and being able to work in groups. Her solution to this was to introduce project-based work in between the personalized periods to invigorate the students by having the whole class work together. She also considered combining vocabulary, thematic content and cultural knowledge to this type of project-based work and applying a personalized and self-paced approach only to grammar and to some extent vocabulary practice (Ala-Akkala 2015b). Helena had noticed a similar trend. She explained that even though students were initially enthusiastic towards this type of learning, they had shown some signs of fatigue due to the increased amount of individual work as there was another language teacher in her school applying this type of an approach. Her solution had been to limit her implementation of the approach to only one of her courses and use different ways of working on other courses. These types of comments reveal that the participating teachers view personalized learning as an approach to teaching rather than a culture of learning as suggested by Mäenpää (2016).

Moreover, especially Anneli's students felt that there were too many oral exercises and oral tests. Anneli commented on this complaint, explaining that some of the students would just like to fill their workbook, which she felt is not and cannot be the purpose of

language learning. These types of scenarios require the teacher to find a balance between personalization and demands for diverse language learning (POPS 399-400). On the one hand teachers should allow personalization of learning strategies so that students are allowed to focus on the things most appropriate for their learning. Yet, on the other hand they need to make sure all aspects of language (i.e. speaking, writing, listening and reading) are being practiced. Even if the ultimate goal is to have autonomous learners be able to determine for themselves on which aspects they need to focus, developing these skills needs practice as it has been pointed out on several occasions in the present study. Relatedly, according to Maria, many of her students have stated that they have enjoyed and found useful the fact that they do more oral exercises than ever before. However, in Minna's feedback there was also one student who pointed out that the new practices had been positive in the sense that oral practice takes place in groups or pairs and he/she is no longer forced to speak before the whole class.

4.4.1.4 Small-group, pair and independent work

As discussed above, all of the participating teachers had included some sort of collaboration between students in their implementations. To no surprise, this aspect had also been discussed in the feedback the teachers had received. Some students had stated that they like to work independently whereas others stressed that they enjoy working with friends. This would support Peura's views of personalized learning, where each learner has the opportunity to choose a setting that is the most beneficial for their personal learning process (Pernaa and Peura 2012). Helena stated that her students had expressed content with the fact that they were assigned to be working with a partner who was approximately on the same level as they. However, during the observations, two concrete advantages of having students choose their own groups was presented. Some students reported that they found it beneficial that they had more advanced students sitting next to them so they could always ask them for help. Then again, others stated that they had enjoyed the fact that they get to work with someone that is working on the same target level as them, so they are able to do all their exercises together. It can be concluded from this that Anneli's decision to let her students choose their own groups has been appropriate for her students.

When in need of help, Anneli's students seemed to find it easier and quicker to ask a friend than to ask the teacher, and with the new approach it was seen to even be

encouraged. However, they also stated that if they do not find the answer in their group, it is also easy to turn to the teacher for help. Johanna, on the other hand, stated that some of her students had noticed they should be more daring in asking her for help when they need it. On the other hand, she claimed to have noticed some students that would previously never ask for help to do so now. Finally, with the pair work that students were expected to complete, some of Minna's students had found it at times inconvenient that they have to wait for someone to be in the same exercise as them. As described in section 4.3.4 in more detail, Anneli had found the answer to this problem to be setting up clear ground rules, which state that if any student is asked to do a pair-exercise, they have to do it. Some students also felt working to be boring if they were not doing the same things as their friends.

4.4.1.5 Suggestions for improvement

Some suggestions for improvement were also offered by the students. Practicing pronunciation and listening comprehension was seen something that should still be done together with the whole class as it they were deemed difficult to do without help. In addition, some students suggested that it might be beneficial to go through grammar items together but then do exercises independently, as some topics were seen somewhat difficult to understand. Whether the students that suggested this had asked for help from their teacher remains unclear. Some students felt the system to be too difficult and confusing, hence underlining the need for support and time to become accustomed to the new practices. Finally, even though they generally liked the new approach, some of Anneli's students seemed to feel that there was a bit too much work done independently. They suggested that perhaps they could do the exercises independently, but still check at least some of them together so that the teacher could correct their mistakes in, for example, pronunciation.

4.4.2 Parents

The present study was also interested in determining the type and amount of feedback the participating teachers had had from the parents of their students. This reception from parents to the use of a personalized approach reported by the interviewees had been mostly positive. Helena's experience with parents involving the approach was rather limited. She explained that as she teaches in upper secondary school, her duty to report

to the students' parents is not very high and therefore she has not felt the need to inform them about her experiment. She did, however, state that when she had attempted the approach with her first-graders, she had presented her ideas in a parent-teacher conference. The experiences of the other interviewees, especially Maria, were, however, somewhat broader.

Maria explained that as she does not have exams, she has decided to use that time to write short, personal feedbacks for her students on Wilma. She does this so that the parents of her students are more aware of what the grades received by their children entail. For example she might specify that a particular student is an extremely skilled writer but needs to gain more confidence in speaking as she has not given much evidence on her proficiency. The responses Maria had received had been mainly positive and those who responded positively were glad to be given more information on how their children were doing. However, some parents whose children are skilled in English but have poor work ethic had defended their children who they felt had received unjustifiably low grade due to the newly established assessment procedures. Maria stated that she was pleased that these parents voiced their concern as it gave her the opportunity to defend her choice and the logic behind this. Interestingly, in order to illuminate her thinking she had developed a sports analogy in which she had compared her English classes to physical education (PE) classes. She had explained that in PE you cannot just lie around for two months, run 3000 meters on a Cooper -test and expect to get the best grade. Same goes for English: it is not enough to be good at English to get an excellent grade, but you need to show your proficiency in class by doing the work. This, of course, is supported by the National Core Curriculum, which states as one of the three main goals for English teaching that students learn the skills necessary to study English (POPS 2014: 399-401). Furthermore, it is explained in further detail that English teaching should encourage students to make use of diverse ways of learning English. If students were awarded excellent grades just by doing well on an exam, it would hardly encourage them to do anything more than to cram for the exam the night before and forget everything the next day.

Anneli and Johanna elucidated that before beginning or shortly after beginning their experiment they sent all the affected students' parents a message through Wilma explaining what they were about to do. Surprisingly they each received a response only from the parents of a single student. For Johanna the response was extremely positive as

it was from the parents of the student who had been teaching the other four students (see section 4.3.4). They expressed their content in Johanna trying new things and stated that their child had enjoyed the new approach very much. In Anneli's case, however, the response was negative as it was directed at critiquing the strong emphasis laid on grades in the applied approach. She admitted to understanding the parent's concern but defended their practice by the necessity set by the curriculum to give students numerical grades, especially with 9th graders finishing their comprehensive school. Therefore she felt it would be strange to define the target levels according to some artificial system. Furthermore, after two months of the experiment, Anneli met with the parents of the class she is in charge of supervising, which happened to be one of the groups who had been studying through personalized learning. In the face to face discussions she had with the parents the feedback was exclusively positive, giving Anneli the impression that the students had been positive about the approach in their discussions with their parents.

4.4.3 Colleagues and principal

Finally, this section concludes with a focus on the reception the experiments had had from their colleagues and their schools' principal, as reported by the participating teachers. Compared to the other interviewees, Anneli's position was particularly lucky in that she and her two colleagues formed a team in which they were able to share, not only the burden of developing their implementation, but also their experiences with it. Anneli and her two colleagues divided the work so that each of them was responsible for creating the path for one of the levels and then they would all use those materials. Naturally, as she points out, this decision is contingent on them trusting each other's judgement in choosing the appropriate material for the other two levels. Still, as indicated in section 4.3.10, Anneli emphasized that this resource was immeasurably valuable to her.

Maria, Johanna and Helena all reported having one or more teachers of another subject implementing a personalized approach in their school, but not having shared that many experiences with them or for some other reason feeling a little alone with their implementation. Maria stated that she had been working together with some other teachers in her school that were interested in the approach, but as those teachers were not focused on the particulars of language teaching the collaboration was limited in its

helpfulness. She concluded that collaboration with language teachers was not possible, as her school's Swedish teacher preferred to maintain his/her authority more traditional teaching. Moreover, the other English teacher in her school was already in part-time retirement so understandably there was little interest for collaboration from that direction. Johanna's experience was apparently quite similar as she stated there was limited cooperation between her and the biology teacher who was experimenting with the approach in her school. She explained that this was because their practices were quite different as the other teacher in her school had built his/her application on group assignments he/she collected from the students. In Helena's school there was a Swedish teacher who has become interested in and experimented with the personalized approach. However, as with the other interviewees, collaboration in Helena's case had been minimal.

There had been varying amounts of interest and positivity towards the participants' experiments from teachers who had not had similar types of experiments. Helena stated that she had not had any contact about the approach with the other teachers at her school beyond mentioning it. Maria stated that most of the feedback she had received from other teachers had to do with practical issues, such as noise made by her students when working outside the classroom and whether it is acceptable to leave students in the computer room unattended. Minna, Maria and Johanna emphasized the importance of receiving support from colleagues outside their school through media in general, or more specifically the Facebook groups dedicated for the approach. Johanna explained that as the reception from the other teachers at her school had at times been skeptical towards her experiments, she found the positivity towards the approach presented in the media to be reassuring. On the same lines, Minna stated that she had at times felt alone with her experiments in her own school, but appreciated the support and encouragement she had received from the Facebook groups. This experience was shared by Maria, who had turned to these groups when she was in need of new ideas for the previous spring term. In fact she had also been in correspondence with Minna, sharing their excitement along with their thoughts and ideas.

In addition to receiving support from her colleagues, Anneli was supported in her endeavor by the principal of their school. As he is strictly against dividing classes into so called tracks or ability groups, Anneli and her team felt it necessary to properly explain what they were about to do and be given consent prior to introducing the

approach to their classes. After they explained that the idea was not to separate the students into skill level groups, but that students from all levels would still be working together and that the students are allowed to choose the levels themselves, the principal gave them his support. Maria was also given their principal's approval after she and some of her colleagues had asked permission to be absent from work for a day to go visit the school of the language teacher with whom she had been in contact. Johanna, on the other, had not been in contact with their school's principal regarding the approach but was aware of his/her positive position on the matter due to the previous experiences of the biology teacher. Finally, Helena had not discussed the matter with their school principal, but had interpreted the lack of questioning as a positive sign.

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

As expressed by Maria, there are countless ways the underlying ideas of personalized learning can be transformed into action. Even though Peura proposes a general route to implement these ideas that might assist teachers in developing their own implementations, the final end result is by default always unique because it has to match the particulars of the taught subject, the teacher and the diversity of his/her students. Therefore, it was by no means the purpose of the present study to put forward any readily applicable model of a personalized approach. Instead, it was the intention of the present study to look at how five teachers had implemented the approach and what advantages and disadvantages of the approach are identified by them. These experiences were mirrored with knowledge from previous studies on related issues, such as mastery learning and language aptitude, autonomy and motivation, and self-paced learning. The secondary purposes of the present study were to determine how the participating teachers felt their experiments had been received by students, parents and colleagues, and the reasons for which the participating teachers had begun their experiments. The present study was successful in answering all of the four research questions. The aim was to provide some new insight into this particularly current topic, still acknowledging the superficiality of the present study and the need for further, more profound research. In this final chapter, the primary findings of the present study will be brought together in the same order they were presented in the previous section. Final remarks will also be given to the limitations of the present study and to suggestions for further research.

The main rationale for the interviewees to begin changing their approach towards a more personalized model was a frustration of some sort. Helena, Maria and Anneli were dissatisfied with the tools to answer to the needs of their heterogeneous groups through traditional teaching techniques. Johanna, on the other hand, had found that teaching the whole class at once did not suit her personally. Just as the reasons and paths that had led the participating teachers to implement a personalized approach had been quite different from one another, so were the implementations that followed. Anneli and Maria were strongly influenced in by the work of Minna, and therefore these three implementations bore the most resemblance to each other. Particularly, the division into three target levels was a quality shared by the applications of these three teachers. Johanna and Helena, on the other hand, had executed their ideas of the personalized approach in their own specific ways. Still, the implementations of the five participants varied in many ways. Maria and Helena had moved further from the chapters of the workbook and focused their implementations on themes. All of the participants utilized small group learning, even though the ways it was realized differed between them. All of the interviewees also stated that they use joint sessions to some extent. Maria and Helena reported having had the opportunity to let their students work outside the classroom, whereas Anneli and Johanna did not. None of the participants seemed to use homework in any consistent manner, although Helena, Anneli and Maria did mention using take-home assignments in their assessment. Assessment practices were also highly varied in the implementations of the participating teachers. Let us briefly collect together the discussion of two practices: assessment and homework.

All of the participating teachers had included some other assessment practices either in addition to or in the place of a conventional exam. Minna and Maria had used assessment discussions and self-assessment. In addition to these Minna had used formative tests, whereas Maria had used oral and written assignments and small grammar tests. Minna had also had an end-of-the-schoolyear final exam for some of her students. Moreover, oral tests were reportedly only used by Anneli. She and Helena had also used vocabulary and/or grammar tests and written assignments, in addition to which Helena used pair and/or self-assessment. Johanna was the most conventional in her assessment procedures, still relying on a final exam in addition to which she had small vocabulary and grammar tests. It can thus be concluded that Minna's assessment procedures bare the most resemblance to those of Peura, who bases his assessment on

self-assessments, assessment discussions and formative tests (Peura 2013a). The interviewed teachers are thus still quite far from the ideas for sustainable assessment proposed by Everhard (2015) and supported by Peura's (2013a), who see potential in utilizing assessment as a part of the learning process.

The issue of homework, on the other hand, was seen somewhat unresolved in practically all of the implementations. Peura himself uses educational videos to flip his classroom so that his students can watch learn the theories through videos at home and focus on their own work at school (Peura 2013b)⁶. However, this type of an approach was not present in any of the participating teachers' implementations as, short of Minna, none of the teachers had used this type of learning videos as part of their approach. Helena, Anneli and Maria attested to using written assignments as a part of their implementation, which can be seen as a form of homework. Minna had not covered the topic of homework in her blog, but there were two comments, one positive and one negative, concerning the lack of homework in the second feedback she had collected from her students (Ala-Akkala 2016). Johanna and Helena admitted to having assigned their students the responsibility of homework, whereas Anneli's students stored their workbooks in the classroom, which makes it impossible for them to return to the material at home. Even though autonomous learners should optimally be able to take responsibility for all aspects of decision-making (Dickinson 1994: 4-5), including homework, it might be that students need some practice before being able to fully execute their autonomy. Without forgetting the negative effects of homework, the positive effects of consistent completion of homework are undeniable (e.g. Cooper 2007, Paschal et al. 1984). It can therefore be concluded that the topic of homework might be something that should be addressed when personalizing education. One possibility could be student-assigned homework that was supervised through learning diaries (electronic or hard copy). This supervision could be ceased when students' were seen to be able to practice autonomy.

The participating teachers reported to being excited about the possibilities of the approach, but admitted it to have some defaults as well. The discussion of teacher

⁶ For more information on flipped classroom and flipped learning, see e.g. Toivola and Silfverberg 2015.

viewed advantages and disadvantages of a personalized learning covered the following topics: (1) self-paced learning, (2) autonomy, (3) motivation and concentration, (4) small-group work, (5) technology, (6) outcomes, (7) target level system, (8) teacher-student relationship, (9) availability of teacher's assistance, and (10) demands on teacher resources. The main advantages were seen to be that students were allowed to progress with a pace that best suited their learning. This was seen to benefit both the advanced as well as the less advanced students. However, the downside of procrastination often associated with self-paced learning had also manifested itself with some students. Another advantage that was seen essential was the increased responsibility for learning their students were taking. Finally, in addition to being beneficial for their learners, the participating teachers expressed their content with the positive impact of implementing the personalized approach had had on their teacher-student relationships. It was also stated that their professional wellbeing had increased due to the diminished energy they had to spend on managing the class as a whole.

The greatest disadvantages identified by the teachers were in association with two issues: motivation and concentration. This type of a learner-centered approach where students are expected to be active participants understandably demands quite a lot from students with regards to their motivation for learning. If a student is extremely unmotivated to do the work required for learning, they might not learn much at all with this approach. It was mentioned that with a more traditional, teacher-led classes these types of learners might accidentally learn something while passively listening to the teacher. The second disadvantage was detected in connection with concentration. Some students had been observed to have difficulty with staying focused, either due to the raising noise in their classroom or due to more personal characteristics. Finally, it was also pointed out that the remodeling of teaching practices requires quite a lot of resources, especially in the development stage.

Furthermore, all five of the participating teachers had asked their students for feedback for the new practices in some way or another. In addition, the observation of lessons in the present study was partly focused on determining how the approach was perceived by Anneli's students. The participants reported their students to mainly being positive in their feedback, and to expressing a willingness to continue with the approach. Nonetheless, there were some concerns that had been raised as well. Based on the feedbacks, the teachers reported their students to have commented on the following

topics: (1) self-paced learning, (2) autonomy and motivation, (3) applied learning techniques, and amount and quality of learning, (4) small-group, pair and independent work, and (5) suggestions for improvement. Additionally, the participating teachers were asked about the reception they had had from the students' parents, and their own colleagues. From the interviewed teachers, Helena had had the least amount of contact with the parents of her students and Maria had had the most. In general, the response from parents had been quite minimal, yet positive. Minna did not discuss the topic of parent response in her blog. Furthermore, all of the interviewed teachers had had one or more teachers in their school who was experimenting with the approach. Yet, Anneli was the only one who had truly benefitted from the collaboration to a significant extent. The reception from the other teachers at their school had been either minimal or discouraging. This had led Minna, Maria and Johanna to seek council or just general positivity from colleagues through media, of which special mention can be given to the Facebook groups intended for teachers interested in the approach. Finally, contact with the schools' principals had also been quite limited, as Anneli and Maria were the only ones who had actually had a discussion about it. Johanna and Helena had not discussed the topic with their principal but assumed a positive response. Minna again gave no mention of the topic.

Before concluding this section with a consideration of the limitations of the present study and its suggestions for further research, focus should be given to explaining why the studied approach can be beneficial for language learning beyond the findings of the present study. As argued especially in section 2.2 on foreign language research, language learning is an individual process for each learner that is greatly affected by two factors in particular: learner motivation and language aptitude (e.g. Skehan 1989, Robinson 2002, Dörnyei 2005, Ellis 2008). Language aptitude was originally seen as one of the main determinants that indicate of how well a language can be learned by someone (e.g. Carroll and Sapon 1959, Pimsleur 1966). However, the idea behind Bloom's (1968) theory on mastery learning, to which the studied approach is quite similar, is that when provided with sufficient resources, the impact of language aptitude on the attained level of achievement can be diminished. Furthermore, the role of motivation in language learning is the most studied factor in research on individual differences in SLL (Ellis 2008: 677). The impact of motivation on whether or not language learning is successful is undeniable due to the time- and effort-consuming nature of the SLL process (Dörnyei 2005: 65). However, it was also established that

increased autonomy, which is one of the main goals of the studied approach, can be highly beneficial for language learners as it has been argued to improve language motivation (Dörnyei and Csizér 1998, Dickinson 1995). In addition, motivation can be increased by personalization of the learning process, and increasing learners' goal-orientedness (Dörnyei and Csizér 1998), which again are aspects promoted by the personalized learning approach. It can thus be concluded that this type of a personalized approach can be particularly beneficial for language learning in terms of increasing motivation through autonomy and decreasing the effect of language aptitude.

There were some practical limitations the present study had to face, which might affect its validity and reliability. Primarily, in the data collection phase the study could have benefitted from the skills and knowledge of a more experienced researcher. For instance, during the analysis of the interview transcriptions, unsaturation of some interview questions was detected (Cousin 2009: 80). Furthermore, the limited resources of the present study restricted the amount of data collected, which in turn might weaken the reliability of the results. For example a longer observation period might have been beneficial. It is also important to bear in mind that due to the relative novelty of the approach and the constant flow of new information on it, the ideas and thoughts presented by the participating teachers are only representations of a particular time and might in fact already be outdated. In addition, as is always the case when a human being is analyzing the oral or written product of another, it is impossible to completely dismiss the risk of misunderstandings and misinterpretations. Furthermore, it must be concluded that all of the participating teachers recognized that the implementations of the approach they were applying were not perfect. They did, however, all demonstrate an eagerness to continue with the approach and develop it further. If compared to Mäenpää's (2016: 42-43) wider viewpoint of personalized learning as a culture of learning, it must be admitted that the present study and, perhaps to varying extents, the participating teachers regarded personalized learning as an approach that can be chosen to implement when appropriate. Perhaps this, in some ways more limited viewpoint is easier to comprehend and also to study. As a result, it can be questioned how well this viewpoint actually incorporates the vastness of Peura's thinking and whether the studied implementations encompass the whole concept behind Peura's personalized learning.

Due to the extremely popular nature of the approach, further research into the topic of personalized learning is highly encouraged. The three avenues of research that would be

found most advantageous at this time are research into learning results, learner attitudes and motivation, and the process of personalizing teaching. In order to determine the efficiency of the approach in terms of learning results and learner attitudes and motivation, it might be extremely beneficial to conduct a large-scale study that focuses on either one or both of these topics. In addition, a longitudinal study of the process of developing a personalized language classroom, and the process of teachers and students learning to function in that new setting might be useful for practicing educators changing their teaching towards a more personalized approach.

6 BIBLIOGRAPHY

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7 APPENDICES

Appendix 1 Interview guide

- Taustatiedot:
 - Koulutus
 - Opetuskokemus vuosina
 - Opetettavat ryhmät joilla toteuttaa
 - vuosiluokka, niiden koko (arviolta) kieli
- Menetelmään perehtyminen:
 - Mistä tieto menetelmästä
 - Onko medianäkyvyys vaikuttanut
 - Jos kyllä, kuinka
 - Mahdolliset lisäkoulutukset
 - Mahdolliset kirjallisuudet
- Oma sovellutus:
 - Mistä liikkeelle
 - Mitä luokassa tapahtuu
 - kuinka suullinen, kuuntelu?
 - Teknologia
 - Arviointi
 - tavoitetasot?
 - Mistä materiaalit
- Kokemukset:
 - Mitkä ratkaisut käytännössä ovat toimineet hyvin
 - Miksi?
 - Mitkä tehtävät tai toimintatavat esimerkiksi eivät ole toimineet
 - Miksi?
 - Onko oppiminen muuttunut
 - Jos on, kuinka? (esim. oppilaiden vastuu)
- Muiden suhtautuminen
 - Kuinka vanhemmat ovat suhtautuneet
 - Kuinka kollegat ovat suhtautuneet
 - Mahdollinen yhteistyö
 - Kuinka oppilaat ovat reagoineet
 - Oletko kysynyt oppilaiden mielipiteitä
 - Jos olet, mitä noussut esille

- Ajatukset:
 - Miksi lähtenyt kokeilemaan
 - Mitkä oppimiskäsitykset taustalla
 - vrt. opettajankoulutuksessa opetettuun oppimiskäsitykseen, ns. perinteiseen opetukseen
 - Mitä menetelmässä hyvää
 - vrt. perinteisiin menetelmiin
 - Mikä menetelmässä huonoa
 - vrt. perinteisiin menetelmiin
 - Aiotko jatkaa menetelmän käyttöä
 - Jos kyllä, oletko tekemässä joitain muutoksia
 - Jos kyllä, mitä
- Muita kommentteja menetelmästä

Appendix 2 Field-note tables

TUNNIN ALOITUS JA TYÖSKENTELYYN ORIENTOITUMINEN	MITÄ TYÖSTETÄÄN KIELITÄIDON OSA- ALUEET luetunymmärtäminen kuullunymmärtäminen suullinen kielitaito kirjoittaminen	MITÄ TYÖSTETÄÄN KIELEN OSA- ALUEET kielioppi sanasto ääntäminen muu, mikä	MITÄ TYÖSTETÄÄN ESIMERKKEJ Ä TEHTÄVISTÄ
KUINKA TYÖSKENNELLÄÄN yksin pareittain pienryhmässä isossa ryhmässä (5+ hlö) open kanssa	OPETTAJAN TOIMINTA LUOKASSA	TUNNIN LOPETUS	

MUUT HAVAINNOIJAN KOMMENTIT

MITÄ MIELTÄ OPPILAAT VAIKUTTAVAT OLEVAN YKSILÖLLISEN
OPPIMISEN MENETELMÄSTÄ (YLEISESTI)

MENETELMÄN HYVÄT PUOLET

MENETELMÄN HUONOT PUOLET