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# TEACHING HERITAGE GERMAN AND RUSSIAN THROUGH AUTHENTIC MATERIAL IN JYVÄSKYLÄ, FINLAND

A multiple case study design

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## Abstract

Since 2013, sixteen heritage language teachers in Jyväskylä, Finland, have been developing an Active Library (ActLib) method and an online cooperative learning forum designed to create and share authentic language learning material. The main objectives are twofold. Firstly, from the learner's perspective, the aims are to enhance pupils' language awareness while encouraging them to use their language repertoire as a resource in learning, to develop authentic activities, and to increase pupil agency. Secondly, from the teachers' and education policy perspective, the aim is to prepare heritage language teachers to introduce in advance the new Finnish core curriculum. A further objective is to develop teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in order to diversify their teaching practices. The ideology of ActLib is based on the cooperative learning of teachers. This case study focuses on possibilities for using authentic material in learning German and Russian as heritage languages. The data consists of ActLib assignments in German and Russian heritage languages and pupil interviews. The results show that the assignments develop pupils' language awareness, but the linguistically authentic learning material was not sufficiently meaningful for pupils to develop their autonomy and acquisition.

Yhteenveto (summary in Finnish). [Translated by Pia Bärlund]

Vuodesta 2013 16 Jyväskylän kaupungin oman äidinkielen opettajaa ovat kehittäneet autenttiseen opetusmateriaaliin perustuvaa ActiveLibrary—opetusmetodia sekä tehtäväpankkia. Pää tavoitteina on ollut ensinnäkin saada oppilaat tietoisiksi kielipääomastaan ja rohkaista heitä käyttämään sitä oppimisen välineenä, kehittää autenttisia toimintatapoja ja näin ollen kehittää oppijan toimijuutta toiseksi kehittää oman äidinkielen opettajien tietoisuutta POPS2014 sisällöistä. Samalla on kehitetty opettajien pedagogista osaamista ja jaettu käytänteitä. ActLib:n ideologia perustuu oman äidinkielen opettajien yhteistoiminnalliseen tiimioppimiseen. Tässä tapaustutkimuksessa keskitymme kulttuurisidonnaisten aut-

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enttisen oppimateriaalin mahdollisuuksin saksan ja venäjän oman äidinkielen opetuksessa. Tutkimusaineisto sisältää oppilaiden haastattelut ja saksan ja venäjän tehtäväpaketit. Tulokset osoittavat, että tehtävät kasvattavat oppilaiden kielitietoisuutta, mutta lingvistisesti autenttiset oppimateriaalit eivät olleet riittävän merkityksellisiä kehittämään oppilaiden itseohjautuvuutta ja hankitun uuden tiedon soveltamista.

Keywords: heritage language learning, authentic language learning, culturally authentic material, linguistically authentic material, teacher education

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Finnish schools have long been monocultural. Since 1990, however, the situation has been changing (Linderoos, 2016, pp. 16, 35-39) and in 2015, it changed more than anyone could have expected with the arrival of 8500 minor asylum seekers in Finland (Ministry of Education, 2016, 3). Multilingualism and multiculturalism present new challenges regarding integration both for the nation as a whole and for the education system.

In parallel, the Finnish national core curriculum and the Finnish school system are undergoing a significant change in pedagogical thinking. The new core curriculum, which came into effect on August 1<sup>st</sup>, 2016 (FNBE, 2014a; FNBE, 2014c), promotes multilingualism and multiliteracy skills<sup>1</sup> in school and, along with these, the integration of different languages in learning and interdisciplinary learning in general. Languages are no longer separate subjects with their own objectives and learning cultures, but resources for broad-based learning. For example, communicative competence, oral, visual, auidal learning methods and knowledge management skills are crucial components of all language subjects. Multilingualism is thus at the centre of phenomenon-based learning, which forms one of the cornerstones of the new Finnish curriculum.

In tandem with this renewing learning culture, the role of heritage languages<sup>2</sup> is also increasing in informal learning, with pupils being enabled to use their heritage language as a medium of learning parallel to Finnish. Heritage languages will thus continue to be taught as separate, optional subjects outside the curriculum. The curriculum reform and the current issue of the increasing number of refugee and migrant pupils in basic education also require the development of heritage language teaching, which has not been taken into sufficient account in language policymaking in Finland (see Pöyhönen & Luukka, 2007; Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 4).

A number of key issues need to be improved before heritage language instruction can reach the goals laid out in the new curriculum. In this study, we present an innovative way to teach, combining literature with phenomenon-based learning, and seek to provide solutions to two of the key challenges mentioned by Linderoos (2016, p. 48), namely the lack of teaching materials for heritage language learning

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<sup>1</sup>See Tønnessen (2011) for a closer examination of these skills.

<sup>2</sup>See also Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt (2012, pp. 2-3) and Linderoos (2016, p. 62).

and how to cope with the enormous heterogeneity of pupil age and language level in heritage language groups. To develop heritage language learning, we created a method based on learning activities that draw on cultural experiences and authentic texts. The online Active Library (hereafter ActLib) is a Finnish offshoot of the EU's EuroLib<sup>3</sup> project (EuroLib). The main idea of ActLib is to create, test and collect multicultural and multilingual materials together with peers for language, literacy and cultural teaching. The method proposes that language learning is best served through pupil interaction when completing tasks, learning content, or resolving meaningful problems together (cf. Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 2013, p. 220).

Since 2013, sixteen heritage language teachers with a multicultural background in Jyväskylä, Finland, have been developing an ActLib teaching method and online cooperative learning forum (<https://peda.net/oppimateriaalit/kirja-arkku>) based on authentic language learning material. The main pedagogical aims have been to enhance the pupils' language awareness while encouraging the use of the pupil's own language repertoire as a resource in learning, to develop more authentic classroom activities, and to increase pupil agency. The ideology of the ActLib shared space is based on cooperative, peer learning of heritage language teachers. To promote the in-service education of teachers, ActLib provides meetings and workshops joint preparation of teaching materials and lesson planning and presenting and publishing learning material and receiving face-to-face support and guidance from peers and supervisors. The education is based on cooperative learning (see Kohonen, 1992) and developing peer support among heritage language teachers and classroom teachers, while also aiming to further develop multilingualism in schools. ActLib's concretize the main aims and contents of the new Finnish core curriculum (FNBE, 2014a; FNBE, 2014c): the use of multimodal texts in learning, interdisciplinary learning, and gradually developing the multiliteracy competencies of pupils at all levels and in all subjects of basic education. The heritage language teachers use culturally authentic texts, such as novels, fables, proverbs, poems or stories as a basis for lessons. According to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2013, p. 225), most language learning methods treat culture implicitly, having no clearly articulated view of its role in instruction. In contrast, the ActLib method is based on explicit cultural values learned through language. Teachers are encouraged to freely manipulate authentic texts for teaching purposes, and peers and supervisors support them in creating artful, functional language learning assignments.

This article focuses on the production of authentic, text-based learning material and possibilities for its use in literacy learning. Two languages, German and Russian, were targeted in the study due to their long teaching tradition in Jyväskylä.

Language learning and teaching in the Finnish basic education system is examined briefly in sections 1.1 and 1.2. Section 2 presents the Active Library as a learning method, followed by the research questions, data and method in section 3. Finally, section 4 presents theory and the results combined together, revealing the

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<sup>3</sup> EuroLib. <http://www.eulib.eu/home.html>

main themes of literacy learning using the ActLib method, and section 5 presents the conclusions of the study.

### *1.1 Language of instruction in basic education*

The duration of basic education in Finland is nine years, comprising a minimum of 8436 hours (Basic Education Act, 628/1998; OECD, 2010). The language of instruction can be Finnish, Swedish or one of the three minority languages (Sami, Roma and Finnish sign language). During basic education, pupils are required to complete 1596 hours of compulsory Finnish or Swedish L1 studies. Immigrant pupils are required to learn the same amount of Finnish or Swedish as an L2. All pupils can share the same classroom, however, they follow a different learning syllabus and are evaluated differently. The parents of an immigrant pupil may choose which syllabus their child will follow, Finnish or Swedish as L1 or L2, where L1 is the pupil's native or first language and L2 a second or foreign language (Basic Education Act, 628/1998). According to Official Statistics of Finland (2017), in the school year 2013-2014, a total of 492,079 pupils learned Finnish as L1, while 32,519 pupils chose Swedish as their L1, in addition to which 1088 pupils learned in another language (cf. Linderoos, 2016, p. 39).

Of the 10 pupils included in the present study, five registered as having Finnish, one as having Ukrainian and four as having Russian as their mother tongue. It is important to note that in Finland, it is only possible to have one officially registered mother tongue; this means that in this study, 50% of the pupils' bilingualism is officially invisible and therefore cannot be recorded statistically.

### *1.2 Teaching heritage language in Finland and in Jyväskylä*

There is research-based evidence showing importance of bilingual children's heritage language for their overall personal and educational development (e.g. Bialystok & Feng, 2011). In Finland has a long tradition of teaching heritage languages (mother tongue) to first and second generation immigrants. According to Latomaa (2007), heritage languages have been taught in Finnish schools since the end of the 1980s. Adoptive children and plurilingual native Finns who have lived abroad for an extended period are also welcomed to take part in heritage language lessons. Local authorities are required to organize heritage language teaching in languages where there is a minimum of four pupils registered who speak the same language and a teacher is available. Participation is optional for the pupil. The Finnish National Board of Education supports the financial cost of the teacher's lesson time in two-hour increments, contributing 86% of the overall teacher's pay. The Finnish system differs in this respect from the equivalent German, French and American systems (Linderoos, 2016, p. 46; Europäische Kommission, 2009, p. 24; Ludanyi, 2014).

Although heritage language learning strengthens Finnish language learning, not all migrant children take part in the optional lessons. According to Mäkelä (2007,

pp. 16-17), lack of participation may be due to several reasons, including lacking or inactive language skills at home primarily due to Finnish being the main language. Finnish may dominate the other language. The statistics of the Finnish National Board of Education reported that in the year 2012 some 13,222–13,914 pupils took part in lessons in 52-54 languages in 88-92 communities (FNBE, 2013; Linderöos, 2016, p. 47)<sup>4</sup>. The official statistics and the statistics of the FNBE are not comparable due to the huge invisibility percentage of pupil's plurilingualism in schools.

The City of Jyväskylä has been offering heritage language lessons since 1990 (cf. Korpijoki, 1990). The first language group was German. By the 2013-2014 school year, the number of languages offered had increased to 22 languages, with 421 pupils taking part in heritage language lessons. During the school year 2015-16, this number has increased by a further one hundred pupils. As mentioned above, it is impossible to adequately record true plurilingualism at the community level due to the ability to register only one official mother language and which syllabus the pupil is studying.

For this study, we chose the German and Russian languages as there has been a long tradition of teaching German as a heritage language in Jyväskylä, and Russian has the biggest number of learners. In the school year 2013-14, a total of 19 pupils participated in the German heritage language class, while 125 pupils learned Russian as a heritage language. The teachers of these language groups both have a migrant background and are qualified teachers.

## 2. THE ACTIVE LIBRARY AS A LEARNING METHOD

The ActLib language education project supports teachers in implementing phenomenon-based learning with an emphasis on literacy and art. The ActLib method is implemented through an online cooperative learning forum for innovating, testing, collecting and presenting multicultural and multilingual materials by teachers for language, literacy and cultural teaching. In order to ground teachers in the pedagogical ideas of ActLib, face-to-face peer learning is also organized in the form of workshops and other meetings. The peer learning is aimed at different types of learning groups and for the integration of school subjects towards the study of literature, language and culture. Cross-curricular learning is given special emphasis as one of the most important aims of the new Finnish National Curriculum 2014<sup>5</sup>.

ActLib stresses the necessity of making classrooms into collaborative learning communities that provide opportunities for pupils to negotiate the meaning of texts, expand their language resources, explore how language is used, and take part in meaningful communicative activities with different textual and cultural dimensions (cf. Tønnessen, 2011, p. 155). ActLib is based on a 3-dimensional lan-

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<sup>4</sup>*Variation in the figures is due to communities giving statistics separately in the autumn and spring terms.*

<sup>5</sup>*The Finnish core curriculum was drafted in 2014, but came into force August 1<sup>st</sup> 2016.*

guage learning design: the connections between cultural competence, linguistically authentic texts and language awareness. According to Richards (2005, p. 25) this kind of communicative language teaching is concerned with the engagement of learners. It allows pupils to develop their communicative competence, of which linguistic ability is an important part. Language variation and as large a cultural literacy world as possible have been ensured by jointly negotiating suitable genres for the pedagogy of ActLib. Material has been created, for example, through the use of folktales and proverbs, which offer free copyright use of these text groups and close connection to cultural issues.

The ActLib method concretizes the basic aims and contents of the new Finnish National Curriculum: use of multimodal texts with cultural roots in learning, interdisciplinary learning, and developing multi-literacy competencies in various learning environments.

A further aim of ActLib is to renew language learning to be more active, functional, inspiring, experience-based and creative through innovative use of literature in heterogeneous learning groups. Activities are based on learning by doing in order to replace the prevailing print text-based language learning culture, with its monolithic individual studying methods, with collaborative learning. Language learning practices in Finland continue to follow a diction–grammar model, and learning routines are teacher and textbook led (Luukka, Pöyhönen, Huhta, Taalas, Tarnanen & Keränen, 2008). Our expectation was that more innovative, active use of cultural texts could be promoted, especially in heritage language learning, in which motivating methods are needed while the circumstances of studying (cf. Linderoos, 2016, p. 49).

ActLib emphasizes authenticity in learning. We understand authentic language learning as being a method that uses linguistically and culturally authentic materials to improve learners' communicative skills. In addition to the learning material, the assignments and classroom materials should also be meaningful for the learner. Activities are designed to be authentic for learners in order to enhance their autonomy and agency (Bärlund, 2012, p. 11; Edelhoff, 1985; Gilmore, 2007). In practice, this means simply that the teacher and pupils choose an interesting text together, and the teacher then prepares the language learning material and activities around this linguistically authentic text.

Finally, as a whole, the learning unit improves the pupil's ability to communicate about a given theme at their own language level. Learners should therefore have the possibility to choose the texts and assignments themselves, as also underlined in the Finnish language evaluation report of the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE, 2014a; Härmälä & Hildén, 2014). Assessment should also be authentic and based on each pupil's own language level (vs. Linderoos, 2016, p. 48). Furthermore, authentic learning is seen as participatory learning. For example, text selection in the classroom is a negotiation process where the interests of both pupils and teacher are represented. Also, activities related to the chosen texts include variation in order to give pupils opportunities to pursue their own needs and inter-

ests. Both actors in the learning unit, the pupils and the teacher, actively take part in the planning of the learning practices throughout the process.

ActLib tasks are based on linguistically authentic material, such as novels, poems and proverbs, while the pupils' action is based on the following activities: drama, plays and games, arts and crafts, production of music and videos. Instead of sitting passively in the classroom, these activities encourage more active and participatory learning with peers, drawing on the interests and capacities of each pupil. The ActLib model uses the idea of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) based on art and collaborative acts. Socio-constructive learning theory and the sociocultural concept of language are also at the core of the ActLib model. Language learning is seen as a situated act bound up in the linguistic activities and communicative practices of various communities and settings (Kucer, 2005). Different contexts offer affordances for learners to recycle the socially and culturally available linguistic resources in a learning community (Dufva, 2013).

The focus of the learning is to inspire both teachers and pupils to network and to study phenomena of different school subjects through literature. The aim of the active art tasks is to enhance language awareness and develop the whole language repertoire of the learner. According to Svalberg (2007), these aims demand that pupils learn to see languages from various aspects. This is based on pedagogy with cognitive linguistics (learner's attention and awareness of language learning), cross-curricular language sensitive instruction, and intercultural communication (Svalberg, 2007). Furthermore, enhancing language awareness requires explicit knowledge about language, conscious perception and sensitivity in language use (cf. Hawkins, 1999) and, finally, awareness of one's linguistic repertoires and develop this metalinguistic competence (Andrews, 2007). According to the Finnish core curriculum FNBE, 2014a; FNBE, 2014c), multiliteracy is one of the cross-curricular themes including the instruction of all school subjects. Based on this thinking, every subject has its own language, e.g. music notes or mathematical formulas, and every adult in the school is a language teacher, not only those who have a background in languages. The ActLib method is primarily based on two key dimensions of multiliteracy: reader-response theory (Rosenblatt, 1995) regarding literary texts, and community-oriented reading (Kauppinen, 2010) regarding cooperative activities, research question, data and method. This case study focuses on the possibilities to use authentic cultural material in heritage language learning. The research questions are: 1) How do multicultural pupils learn writing and reading through ActLib tasks while using their heritage language, when their Finnish language is stronger? and 2) How do pupils experience the so-called authentic tasks designed by the teachers?

The data consists of documents and interviews. The documents consist of ActLib activities created by German and Russian heritage language teachers as part of the ActLib project. The activities consist of tasks based on cultural texts. In German, the cultural text is Theodor Fontane's ballad 'Herr von Ribbeck auf Ribbeck im Havelland' and in Russian the folktale of Valentin Kataev's 'The flower with seven



colours'. The text samples and materials can be found on the ActLib website (open access). The data offers an opportunity to examine the ActLib language learning method from two perspectives: the affordances included in the activities, and the pupils' experiences and opinions.

In addition to the learning material, the data also includes semi-structured thematic interviews of pupils ( $N = 10$ ) conducted in the school year 2013-14. The voice-recorded interviews lasted 10-20 minutes and were transcribed. The interviewing and transcription language was Finnish. The pupils are heterogeneous language speakers, some active users of their heritage language, others passive users (Melo-Pfeifer & Schmidt, 2012, pp. 3, 5).

All the German language pupils are registered Finnish speakers with Swiss, Austrian or Finnish parents, while the Russian language pupils have a 100% Russian or Ukrainian family background. Thus, of the 10 pupils interviewed, five have Finnish, one Ukrainian and four Russian as their official mother language.

The interviews and the learning material were analysed using qualitative content analysis, which was partly theory-driven, partly data-driven. The analysis followed the rules of analysis (Lankshear & Knobel, 2004, p. 270). The documents and interviews were cross-analysed by two researchers. Firstly, the Russian and German assignments were divided into categories in accordance with the aims of the ActLib method, namely artful and creative action, learners' agency, cooperative learning, and authenticity of materials and activities. After the categorization, the classes were thematized according to the meanings of contemporary language learning and education, especially the new curriculum and the 5 A's<sup>6</sup> method. The final themes were: choices in the literacy world, cultural competence, linguistic knowledge, learning skills, agency of language learners, and authenticity in language learning materials. In connection with this, the division of activities and pupils' thematic interviews were analysed. Parallel to the analysis of the assignments, utterances revealing the ideas of language learning were sought through the ActLib method. After that, the utterances were categorized and thematized in the same way as in the analysis of the assignments. All ten interviews were conducted together to maintain pupil anonymity in the case study. Due to this, there was no opportunity to use the cross-sectional method in the analysis. The interviews and transcriptions were carried out by two external parties to ensure the reliability of the research.

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<sup>6</sup>The 5 A's method used in this study was inspired by previous research. The method indicates how **a**uthentic material is, how the material awakens pupil **a**wareness, how the material develops pupil **a**gency, how **a**utonomous the pupils grow through learning, and their **a**cquisition capability, i.e. how the pupils take ownership of the learned text (see Bärlund, 2012; Edelhoff, 1985; Gilmore, 2007).

### 3. THE DIMENSIONS OF ACTIVE HERITAGE LANGUAGE LEARNING

In the following sections we describe the results of the analysis. We combine the theory and previous researches with the analysis. There are six dimensions of authentic language learning that promote pupils' agency through the ActLib method: the choice of literacy world, developing cultural competence, developing linguistic knowledge, developing learning skills, agency of learners, and authenticity of the material and learning perspective of learners.

#### *3.1 The choice of literacy world*

One of the principal aims of Finnish literacy instruction is to socialize pupils into the literacy world of contemporary society in order to gain full citizenship and possibilities to access all sectors of society (FNBE, 2014c). However, the selection of texts for instruction is challenging — a 'text' in its broadest definition includes all kinds of functional, multimodal meaning-making matter. In addition, the spectrum of language variants has to be visible in the language lesson: texts from various decades and centuries, factual, fiction, dialects and other variants. The texts should also represent the broad scale of language use in different situations and contexts.

Furthermore, the linguistically authentic texts chosen by the teachers are part of the national canon of school culture (Kauppinen, 2010). This is well-known in the heritage culture in the case of literature instruction (Literary Framework, 2015). It is notable in the case of heritage language instruction that the curricula, the school culture of the heritage language, and corresponding aspects in the contemporary education system affect the text choices. The text canon is not especially strong in the Finnish curricula, but it is visible and therefore affects the text choices in language lessons (Kauppinen, 2010).

Due to the emphasis on the larger literacy world and the role of the canon, the texts can be considered linguistically authentic: they represent learning authenticity in the official heritage school culture, but not necessarily in the minds of pupils (Bärlund, 2012). By also promoting the leisure time literacy world of pupils (social networking sites, videos or pop music) informal, autonomous learning can be activated (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013, p. 220). For example, the possibility in German language lessons to explore multimodal text compositions has especially strongly represented the children's and adolescents' own literacy world, with, for instance, pupils producing manuscript rap versions of Fontane's ballad and performing them over their own choice of music.

The main aim in the Russian community-level curriculum for grades 3-5 is to read classical and contemporary literature, analyse it, and share reader experiences (City of Jyväskylä, 2006). The Russian folk tale by Kataev currently used in the heritage language lessons has a long history in children's culture. The choice of the German ballad is also in accordance with the curriculum, in which reading epical and lyrical texts is the main aim for grades 6-9 (part reading and literature) (City of

Jyväskylä, 2006). Both teachers of these heritage language classes have followed the community-level curriculum closely by choosing the ActLib text. Nevertheless, pupils have not been able to choose texts themselves.

The activities carried out relating to the folk tale and ballad were diverse. Both the Russian and German assignments include reading aloud in front of the class, pronunciation of new and difficult vocabulary, and spelling. The German assignments include rapping and rewriting the text. Some tasks, such as information gap exercises or committing poems to memory, were traditional to foreign language lessons (see Luukka et al., 2008). In addition, some assignments were developed based on the ActLib ideology. These artful, functional activities, such as rapping the ballad, offered pupils opportunities to learn collaboratively and creatively and make choices of their own. The rap compositions, for example, varied considerably from pupil to pupil, with each pupil able to use the meaning-making resources provided as a source of personal inspiration.

### *3.2 Developing cultural competence*

Traditional literature learning tasks were employed in both language classes. Both the folk tale and the ballad were treated as fiction, and text analysis was conducted using conventional concepts in literature learning such as verse, strophe and plot. Both texts were also analysed with respect to their genre features.

The ballad on which the German ActLib material is based was examined as a genre and the many cultural dimensions related to ballads were explored, with the different versions of the ballad representing different styles of lyric, music, age group, etc. Through these, the pupils were able to explore the nature of spoken heritage, its different variants, and the ability of us each to create our own versions of it (Penny, 2011). Personal interaction through rapping also made the ballad alive (Mishan, 2005, p. 105; Penny, 2011). Secondly, close reading of the ballad gives tools for examining literature, and working actively with the ballad makes it more natural to use literate terms such as verse, strophe or plot, as tools when analysing its text. These become part of the pupil's literate knowledge as well as the poetess herself. Thirdly, the rap versions of the ballad gave important insight into intertextuality, which relates to all kinds of texts and the text cultures behind them. Fourthly, studying the ballad gave the pupils some inkling, although subjective, of life in 19th century (Mishan, 2005, pp. 101-102).

Adult: Right, ok. What can you say about this poem you've been looking at, Herr von Ribbeck. Was it a good choice?

Pupil 2: Well, I think it was a good choice 'cos the author was someone famous, I think. Don't really know if they were famous, can't remember, but it's really important to know stuff like this.

The Russian ActLib material is based on a popular folktale that offers a good opportunity to approach phenomena-based school subjects, such as science and mathe-

matics, alongside the mother tongue. The pupils gained a more literate awareness of, for example, the kinds of phenomena contained in fairy-tales, such as a plot with a problem-solving structure, a miracle item (a flower which fulfils hopes), the number seven as a magic number, and a moral lesson (e.g. generosity breeds happiness). Such elements can be seen as transcultural, i.e. present in all cultures (Mishan, 2005, p. 103).

Adult: What makes a fairy tale?

Pupil 3: It's a story

Adult: OK

Pupil 3: It's partly true and partly, well different, like a story.

The folk tale and the ballad are classic representations of the Russian and German literary canons and provide insights into these respective cultures. The tasks employed develop writing skills through genre-based writing, such as text transformation in which the pupils wrote their own version based on the original. This demands understanding of old heritage vocabulary. The pupils also wrote descriptions of the protagonist and other characters, and made a rap version (narrative text). A manuscript for the rap version of the ballad was also written, which called for deeper understanding of spelling and rhyming vocabulary. The music for the rap was chosen online by one of the pupils and the performance was video recorded. The rap exercise is an example of multimodal text composition.

Both the German and Russian ActLib material cover several levels of cultural competence regarding learning literature. The activities of both language groups are rooted in cultural genres defined by socio-cultural features such as composition or mode of meaning making. The pupils became gradually aware of the background knowledge of these genres and their special forms and features. In addition to literary culture itself, the pupils became aware of its connections with contemporary culture, especially the culture and literacy worlds of children and teens.

In doing the German language tasks, the pupils discussed the different types of reading experience surrounding poetry. The interview points out that none of the German pupils could see the similarity between lyrics and poems, or that they can be viewed as the same genre of literature. According to the pupils, they are able to describe the kinds of music they listen to, but do not read any poems:

Adult: OK, what about poetry, do you ever read poems in your free time?

Pupil: No

Adult: OK.

Pupil: They are little bit, should I say boring.

Adult: OK.

Adult: Well, do you read poetry in your free time?

Pupil F: No.

Adult: OK, what about music, do you listen to music?

Pupil F: Really loads.

Adult: OK

Pupil F: Without music, I wouldn't be able to express myself so well.

Adult: Right, so what sort of music do you listen to?

Pupil F: Sometimes I listen to, well I don't really know, not exactly rap, but pop music and sometimes something a bit more chilled.

As previously discussed, the pupils studying Russian have been reading a folk tale. During the lessons, the teacher also taught the genre pedagogy. According to the interviews, 90% of the students recognized such key terms as main character and storyline. Pupils are also able to recognize the key components that characterize a fairy tale. It is interesting to note, that while poetry was found to be a difficult genre for the German heritage language pupils, the Russian pupils felt the genre pedagogy of fairy tales to be easy. The question, then, is what makes poetry such a difficult genre in comparison to fairy tales, despite children being introduced in early childhood to nursery rhymes and fairy tales?

Perhaps the answer can be found through Heyne's reading competence concept (2014, p. 32). She writes that reading competence consists not only of cognitive skills, but also of motivational aspects, such as attitude, value and motive. This can be interpreted as pupils being not motivated to read poems, but to listen to musical lyrics. Penny (2011, p. 49) offers another aspect. He writes that poetry offers a more demanding and challenging genre, which might reduce the interest of young learners in poetry, but make them heavy users of lyrics. Furthermore, they can take various roles as a reader, which promotes their readerness (Appleyard, 1991, p. 14-15).

The ActLib activities cover a large range of the criteria of the European Literary Framework (2016) according to the competencies of pupils as a reader and the dimensions of books. According to these criteria, the ActLib activities provide opportunities to develop the literacy skills of many kinds of readers. How the pupils use these activities as a resource in their learning in practice depends essentially on the teaching arrangements. At best, the ActLib activities provide opportunities to strengthen the reader/writer identities of pupils, namely discursal self and self as author (Clark & Ivanic, 1997).

Nevertheless, although the genre pedagogical activities may have been challenging, the ActLib tasks have helped pupils develop their oral skills. According to the interviews, most pupils felt that the activities helped or may have helped them with their pronunciation. When asked if the ActLib tasks helped their pronunciation, 20% of participants answered yes, 60% answered maybe and 10% answered no. Pupils do, however evaluate themselves very realistically; 70% estimated that they speak their heritage language in everyday life as 3 on a scale of 5 (1 indicating 'I do not talk a lot' to 5 indicating 'I talk a lot').

Adult: [...] you read the text aloud?

PupilD: Hmmm.

Adult: Did your Russian pronunciation improve?

PupilD: Well maybe yes, but I read better in Finnish.

Adult: OK

Adult: Well, did the tasks help you speak more German?

Pupil F: Not really so much.

Adult: OK, did you feel your pronunciation improved when you read the text aloud?

Pupil F: Well yes a little bit, cos talkin' is so difficult, cos well I don't talk so much.

Adult: OK

Pupil F: Yes, talkin' is little bit difficult and I can do it, but sometimes I forget the words, I can read aloud and writing is a challenge, cos I don't remember when there's a capital or some other pronunciation thing.

On the other hand, after three months, this type of ActLib activity did not fulfil the main aim of the research, i.e. to encourage pupils to speak more in their heritage language and take the vocabulary of the ballad or fairy-tale into active use. (cf. Penny, 2011, p. 53). This might be due to the fact that this kind of literacy is far removed from the pupils' everyday lives. According to Penny, teaching literacy and poetry in school develops learners to recognize real life in other literary forms (Penny, 2011, p. 42). According to Mishan (2005, p. 105), linguistic forms are distilled and stylized rather than copied from the real world.

### *3.3 Developing linguistic knowledge*

The German ActLib material developed the pupils' linguistic knowledge in several ways. Through the activities, the pupils engaged with a broad diversity of language with, for example, the use of archaic, lyric and dialectic vocabulary, revealing to them the bigger picture of linguistic variants. The ballad developed linguistic knowledge in three ways: firstly, the phenomenon of different text types, such as argumentative, descriptive, narrative texts, was introduced; secondly, the pupils became aware of adjectives as part of speech in the descriptive text type; and thirdly, by learning words and wordings. The Russian ActLib material developed the pupils' linguistic knowledge in only a slightly different way. The pupils learned means of meaning making in literary and multimodal texts, for example by comparing a video animation with a traditional fairy-tale, as well as composition and meaning-making in different genres. The material developed the pupil's ability to see the difference between narrative and argumentative texts and how the linguistic structure as a system works: parts of speech, proper/common nouns, from letters to words and words to sentences. By practicing using different types of dictionaries, the pupils also learned different meanings of words in addition to their spelling. Our analysis of tasks showed us that the teachers have designed wide-ranging, versatile learning material. These materials enhanced the pupils' knowledge of meanings, the role of word classes, and awareness of sentence structures.

The diversity of the language also became evident to the pupils when working with the ballad with its archaic, lyrical and dialectic style. The pupils also compared different variations of the original ballad. Such tasks provided insights into the phenomenon of linguistic variants. By working with several dictionaries during the

German lessons, the pupils enhanced their knowledge of the diversity of spelling and meaning of words.

Adult: OK, can you say, if it would have been an easy poem, how would it have been easy, what could have made it easier?

Pupil: Well, maybe it wouldn't have such difficult words, like in that poem we rehearsed, it had such, such sort of old fashioned German.

Adult: OK

Pupil: Like such older words.

Adult: Well

Pupil: Well, nobody understood them.

It is worth noting here that even native speakers do not always understand the message of a poem. As Mishan reminds us, the language learner should be encouraged simply to feel the poem and its multiple levels (2005, p. 106).

### *3.4 Developing learning skills*

The language learning methodologies used in ActLib have a special focus on teaching learning strategies, cooperative learning, and planning lessons that promote the strengths of different kinds of learners (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013, p. 220). The German language ActLib material gives pupils many opportunities to develop their reading comprehension skills and to learn different reading strategies. For example, exercises exploring different variants of texts develop the pupils' close reading skills. The German activities also offer opportunities to develop 21st century skills for active citizenship, versatile dictionary use (to seek new and alternative definitions), ICT-based learning including good online practices and use of cloud services, presentation and listening skills, use of visualizations to aid reading comprehension, assessment skills such as peer assessment of rap presentations, self-assessment skills, and independent use of imagination in language learning to enhance acquisition.

The Russian ActLib material is based on tasks that develop many literacy skills, such as peer reading and shared reading experience. The teacher has also designed various tasks to develop the writing skills of heterogeneous pupils, such as rewriting the folk-tale, drawing the main 'flower' character, and constructing a mind map of the storyline. Among these tasks, more traditional information gap exercises have also been used. The pupils have also watched an animated film version and compared it with the original (as an exercise in meaning-making with multimodal texts).

The Russian activities also promoted phenomenon-based learning and showed the benefits of integrating school subjects, i.e. learning science via literature and arts (colours of a rainbow, geometrical shapes, compass points, a flower as a part of flora). Both teachers have also used embodied language learning methods (visual, auditive, logical and kinaesthetic creative learning) to teach vocabulary.

When striving to develop learning skills, we need to remember that children do not analyse what is or is not a skill or is or is not important to learn. They simply think in terms of what is fun and what is not. According to the interviews, 80% of the pupils liked active tasks such as rapping, drawing and doing arts and crafts. Only two boys mentioned that drawing is not their thing. ActLib's active learning methods have been clearly enjoyed by the pupils.

When designing the learning tasks, the teachers are required to think at a deeply pedagogical level in order to resolve how to fulfil the demands of the curriculum and best educate their pupils. The aim of learning 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, such as how to record videos and save them on a cloud service while at the same time learning and understanding 'netiquette' (internet etiquette) and the ability to summarize multiliteracy text in the pupil's own words, has always been a determining factor when planning the ActLib tasks.

According to the interviews, the pupils recognize how they learn best, although they expressed doubt that they would have had more interest in the assignments if they had been able to design them themselves. Revisiting texts in different ways helped them memorize and become familiar with their content. Here it is important to remember that learning strategies are highly individual; rapping the ballad helped one pupil, rewriting and learning it by rote helped another pupil, and handwriting the text proved beneficial to another.

Adult: How did you manage with the homework?

Pupil: Quite OK, we had one part of the poem to learn at home by heart and then everyone had their own part to learn, so I wrote it on my hand and read it over and over each day, so I learned it that way.

The most effective way to learn was when it was made fun for the pupils. Here, we return again to Heyne's (2014, p. 23) motivational reading competence. When the teacher changed the traditional ballad (text version) into the rap version found on the internet, the above pupil mentioned how boring poetry suddenly became fun, as she describes below:

Adult: Well. OK, and how did you feel when you were doing the rap? What sort of feeling did you have?

Pupil: Well, it was kind of fun and ridiculous when we were watching the videos, and when someone forgot to come in or just exploded [laughed] because they didn't remember the words. Well, it was fun.

Using music as a learning method and to teach such a difficult genre shows the pedagogical talent of the teacher. As Mishan states, the fact that pupils 'learn and retain songs in their first language even before they are able to understand the words, suggests that something in the combination of repetition, music and rhythm promotes learning and retention' (2005, p. 198).

In learning languages, pupils must learn to use multiple corpora. Perhaps one of the oldest, most traditional ways to translate and uncover unfamiliar words is the use of dictionaries.



Pupil X: Uh, I just ask the teacher, I'm too lazy to turn the pages and search for the word.  
 Adult [Does she help?]  
 Pupil XXX: We did have dictionaries there  
 Adult: Yeah?  
 Pupil XXX: I didn't use them  
 Adult: Did anyone else help you search for vocabulary and talk about the meaning?  
 Pupil XXX: Hmmm, well the teacher helped me at some point and to look for some word, cos I didn't find it.

### 3.5 Agency of learners

The previously mentioned learning skills and agency of the learners also affect the learning process through their motivational effect (Kohonen, 1992). For example, if pupils do not learn how to use a traditional dictionary or how to find information online, they cannot advance their agency, and the learner autonomy and acquisition do not develop. It should be noted with the current generation of mobilephone users, pupils have no problem using online dictionaries. On the other hand, teachers who are part of the telephone book generation may be better acquainted with alphabetical order. Here would be the proper place for a rhetorical question regarding the development of 21<sup>st</sup> century learning skills<sup>7</sup>.

The German task gives pupils opportunities to enhance their agency in language learning by actively taking part in the entire learning process. For example, repeating learning activities, producing and assessing learning activities, working in peer groups, producing different kinds of texts and presentations based on the pupil's own ideas, and working with different materials and equipment such as paper and pencils or a video camera, all enhance pupil agency. The Russian activities, in particular, approach agency by ensuring the authenticity of learning materials by paying attention to the literacy world of the children, i.e. animated films and fairy-tales they have read, and by designing suitable methods such drawing, colouring, elocution and making puzzles. Cooperative activities have been somewhat more traditional, such as collectively reciting poems, but on the other hand, pupils have been exploring words in their learning groups through drama, assessing the exercises of their classmates, and carrying out light-hearted competitions with a learning dictionary.

More importantly with regard to agency and learning is the question of group and participatory learning. The group dynamic in the classroom can be affected greatly by peer attitudes and behaviour. The female pupils, in particular, mentioned that they were afraid to read aloud because it would have been embarrassing to make mistakes or someone might have laughed. At one point, the German class was video recording the rapping of the ballad. For one pupil, this recording

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<sup>7</sup>*In our experience 21st century learning skills vary between cultures. E.g. in Turkey and in Japan pupils need to learn how to survive earthquakes, whereas in Finland 21<sup>st</sup> century skills may be something else entirely.*

was considered fun, while for another it caused anxiety about what she should wear in the video. A third pupil did not want to be recorded at all. Social pressure, especially among the girl group, is considerable. Although the pupils have known each other for many years and the group environment should have been safe, a level of insecurity and stress was present in the group.

Adult: OK, and didn't you do something a bit unpleasant, or what would you have done differently with that poem?

Pupil: I didn't really like that we were video recorded.

This type of video recording exercise caused these above mentioned emotions, which Dörnyei and Murphey (2003, p. 15) describe in following way: uncertainty about being accepted, uncertainty about their own competence, and a general lack of confidence. Reading aloud also has to do with the plurilingual pupil's language identity and self confidence in their heritage language (cf. Linderoos, 2016, p. 204). Kohonen (1992, p. 22) describes this as part of personal growth as language learner, the need for pupils to step out of their comfort zone. It is interesting to note that such negative emotions were evident only in the answers of the female pupils (cf. Linderoos, 2016, p. 206).

### *3.6 Authenticity of the material and learning perspective of learners*

Like previous on the page 6 described, we understand with authentic material as well linguistically authentic literacies as for the learner meaningful material and supplies (Bärlund, 2012; Edelhof, 1985; Gilmore, 2007). Thus, authentic language is language used in a real context (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013, p. 237). The German learning materials contained a high level of cultural authenticity (genuine materials, old gendered rote Faden) and meaningful activities (real life activities for children and teens: working with peers, music genre of youngsters, learning by making art). The Russian material also shared similar aspects of authenticity, such cultural authenticity and suitable activities for early childhood language learning, such as drawing, colouring, elocution and doing puzzles. Less or non-authentic activities have also been employed, such as some drama methods and practicing dictionary use.

In this research, the teachers chose the texts and some pupils found them to be meaningful. The folktale was found to be both exciting and boring for the pupils. One of the ten pupils stated: *'the teacher chose the text, so there was nothing could be done about it'*. The pupils were very aware of what kind of text they would have chosen if they would have been asked. This was even explicitly stated in one interview: *'it would have been more motivating to choose the text myself'*. On the meaningfulness of a text to the student, Murphey (1993) and Murphey & Jacobs (2008) state that it motivates learners when they have the possibility to choose the text themselves. As the responses above reveal, the pupils are aware of what motivates them as a heritage language learner. The texts were authentic for the teachers, but

not for the pupils (Bärlund, 2012, pp. 11-12; cf. Härmälä & Hildén, 2014). On the other hand, a German study (Dube, 2014, pp. 52-54, 60) shows that the possibility to choose the text does not motivate immigrant learners to read more and has no positive effect with regard to the development of reading skills. Dube further states that being given the freedom to choose a text may even have a negative effect on development. Furthermore, Heyne (2014, p. 39), a German researcher, states that choosing one's own books and presenting them requires reading competence.

It must be considered, therefore, what immigrant pupils in Finland know, what motivates them to read, and why this does not work in Germany. Although the pupils in our study speak the language as a second 'home language', their language level is still not at a native speaking level and it is therefore possible to compare our research with Dube's (2014) results.

Some of the Russian language pupils mentioned what kind of book they would have chosen had they been given the option, while others stated that they have no idea what they would have chosen. The German pupils, on the other hand, mentioned that they do not read poems, but if they would have had the possibility to choose, the book would have been easier and would have an animal theme. It can be therefore difficult for pupils to design their own learning, because it hasn't been common in schools to let pupils design learning material. Thus, to ensure significant authenticity within the learning process, the teacher should always guide those learners who cannot yet independently choose their own texts (cf. Bärlund, 2012, p. 178).

It is also worth further noting that some pupils may settle for texts chosen by the teacher out of respect for the teacher as the role model for learning and the authority figure in the classroom. One pupil stated during the interview: *'If I had done the tasks, they would have been exactly the same as the teacher did them.'* This answer reflects the pupil's level of respect for the teacher and a lack of creativity, which is especially evident within the traditional Finnish classroom, which is still far removed from participatory learning.

All interviews and ActLib tasks were cross-analysed, resulting in four different categories in response to our first research question: 'How do multicultural pupils learn writing and reading through ActLib tasks while using their heritage language, when their Finnish language is stronger?'. According to the interviews, the multicultural pupils estimated that only their pronunciation has improved through reading texts aloud. This might have to do with pupils' language identity and self-confidence in their heritage language.

The ActLib tasks, such as combining writing with arts and crafts have been successful among the pupils. Following this study, when teaching difficult themes such as poetry, it is recommended that arts and crafts be used as a teaching method.

The assignments also give the pupils an opportunity to share their feelings, experiences and findings as they offer opportunities for cooperative, multimodal reading and writing. ActLib helps pupils to view language as a communicative tool and learn different means of meaning-making of texts.

According to Bärlund (2012), the main idea of authentic learning is that the learner can impact their own learning process by choosing texts or taking part in the development and design of the learning materials. In the present study, the pupils did find the teacher designed authentic tasks interesting. However, they felt that they would have known better than the teacher what kinds of texts and materials would interest and motivate them. In this case study, pure authenticity of learners and learning did not occur. In order to develop authenticity among learners, it is necessary to consider the education of the teachers involved in the heritage language classes. This offers us a guideline for further development of the Active Library method.

#### 4. DISCUSSION

All interviews and ActLib tasks were cross-analysed, resulting in four different categories in response to our first research question: 'How do multicultural pupils learn writing and reading through ActLib tasks while using their heritage language, when their Finnish language is stronger?'. According to the interviews, the multicultural pupils estimated that only their pronunciation has improved through reading texts aloud. This might have to do with pupils' language identity and self-confidence in their heritage language.

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Owing to the various backgrounds and diversity of heritage language pupils, the classes represent different language levels and oral skills. Only 45% of the pupils in this study estimated that they speak their heritage language at level 3 (based on a scale of 1 indicating not at all and 5 indicating very much). Unfortunately, in this study the researchers were unable to ask further detailed questions about language identity and its effects on speaking the heritage language. Nevertheless, the

results present a challenge for teachers in many ways regarding the development of learning materials, and raises the question of how to design activities that suit all represented language levels (Linderoos, 2016, p. 46).

We identify five main aims of heritage language lessons, to:

1. Learn functional bilingualism in the heritage and Finnish language.
2. Practice and develop oral skills in the heritage language alongside day-to-day immersion in Finnish.
3. Learn other literacy skills (parallel with point two).
4. Provide peer support for bilingual/multilingual pupils in Finland.
5. Ensure the pupil's voice is heard when lessons are designed, and so foster autonomous heritage language users.

Promoting multilingualism is the responsibility of both society (schools) and guardians. Learning languages, learning through languages, and learning about languages (cf. Halliday, 2004) are the main objectives of language pedagogies such as the ActLib method. According to the Finnish core curriculum (FNBE, 2014c), language is taught as a subject but also used as a primary medium of other subjects in cross-curricular instruction (Vollmer, 2006). Therefore, the pedagogy of Finnish basic education offers opportunities to utilize the language capacity of pupils. However, becoming bilingual does not come easy and requires the cooperation of both parents and teachers (Linderoos, 2016, p. 106). The ActLib method seems to encourage both pupils and teachers to use innovative language learning activities through embodied and phenomena-based learning.

Interestingly, among the heritage language teachers that have taken part to the ActLib project, the most active users of the method since have been those teachers who do not hold a teaching qualification. It is these newcomers that have most readily adopted the phenomenon-based method perhaps lacking of the routines of language teaching tradition.

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