PATHWAYS TO BETTER WRITING PRACTICES IN FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

An analysis of writing exercises in an English course book used in a migrant class

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Tiivistelmä –Abstract Tässä työssä tutkin oppikirjaa, joka on käytössä yläkoulussa, mutta ei ole alun perin laadittu peruskoulua varten. Kirjaa käytetään yläkoulussa alkavan englannin opetuksessa. Käytännössä kaikki oppilaat näissä ryhmissä ovat maahanmuuttajataustaisia. Työssäni analysoin oppikirjan kirjallisia harjoituksia ja teoreettisena pohjana analyysilleni on tekstitaitojen (literacy) näkeminen sosiokognitiivisena prosessina, jossa korostuvat sekä kontekstin että merkityksellisen kommunikaation tärkeys. Samat asiat ovat perustana sekä Perusopetuksen opetussuunnitelman perusteissa (POPS) että Eurooppalaisessa viitekehyksessä (EVK).

Luokitus, jonka olen laatinut harjoitusten analysointia varten, perustuu tekstitaitopohjaisen opetussuunnitelman perustana oleviin käsitteisiin, tekstilajeihin, jotka mainitaan B1-kielen tavoitteissa POPSissa ja EVKssa, sekä neljän eri kirjailijan kirjoitustehtäväluokituksiin. Analyysi koostuu kahdesta osasta: ensimmäisessä tutkitaan harjoituksia sana-, fraasi-, lause- ja tekstitasoilla ja toisessa tarkastellaan harjoituksia sen mukaan mitä tekstilajeja ne sisältävät, sisältävätkö ne aitoa kommunikaatiota ja totutetaanko niissä kirjoittamaan vieraalla kielellä.

Oppikirjan tehtävien analyysi osoitti, että suurin osa kirjoittamista vaativista tehtävistä on suunnattu vahvistamaan opittavana olevan sanaston ja/ tai rakenteiden oppimista. Lausetasolla huomattava osa tehtävistä koostuu teksteistä kopioitavista lauseista ja vastauksista tekstin sisältöä käsitteleviin kysymyksiin. Lauseet, joissa oppilas voi itse päättää sanavalinnasta ja sisällöstä, ovat harvalukuisempia. Vain pieni osa tehtävistä on tekstitasolla olevia eri tyyppisiä (suppeita) ’kirjoitelmia’, joisa oppijalla on mahdollisuus ilmaista itseään vapaammin. Nämä ’kirjoitelmat’ ovat ohjeissaan hyvin niukkasanaisia, eikä oppilasta ohjata mitenkään käsittelemään kirjoittamista prosessina. Erilaiset tekstityypit ovat erittäin huonosti edustettuina, eikä läheskään kaikkia opetussuunnitelmassa ja viitekehyksessä mainittuja tekstityyppejä löydy. Aitoa, merkityksellistä kommunikaatiota edes jossain määrin sisältäviä tehtäviä oli erittäin vähän ja tehtäviä, joiden voisi sanoa toimivan säännölliseen kirjoittamiseen totuttavina, ei ollut lainkaan.

Asiasanat – Keywords Keywords **course book analysis, English, foreign language teaching, immigrants, literacy, writing exercises**

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CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION ……………………………………………….................. 7

2. LITERACY ………………………………………………........................... 8
  2.1. The concept of literacy ………………………………………….. 8
  2.2. Literacy across disciplines ……………………………………… 9
  2.3. Two models of literacy ………………………………………...... 10
    2.3.1 The autonomous model ……………………………………… 10
    2.3.2 The ideological model ……………………………………….. 11
  2.4. Literacy in this paper ………………………………………........... 13
  2.5. Literacy in foreign language teaching …………………………..... 14
    2.5.1. A brief history of trends in foreign language teaching ……… 14
    2.5.2. Literacy in foreign language curricula …………………… 15
    2.5.3. The sociocognitive view of literacy ……………………….…. 18
      2.5.3.1. Distinctive features of the sociocognitive view …………. 18
      2.5.3.2. The seven principles of literacy ………………………… 20
    2.5.4. The principles of a literacy-based curriculum …………….…. 20
      2.5.4.1. Sequencing of instruction ……………………………….. 21
      2.5.4.2. The roles of teachers and learners ………………………. 21
      2.5.4.3. Responding, revising, and reflecting ……………………. 22
  2.6 Sociocognitive view and the Finnish comprehensive school …….. 23

3. IN SEARCH OF EFFICIENT FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING PRACTICES ………………………………………......................... 24
  3.1. On methods and methodologies in teaching of writing in second- and foreign languages ……………………………………….......... 25
  3.2. Teaching writing as design ……………………………………… 25
    3.2.1. Types of writing activities by Kern ……………………….... 27
    3.2.2. Types of writing tasks by Hyland ………………………….. 30
  3.3. Practical guides to teaching writing ……………………………... 32
    3.3.1 Harmer's classification of writing activities ………………… 34
    3.3.2 Hedge's classification of writing activities ………………….. 38
  3.4. Summary of the writing activities ………………………………. 39

4. THE ROLE OF WRITING IN A FINNISH FL CLASSROOM …. 40
  4.1. Writing in the teaching of foreign languages in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) ………………. … 41
  4.2. The role of writing in foreign language teaching in the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education …………………. 42
  4.3. Writing practices in a Finnish FL classroom …………………… 43

5. PUPILS OF MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS AS LEARNERS OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE …………………………………………..... 44

6. FRAMEWORK FOR THE CURRENT COURSE BOOK ANALYSIS……………………………………………………….. 46
  6.1. Goals of the analysis…………………………………….......... 46
  6.2. Setting ……………………………….................................... 46
  6.3. The course book ………………………………………............... 47
  6.4. Overall arrangement of the course book ………………………… 48

6.5. Analysis of the writing activities ………………………………… 49

7. THE FINDINGS ………………………………………...................... 52
  - 7.1. Part 1: Transcription writing, Reinforcement writing, Compositions, and Translation …………………………………..... 53
    - 7.1.1. Transcription writing ……………………………………... 54
    - 7.1.2. Reinforcement writing ………………………………….... 57
    - 7.1.3. Levels of response ……………………………………...... 63
    - 7.1.4. Compositions and Creative writing ………………………… 65
    - 7.1.5. Translation ……………………………………................... 66
    - 7.1.6. Summary of part I ……………………………………....... 67
  - 7.2. Part 2: Genres, Real-life communication, and Habit-building writing ………………………………………………………. 70
    - 7.2.1. Genres ……………………………………........................ 71
    - 7.2.2. Real-life communication ……………………………………. 74
    - 7.2.3. Habit-building writing ……………………………………… 75
    - 7.2.4. Summary of Part II ……………………………………...... 76
  - 7.3. Recommended additional writing tasks …………………………. 76

8. CONCLUSION ………………………………………...................... 78

Bibliography

Appendix 1 Classification of texts and authors in their book by Street and Lefstein

Appendix 2 Proficiency level A1 in NCC. Limited communication in the most familiar situations. A1.3.

1. INTRODUCTION

In Finland teachers of foreign languages in primary and secondary schools rely heavily on the textbooks in their teaching. Teachers generally feel that the material in the textbooks they use is of high quality and well in keeping with the contents defined for the teaching both in the national curriculum and on the local level. Therefore it is important to gain further understanding of the actual contents of these textbooks in relation to the goals and points of emphasis that the official documents contain.

Writing plays a major part in the Finnish comprehensive school in the sense that pupils do a lot of writing during their school day and some also at home in the form of homework. Writing in a foreign language presents a challenge to many pupils and this is especially the case with different types of so called creative writing exercises.

This thesis attempts to examine and analyze one course book which is being used for the teaching of English as a foreign language in lower secondary school from the point of the writing assignments that this course book contains. What makes this book different from many others used in lower secondary school is the fact that originally it was not written for comprehensive school pupils but for adults, and that it is intended for beginning learners of English. The pupils who use this course book study English as a B1-language, i.e. they start to study English in the 7th grade, and are of immigrant background. Furthermore, it is necessary to point out that the book was not specifically written for immigrants.

By analyzing the exercises I attempt to find out what types of writing tasks or activities the book contains. Equally important is to estabilish what is lacking, i.e. what kinds of activities that the pupils are likely to encounter in real-life situations are missing and, therefore, what kinds of writing tasks the teachers who use this book in lower secondary school should add to their repertoire. I have formed the classes used in the analysis on the basis of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), the Finnish National Core Curriculum (NCC), and the different approaches to foreign language writing instruction that are included in this paper. Additionally, I hope to have created a tool for analysis which can be applied also when analyzing other course- or exercise books.

In order to gain a better understanding of the nature of foreign language writing and different types of writing, I will first discuss the concept of literacy in general and literacy in foreign language teaching in particular in chapter 2. Since the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education has communicative and functional goals in foreign language teaching, I have chosen to introduce the sociocognitive approach to foreign language literacy in more detail. Also the principles of a literacy-based curriculum, which is based on the sociocognitive view, are introduced. This chapter also includes a discussion of the sociocognitive view in relation to the Finnish comprehensive school. In chapter 3 I discuss and compare four different teaching agendas for the teaching of writing in a foreign language. These different approaches all share the same emphasis on the importance of real, meaningful communication in different contexts and writing as a process. The appropriateness and relevance of these approaches for lower secondary school is also discussed. Chapter 4, in its turn, introduces the official documents that set the goals for foreign language teaching in Finland for those parts that are relevant for this paper, and describes the writing practices that are typical for Finnish foreign language classrooms in general. Chapter 5 discusses briefly those special circumstances that are involved in teaching foreign languages to pupils who share an immigrant background, since they are the learners using the course book that will be analyzed. Next, chapter 6 presents the framework for the analysis itself by describing the goals for the analysis, the setting, the general characteristics of the pupils, and the course book in question, followed by chapter 7 which presents and discusses the findings of the analysis as well as offers recommendations for additional writing activities. The final chapter, Conclusions, provides a discussion of the findings and implications for the future use of the course book in the English language classroom.

2. LITERACY

2.1. The concept of literacy

The term ‘literacy’ is by no means unambiguous. It can mean quite different things to different people and depending on time and/or place (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003: 15). The word literacy is derived from the Latin word *litteratus,* which means learnedness (Kern 2003:44). The contemporary term ‘literacy’, in its turn, is used to refer to a specific kind of learnedness, namely the ability to read and write. However, this definition alone is not adequate. Even though, at some point in history, literacy was seen to be achieved, when a person was able to write his or her own name (Kern 2003:44), today’s definition of literacy and the issues around it are much more complex.

Literacy can be characterized in several very different ways depending on the point of view of the individual in question. One way is to view literacy simply as a technique an individual has mastered to a certain degree. Another way is to think of literacy as a set of language skills that are needed in order to be able to read and write. Yet another way to see literacy is in the form of cognitive abilities a person possesses. Furthermore, literacy can be seen as a social phenomenon, a group of social practices, which vary greatly depending on the social context. (Kern 2003:43-44)

Street and Lefstein (2007:34-35), in their turn, also describe four different ways to approach literacy as they characterize the different authors of the articles they have chosen for their resource book. According to them, the first way is to see the learning process as a decontextualized one, the second is to link cognitive processes and social practices, the third is to link literacy with social and political contexts and to the background and language styles of the learners, and the fourth is to see literacy as one of the semiotic means of communication.

According to Luukka (2009: 13), the idea of literacy includes also the ownership of education, i.e., being able to read and write enables a person to participate in education and to function in a society. And in reverse, if a person is not able to read or write, he/she will be deprieved of education and become an onlooker in his/her society.

Although the term ‘literacy’ includes both the skills of reading and writing, they have not received equal attention in research. Traditionally reading -and especially learning to read- has been the issue that has attracted the most attention. (Street and Lefstein 2007:34) The issue of how children learn to read also resulted in something that is often called the ‘reading wars’ in the 1990’s. Some considered that learning to read should be seen as a process of learning phonic principles and spelling-sound relations, while others considered learning ‘reading for meaning’ , also called ‘whole language approach’, to be the right approach. (Street and Lefstein 2007:34-36) However, the present trend is now towards reconciling the differences by taking into account the strengths of both perspectives and a more ‘balanced’ approach is being called for by the researchers (Kamil 2005:31, Street and Lefstein 2007:35).

In Finnish academic writing the concept of literacy has not had an adequate equivalent. The word ‘literacy’ has no corresponding word in Finnish, but has usually been translated as ’luku- ja kirjoitustaito’ - the ability to read and write (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003: 16). Pitkänen-Huhta (2003:16) warns that the Finnish term which refers solely to an ability or a skill may even be an obstacle for the expanding of views on literacy in Finnish research. The term ‘tekstitaidot’ has recently been created for this purpose and its use is now gradually being estabilished, although some feel that it does not capture all the connotations of the original term and therefore the original English term is often preferred even in Finnish discussion. According to Luukka (2007: 13) it seems that in Finnish studies ’tekstitaidot’ is more often used to refer to reading than writing. Sometimes it is also used somewhat incorrectly to refer to a person’s skills to analyze the meanings of texts. In such cases she (Luukka 2007: 13) suggests that the term ‘tekstitiedot’ would be more accurate.

Next I will discuss different aspects of literacy further in order to describe the nature of literacy in more detail. I will also look at different approaches to literacy and consider their relevance to the following course book analysis.

2.2. Literacy across disciplines

Since the 1980’s research on literacy has expanded (Kern 2003:44). It has been the subject of study in many widely different disciplines, which include anthropology, history, linguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, literary criticism, and psychology, to name a few (Shanahan and Kamil 2005:3). All these disciplines have studied literacy from their own point of view and from their own interests, and understandably their findings differ from each other. According to Shanahan and Kamil (2005:3, Kamil 2005:23), the idea of what counts as a discipline has broadened over time and numerous new disciplines have been introduced. In this situation, instead of saying that literacy is a subject of study in many different disciplines, it can now be said that literacy is also a discipline in its own right and that it draws information from other, previously mentioned, disciplines. (Shanahan and Kamil 2005:3)

While the number of disciplines has increased, the knowledge has become more compartmentalized, since every discipline concentrates on its own specific points of interest. Thus, the danger of missing relevant information discovered in other disciplines increases. This makes it even more essential to adopt multidisciplinary perspectives in order to gain a full understanding of what literacy really is. Having the broader concept in mind also helps writers in different fields of study to proportion their own point of interest to the larger picture. (Kamil 2005:23, 25, 31)

Different disciplines are also represented by those writers whose approaches to literacy are relevant for this study, e.g. Street is an anthropologist (Street and Lefstein 2007:115), Kern focuses on literacy in foreign language teaching, and Luukka works in the field of applied linguistics, to name a few.

2.3. Two models of literacy

There exists a difference of opinion concerning the nature of literacy in the academic world. These approaches can roughly be divided into two main categories. Street calls these “two models of literacy” and names them *the autonomous model* and *the ideological model* (Kern 2000: 24, Street and Lefstein 2007: 10). Luukka (2009:14-16) uses similar terms, but calls the latter *the sociocultural and ideological model*. The proponents of these two models also have their respective differences or points of emphasis.

In their resource book on literacy, Street and Lefstein have included over a dozen articles by authors who represent different approaches to literacy. They also discuss the position that the authors hold in regard to the above-mentioned two groups and the nature of literacy. Street and Lefstein point out that, since these articles themselves do not specifically discuss the authors’ model of literacy, the classification is a result of their own assessment of the authors’ underlying assumptions which are reflected in their work. (Street and Lefstein 2007:10-11) The figure they provide illustrates this classification and the way the different authors are placed in it represents the above-mentioned fact that authors cannot be named as only representing the autonomous or the ideological model but have their own points of emphasis. In this paper the said figure is presented in Appendix 1.

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The main difference between the autonomous model and the ideological model lies in the way they see the relationship between literacy and its contexts of use. These contexts can be social, cultural or historical in nature, i.e. literacy is used in different social or cultural environments or at different points in time. Also the notion of the effects of literacy on the society and on its users, i.e. the people who acquire literacy, is different.

2.3.1. The autonomous model

The earlier writers and researchers who wrote about and studied literacy can be seen as representatives of the autonomous model. Until the 1970’s the effects of social or cultural contexts or personal factors were not considered relevant to the concept of literacy (Luukka 2009: 14). In this model reading and writing are seen as one universal skill (Luukka 2009:17) which can even be transferred from a person’s mother tongue to foreign language learning. This skill can be acquired through “explicit instruction” (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003:21), i.e. formal education. Also the standard imposed on literacy users is the same for everyone, i.e. a person’s background or acquired language styles are not taken into account when defining desired skills and practices (Street and Lefstein 2007:35).

In the autonomous model acquiring literacy is seen as being essential to the development of a person’s cognitive growth (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003:21) and rational, scientific thought. This idea is often referred to as ’the literacy thesis’. (Street and Lefstein 2007:10-11) This ties in with the notion of the ‘great divide’, which in language research-related terms means dividing people into literates and non-literates, with the underlying thought that ‘literate’ equals civilized or modern and ‘non-literate’ equals uncivilized or primitive (Street and Lefstein 2007:37-38). The literacy thesis implies that literacy is something everyone should desire, and its effects on societies and cultures, as well as on individuals, are merely positive. Literacy is associated with such concepts as 'progress' or 'civilization' (Street and Lefstein 2007:116). Kern (2000:24) calls this "notion of 'literacy as substance'" and claims that this is the way literacy is still seen in many societies and educational systems today.

In the autonomous model learning to read and write are seen as processes where learner's abilities to recognize words and the knowledge of spelling-sound relations play a major part in successfully achieving literacy (Street and Lefstein 2007:34, 67). As mentioned earlier, literacy skills are separate from their context of use. This is to say, that they remain the same in all situations. Once a person has acquired literacy skills, s/he can use them in any social, cultural or historical context in the same way to understand and create written texts. The social context comes into play only to the extent that it helps to identify the circumstances where the risks of not achieving sufficient skills in literacy may be present. For example, according to Snow et al. (1998, in Street and Lefstein 2007: 81, 83) circumstances which promote reading difficulties in the U.S.A. are poverty, belonging to a minority or a non-English-speaking family, and attending urban schools as opposed to attending suburban schools.

2.3.2. The ideological model

Street's second category can be said to consist of those authors who see literacy as being part of a broader context. Street himself says that he uses the term 'literacy' to mean "the social practices and conceptions of reading and writing" (Street and Lefstein 2007:115). Pitkänen-Huhta (2003:16) describes the concept of literacy as "something (a group of) people do as opposed to something an individual possesses" and as *a practice* instead of *a skill* or *an ability*. The ideological model sees literacy as a set of ideological practices which are culturally embedded and defined by the social institutions they are used in (Kern 2000: 41). This means that literary practices can never be neutral or independent from the ideology of the society in question.

Also, the skills that result from literacy acquisition are not seen as inherent qualities of literacy itself, but dependent on the ideology of the society in question (Street and Lefstein 2007:116). In fact, the positive results that have usually been associated with the acquisition of literacy are more accurately a result of a specific institutional context, i.e. schools (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003:19). In educational settings the ideologies of particular societies are reflected e.g. in textbooks, in the ways of evaluating learning achievements, and in writing assignments (Luukka 2009:19). The question of power ties in with ideologies. The prevailing standards of 'acceptable' or 'good' literacy practices are defined by those institutions, including educational ones, which have estabilished power or prestige in a society. Gee (1992: 40-41), who uses the term 'sociocultural approach', argues that with the adoption of the sociocultural approach also the problem of individual failure in the area of education can be approached in a constructive way, when it is realized that the failure is not due to the individual characteristics of a person, like intelligence or aptitude, but to problems within the educational system and the society.

Finally, Wyse et al. (2010:1) describe literacy from the ideological point of view as "part of a multimodal framework" of different modes of communication. These different modes of communication include in addition to the traditional four language components of reading, writing, speaking, and listening also many other semiotic forms of expression, such as sounds, images and gestures (Luukka 2009:19).

Authors who are seen to support the ideological model by no means form a unified group. They emphasize various aspects of the matter to different degrees. Out of those four ways of approaching literacy introduced by Street and Lefstein, and mentioned earlier in the beginning of this chapter, three out of four can be said to share the ideological view of literacy to various degrees (Street and Lefstein 2007:34).

Seeing literacy as dependent on the culture of its users and being effected by the setting it is used in, leads to the discovery that the products of literacy, i.e. texts, are used in different ways in different situations. According to Luukka (2009:18), texts have different statuses and different meanings depending on what domains of life they are used in. Also the expectations towards the texts used vary, depending on the domain and the specific situation of use (the language event). This, in its turn, means that also the literacy skills needed in each of these situations and contexts are different. Therefore, it would be more accurate to talk about different *literacies* rather than just one literacy (Kern 2003:44). The idea of different literacies has resulted in the emerging of many new concepts, such as *new literacies, multiliteracies, multilingual literacies, global literacies*, and *situated literacies*, among others.

Alongside with context, culture is always an inseparable part of literacy in the ideological model. The concept of literacy carries different values and functions for people in different cultures (Kern 2003:44), as the examples of the studies among different peoples included in Street and Lefsteins's book show. Also, in cultures where people are multilingual, different languages may be used to serve different types of language functions, e.g. the spoken language used at home, the language for 'official' tasks such as job interviews or filling out forms, the language used at school, or the language of commerce. The literacy skills needed to perform the tasks required in each language respectively can be very different. Likewise, some of the languages are usually valued more highly in the community than others.

The terms 'cultural 'and 'social are somewhat overlapping. A certain language practice, for example the one mentioned above, can be seen as a part of a cultural or a social context, or both. In such cases it is therefore easier and perhaps more accurate to talk about 'sociocultural' practices.

Where Street uses the terms *autonomous* and *ideological* models of literacy, Kamil (2005: 25-26) talks about the *psychological* and *social* components. He argues that literacy is by nature a social -or interpersonal- process even when a person is communicating with him/herself e.g. by keeping a diary. The psychological aspects refer to the cognitive processes that take place "privately" in a person's mind while s/he is processing language. Kamil raises the question whether these psychological aspects can be studied separately from the social aspects, and if so, if the findings can be used to improve e.g. instruction in contexts which are social in nature. According to Kamil (2005:25-26), there is sufficient evidence to conclude that both the psychological and the social aspects have to be included in order to form a concise picture of the literacy phenomenon. Nevertheless, in spite the fact that the present tendency in academic world is towards a more holistic point of view, many researchers still tend to see the evidence only from their own perspective.

2.4. Literacy in this paper

If I characterized the model of literacy which best described the Finnish lower secondary school and its foreign language teaching today, it would not be either autonomous or ideological, but a combination of the two. While the autonomous model may nowadays be considered restricted and out-of -date, it has some qualities which are still regarded as valuable today. The school system aims at educating- that is, ‘civilizing‘- its pupils by teaching them good literacy skills. In foreign language teaching evaluation still tends to emphasize the ‘correct’ spelling and the ‘correct’ grammatical structures. Also, the criteria by which the pupils’ skills are evaluated is in practice the same for everyone, in spite of the principle that a pupil‘s achievements are supposed to be measured against his/ her own abilities and development, with minor exceptions of learning difficulties, disabilities, or -in some cases- immigrant background.

Contexts and communicativity are also present in the Finnish foreign language classroom. The basis for the foreign language teaching is the National Core Curriculum, which in its turn is based on the Common European Framework of Reference. It states that the goals for language learning are to be communicative and functional, and that the context, which is defined as that of the target culture, is to be included in the teaching. These goals have an effect also on the teaching materials provided by different publishers, which include themes and texts dealing with different parts of the English-speaking world and introduce people from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Different styles of spoken and written language are also present in the materials in the form of interviews, letters, diaries, newspaper articles, etc. A cultural feature that is most consistently taught is the differences of British and American English on the level of spelling and vocabulary. However, unlike the ideological model, the emphasis in teaching is not on the features or comparisons of different genres, but on the acceptable usage of the English language. The goal is to teach a fairly neutral, educated version of English which can be applied in all situations, and which is not identified with any particular social class or group.

Out of the four different ways of perceiving the literacy learning process (Street and Lefstein 2007:34-35) that I mentioned in chapter 2.1., the one that best describes the Finnish foreign language classroom would be that of ‘linking cognitive processes and social practices‘. Nowadays language learning is considered to be an individual process of accumulating and restructuring knowledge and, as mentioned above, language teaching takes into consideration the social practices of the foreign language use. I find that it cannot be characterized as a decontextualized process, because of the features mentioned above. It can also not be characterized as ‘linking literacy with social and political contexts and to the background and language styles of the learners’ since literacy is not discussed in terms of political or ideological power structures in the comprehensive school, and the background and language styles of the pupils are not considered to be of great importance. Likewise, seeing literacy as ‘one of the semiotic means of communication’ is perhaps too abstract of a concept for lower secondary school, and has little relevance for the everyday teaching process.

For the purposes of this paper, then, literacy is seen as a phenomenon which links cognitive processes and social practices and is affected by the cultural, social and historical contexts that it is used in.

Next I will move from the ideas of literacy in general to a discussion of literacy in foreign language teaching in particular.

2.5. Literacy in foreign language teaching

Until fairly recently, the term ‘literacy’ was not commonly associated with the teaching or learning of foreign languages. Traditionally, the different aspects of foreign language learning were discussed in terms of the four separate skills of reading, writing, speaking and listening. With the social approach to literacy gaining ground also in the research of foreign language learning, the idea of the interdependencies of these four skills is nowadays emphasized. The social approach to literacy is often referred to as Literacy Studies (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003:10) and concentrates on researching various aspects of discourse in different contexts where language is learned.

By using the concept of ‘literacy’ we are referring to something that is broader than ‘reading’ and ‘writing’ put together, as we have seen earlier in this chapter. When we discuss literacy, we also discuss ‘written communication’, since reading and writing are “complementary dimensions of written communication” (Kern 2003:43). However, the studies which have examined second- or foreign language literacy have usually studied reading and writing separately as individual skills and components of overall language proficiency. However, if it is accepted that literacy is defined differently in different contexts, it is not yet known exactly what kind of literacy is learned in foreign language classrooms. (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003:17)

The two different approaches to literacy, the autonomous model and the ideological model, are also present in the different trends that have prevailed in foreign language teaching over the years. The following passages offer a brief account of these trends.

2.5.1. A brief history of trends in foreign language teaching

Written texts have long been an important source of language input in foreign language teaching. Originally texts were translated from a foreign language into one’s mother tongue and the ultimate goal was an exact and grammatically flawless translation. This is known as the grammar -translation method.

In the 1940’s the audiolingual method became popular and the interest in spoken language replaced written exercises. The main emphasis was on repeating model dialogues and learning the sentences by drilling them. Then, in the 1960’s, after the behavioristic models of language learning were challenged, the focus shifted onto teaching the “mental construction of the language” (Kern 2000:18) in question with the help of rules, often called ‘the structural approach’, or ‘the cognitive method’. Again, the attention was shifted more towards the written form of language and the emphasis on grammar. (Hinkel and Fotos 2002:4)

These three trends all focused on understanding or producing grammatically correct individual sentences and ignored the social and cultural aspects of language use as well as the idea that ‘texts’ rather than sentences should be analyzed (Kern 2000: 18-19).

With the beginning of the emphasis on teaching ‘communicative competence’ in the 1970’s and 1980’s, the idea of teaching language in order to be able to use it appropriately in different social contexts, instead of teaching merely grammatically correct sentences, started to prevail. The emphasis was now on language use in real communicative situations and attention to different registers and styles in language use became important. (Kern 2000:19) Although the models of communicative competence, that were developed in the 1980’s, included both oral and written discourse, it can be said that in foreign language teaching the focus has been on spoken communication. Communicative teaching programs have been successful in teaching interactive oral skills but not quite as successful in teaching written communication skills or promoting the learners’ understanding of the underlying factors of the language use in different social or cultural contexts. (Kern 2000:19) Another limitation is the neglecting of instructed grammar learning in a purely communicative approach, since it would seem that also explicit grammar teaching is required in order to acquire advanced proficiency and accuracy in both spoken and written production (Hinkel and Fotos 2002:5).

While communicative, as well as structural, approaches still prevail in foreign language teaching today, it can be said that there is also an interest towards teaching a foreign language by studying literary and nonliterary texts to discover their social or cultural codes or elements of individual expression (Kern 2003: 42.43).

In the Finnish educational system the curricula for teaching foreign languages are based on the ideas of communicative language teaching, but also the influence of structural approach is still apparent. The contents of the National Core Curriculum for the teaching of English and its relation to the European Framework of Reference for the parts that are relevant for the present thesis will be discussed in chapter 4 in more detail.

2.5.2. Literacy in foreign language curricula

The decision of what kinds of literacies are relevant for different groups of foreign language learners has to be made on the basis of learner needs. In her book of writing assessment Weigle (2002: 5-7) describes five different groups of second language learners; two of them consist of children and three of adults. Their needs vary considerably depending on whether they are learning a majority or a minority (or foreign) language, whether they are literate or not in their native language, or their native language literacy skills are still at the early stages of development, and whether they are studying the language for ’surviving’ in the new country, for academic purposes, or out of interest.

A typical Finnish lower secondary school English class would best fit the description of Weigle’s (2002: 5) second group: children who are “majority language speakers in immersion programs or otherwise learning a second language in school”, although Finnish pupils are learning English as a foreign, not as a second language. The small group of learners who start studying English in the 7th grade do not fit into any of Weigle’s classes. They study English as a foreign language (often their second, third, or even fourth foreign language) through their second language, i.e. Finnish, which many of the pupils are still in early stages of learning. Although learning Finnish is for these pupils the most important and immediate task in order to succeed in school, also English as an international language is important for them. It is also important for further education because English is a compulsory subject in upper secondary school and in the matriculation exams.

Kern provides some useful insights in his discussion of practices in teaching literacy. Although his discussion concerns foreign language courses in postsecondary level, i.e. college and university, I find his thoughts useful also when considering the practices of foreign language teaching in secondary levels. According to him (Kern 2003:40-41) foreign language curricula tend to be incoherent in their treatment of literacy. In introductory and intermediate levels the goal is to promote communicative competence, and in textbooks and language programs this is often interpreted as an emphasis on spoken communication. Teaching is focused on basic language skills, correctness and functional activities, such as reading timetables, ads, and signs or filling out forms and writing instruction involves structured, formal types of writing, e.g. essays. Written stories and other texts are treated as sources of vocabulary or grammatical structures, or they are read for meaning, but the meaning only goes as far as mastering the texts' linguistic elements. Kern calls this strand of literacy *text-centric*. (Kern 2000:3, 2003:45)

In advanced courses, in its turn, the approach is more analytical and critical. The two main strands of literacy that are present in advanced courses Kern names the *high cultural* strand and the *cognitive skills* strand. The former refers to the teaching of cultural knowledge related to the particular language and developing aesthetic sensibility e.g. by literature, and the latter refers to the developing of students' textual analysis skills and critical thought. (Kern 2000:3, 2003:45)

I find that the treatment of texts and their features in a Finnish foreign language classroom in the comprehensive school -and even after that in upper secondary school-resembles that of the *text-centric* strand. While the textbooks contain extracts of novels, short stories, or poems by well-known writers which at least give an opportunity to the pupils to familiarize themselves with the *high cultural* strand, there is really no practice on textual analysis skills or activities related to the development of critical thought in relation to literacy. These texts are meant mainly for comprehension and enjoyment, whereas other 'textbook texts' are used as sources for teaching grammar, vocabulary, and communicative language use.

Kern (2000:3-4) argues that the changed expectations in the advanced courses cause difficulties for students. Furthermore, he states that none of these three strands is adequate for foreign language education. First of all, these views regard literacy as being the end product of successful instruction and not a "variable set of processes". This results in teachers concentrating on teaching those learner skills that will be measured against the normative standards set by the educators, instead of helping students recognize the relationships between the different factors of literacy. (Kern 2003:45-46)

Secondly, these views do not usually consider contextual factors as part of literacy. Therefore, students are not made aware of the fact that texts are created and used differently in different communities, and this is likely to cause confusion or misunderstandings in real-life situations. (Kern 2000:4, 2003:46) In order to understand the intended meaning of the writer, the learner has to be familiar with the different contexts in which it is embedded (Pitkänen-Huhta 2003:23) and the same applies when one is creating a written text. Additionally, it should be born in mind that the literacy acquired in the classroom is also influenced by its context, i.e. the classroom setting (ibid. 23).

Thirdly, Kern (2000:4-5, 2003:46) points out that the above-mentioned views of literacy are not consistent with the goals of communicative language teaching, which emphasize appropriate use of the language in a given situation, instead of prescriptive norms.

All the three points that are made here are clearly important for the teaching of foreign languages, and it really makes no difference whether the learners are lower secondary school pupils or college students. Naturally the age of the learners would have to be taken into account when planning activities which would raise the learners' consciousness of differences in language use in different contexts, for example, but it would be quite possible to design such tasks. I would also welcome the thought that pupils would be more confident in their own writing abilities and accept the thought that there were several, equally acceptable, ways of expressing the same thought. This, as well as the idea of experimenting with writing, could be achieved by making pupils accustomed to the different processes of writing without the idea that everything has to be evaluated.

According to Kern (2003:47) it is possible to form a framework of foreign language teaching where the goals of verbal communication on one hand, and the interpreting and creating of different kinds of texts on the other, will both be included. This framework would also link the different levels of language learning and make the course contents more coherent. He (Kern: 2000:5, 2003:47) proposes that the language teaching framework should first and foremost be communicative, and that the textual aspects should be enveloped in it. This would be achieved by emphasizing literacy in language teaching and by creating a literacy-based curriculum for foreign language teaching. The principles of such a curriculum will be presented in the following subchapter.

2.5.3. The sociocognitive view of literacy

As we have seen so far, the discussion of literacy in language education has often been represented by two approaches: the linguistic/cognitive and the social. However, sociocognition in language learning is not a new phenomenon. Already in the 1970's second language acquisition (SLA) researchers were interested in the ways how mind stores information about both language and the social world, and how learner‘s relationships with the social world influence second language learning. The key concept of sociocognition is the interactive nature of the social and cognitive dimensions both in language use and language learning. Without taking into account this interaction it is not possible to fully understand or define either language use or language learning. Compared to the cognitive perspective research, sociocognition has not been explored in second language acquisition research to any great extent, except for the sociocultural theory. (Batstone 2010: 5)

Kern presents a sociocognitive view which takes into account both the cognitive and the social dimensions in foreign language literacy teaching. Since the focus of this paper is on the teaching of writing and different kinds of writing tasks in foreign language instruction, it is necessary to include a theoretical perspective on language teaching with literacy as its center of attention. Richard Kern's sociocognitive view of literacy fulfills these requirements and is the starting point for his literacy-based approach to language teaching. According to him, the following definition is specifically intended to characterize literacy in academic foreign language education (Kern 2003: 48).

> Literacy is the use of socially-, historically-, and culturally-situated practices of creating and interpreting meaning through texts. It entails at least a tacit awareness of the relationships between textual conventions and their contexts of use and, ideally, the ability to reflect critically on those relationships. Because it is purpose-sensitive, literacy is dynamic - not static- and variable across and within discourse communities and cultures. It draws on a wide range of cognitive abilities, on knowledge of written and spoken language, on knowledge of genres, and on cultural knowledge. (Kern 2000:16)

This sociocognitive view, as the above quotation shows, consists of three dimensions which are all equally important for the full understanding of literacy, namely *linguistic*, *cognitive*, and *sociocultural* dimensions (Kern 2000:25-39). Furthermore, these dimensions do not function separately from each other; they are interactive and overlapping (Kern 2000:38).

2.5.3.1. Distinctive features of the sociocognitive view

According to Kern (2000:6), his sociocognitive approach to literacy is both "conservative and expansive". The conservative side is represented by the notion that the study of texts and the use of literature are essential in the systematic studying of a foreign language and culture. The other two aspects he introduces are mentioned of representing more novel thinking.

Firstly, the concept of acceptable 'texts' used in language teaching should be broadened, so that they would more adequately represent the 'real', non-literary texts that are used in a society. These texts can be written or spoken, e.g. advertisements, articles, speeches, films, or music videos. Secondly, genuine reading and writing tasks should be used in foreign language teaching even in the introductory and intermediate levels. Kern claims that, although both teachers and students see these skills as essential for the mastering of a foreign language, most of the reading and writing students do is reading and writing *practice*, instead of real, meaningful communication. More frequent use of genuine communication tasks would also increase students' motivation to learn. (Kern 2000: 6-7, 2003:41)

Kern (2003:41) also points out that there is only little practice on any interpretation of texts or of the understanding of cultural communication practices. For students the goal of reading and writing exercises is usually to find or create the 'right' answer (ibid.44), and teachers, in their turn, consider competence in functional and performance-based terms (ibid. 41).

Many students find reading and writing assignments to be the most challenging exercises in the learning of a foreign language. Kern (2000:7) points out that often students are left on their own to manage these tasks. Instead of giving reading and writing of essays, for example, as homework, students should be provided with systematic instruction during these tasks. Also Weigle (2002:174) remarks that teachers tend to use class writing to evaluate their students' progress, i.e. to test them, whereas out-of -class assignments are given “for practice and consolidation of learning”.

This discussion leads us to the “four literacy needs of a foreign language learner“. According to Kern (2003:50), foreign language learners need

1. to be immersed **meaningfully** in written language
2. to receive **direct assistance** in the complexities of reading and writing FL texts
3. to learn to **analyze and evaluate** what they read
4. to learn how to **transform** meanings into new representations

While it is easy to join Kern in support of these learner needs, as well as the overall discussion so far, it should be remembered that there are also teachers and authors who share many of his opinions and methods even though they may not classify themselves as representatives of the sociocognitive view. One such author is Gaudiani, who has long experience of teaching foreign language composition courses in college. She wrote her book on teaching writing as early as 1981 and as motivation for her writing she gives her “belief that the skills needed for good expository writing are not language-specific (at least not in the Indo-European language group)” (Gaudiani 1981: 1), in contrast to the sociocognitive view that language used in a given situation is embedded in the cultural context of use.

According to her, good writing focuses on three levels: the word, the sentence, and the paragraph. She, like Kern, emphasizes writing as a process, but calls her way of teaching foreign language composition ‘the text-editing approach’. Likewise, she emphasizes teacher’s role in students’ writing when she says that teachers should write with their students as often as possible in order to remember how difficult writing actually is. (Gaudiani 1981: 1-2) Also, students’ skills of editing and rewriting are methodically developed in the class. Gaudiani also agrees with Kern on the first learner need of meaningful written language. She finds that writing on autobiographical topics, sharing their writing with other students in the class, as well as creating and editing texts in groups make the pieces of writing meaningful and motivating for the students. Furthermore, she believes that the need to communicate effectively will cause language proficiency to “become more sophisticated”. (ibid 6, 15, 45-46) These are all methods that are used and recommended also by the authors of those teaching agendas that will be presented further on in this paper and which represent the sociocognitive view. Gaudiani also provides concrete examples of step-by-step writing exercises, e.g. a collaborative text-editing method, which she says “to build interest and ability in writing in the target language“ (ibid 46), yet another common interest, since motivation is also seen as an important factor in the sociocognitive view.

2.5.3.2. The seven principles of literacy

In addition to the learner needs, Kern (2003:49) also introduces seven principles, which can be derived from his definition of literacy, and which he claims to be directly applicable to language teaching. Each of these principles contains elements of the earlier mentioned three dimensions. Furthermore, these principles can also be applied to communication in general, and not only to reading and writing, and they can all be placed under one main principle, namely *literacy involves communication* (Kern 2000:17).

The seven principles of literacy as communication (Kern 2000:16-17) are presented here in their original form, but without elaborations.

1. Literacy involves *interpretation*.
2. Literacy involves *collaboration*.
3. Literacy involves *conventions*.
4. Literacy involves *cultural knowledge*.
5. Literacy involves *problem solving*.
6. Literacy involves *reflection* and *self-reflection*.
7. Literacy involves *language use.*

With the help of these principles it is possible to identify both the contents and the means of teaching language with reflective communication as a goal. The three basic elements in teaching a foreign language are found in principles numbered 7, 3, and 4: *language use, conventions,* and *cultural knowledge*. The remaining four principles name the processes that are both taught and used in the teaching of the aforementioned three elements: *interpretation, collaboration, problem solving,* and *reflection.* (Kern 2003:50)

2.5.4. The principles of a literacy-based curriculum

There are two main goals that literacy-based teaching finds important. The primary goal is the development of communicative ability in a foreign language. Another important goal is to teach how to analyze and interpret, as well as transform, spoken and written texts, and to view them critically in their social contexts of use. This approach is not solely structural nor communicative. Instead, it "attempts to relate communicative and structural dimensions of language use". (Kern 2003:50)

There is no particular method connected with literacy-based teaching. Instead, teachers are invited to use all those instructional activities connected with reading and writing they are already familiar with. The activities Kern (2003:50) mentions are voluntary reading, readers' theater, reading journals, free writing, semantic mapping, discussions based on critical focus questions, textual comparisons, translation, summary writing, stylistic pastiches, and other kinds of textual reformulations. A literacy-based curriculum sees the traditional four skills of reading, writing, speaking, and listening as interdependent, and this nature is emphasized in these instructional activities. Learners' attention is also focused on "the interactions between linguistic form, situational context, and communicative and expressive functions“. (Kern 2003:51)

Although methods of teaching can remain relatively unchanged, adopting literacy-based curriculum requires teachers to change their objectives of instruction. Instead of mainly providing learners with linguistic and cultural facts and oral practice, their main goal is now to help the learners to acquire tools for evaluating and interpreting language use in different spoken or written contexts. There are two key features that play an important part in the organization of a literacy-based curriculum: the sequencing of instruction and the roles of teachers and learners. (Kern 2003: 51-52)

2.5.4.1. Sequencing of instruction

The most distinctive difference between a traditional foreign language curriculum and a literacy-based curriculum lies in how reading, writing, and talking are sequenced in the teaching. Kern (2003:52) argues that in a traditional curriculum these activities are most often separate phases and take place in a linear sequence. Typically, learners start by reading a text at home, then they discuss it in the class, and possibly do a writing assignment related to the same text at home. Kern claims that often learners perceive reading and writing as the most challenging parts of language study for particularly this reason; they are left without instruction to complete these tasks outside of class.

In literacy-based curriculum the relation between reading, writing, and talking is overlapping instead of linear. Kern (2003:52-53) mentions several ways in which reading and writing can overlap. Students can write down their thoughts of texts as they are reading, or they can write down their own story or ideas related to the topic of a text that they will read afterwards. Students can also read a text with the aim of finding elements to be used in their own writing, or they can read their own or other students' texts critically and give suggestions how to improve them. By using tasks of this nature, it is also possible to tie in literature with foreign language teaching in a natural way.

2.5.4.2. The roles of teachers and learners

If a literacy-based curriculum is adopted, it entails, that the roles of teachers and learners must be different from those of a structural or communicative curriculum. As discussed before, the goal of a literacy-based curriculum is to develop learners' competence of critically analyzing different kinds of texts in relation to their contexts. In a literacy-based curriculum the center of analysis is the communication -spoken or written- that takes place in the classroom, and to accomplish this requires the recasting of teacher- and learner roles. These roles must "promote the kind of classroom culture that fosters critical thinking and metacommunicative awareness". (Kern 2003:54-55)

The teachers' role in literacy-based teaching is to respond to the language as it is used in the class, and to focus -and encourage also the students to focus- their attention to reflecting on and revising the language used. The learners, in their turn, have to actively engage themselves with using the language they are in the process of learning, and systematically reflect on and revise their language use. (Kern 2003:57)

The difference between this approach and the structural and communicative approaches lies in the fact that teachers are no longer either authorities or merely organizers or motivators of learning, and learners are no longer either passive absorbers of language material or only autonomous participants in communicative situations of language use. (Kern 2003:54-55)

Closely in connection with the teacher- and learner roles are Kern's "three R's of literacy-based teaching": *responding*, *revising*, and *reflecting* (Kern 2003:55). These terms describe the activities and processes by which critical thinking and metacommunicative awareness are achieved. They also give us further insights into the roles of teachers and learners.

2.5.4.3. Responding, revising, and reflecting

Responding refers to both “giving a reply” and “reacting” when reading, writing, or talking. When reading, we “react” towards the contents of the text in question, and “reply“, when we complement the text in our mind with something that is not explicitly said in the text. When talking about a text, we give our response to it, as well as give response to the responses of others, which, in turn, ultimately affects our original response to the written text which is under discussion. When writing, the response can be either concrete or abstract. A concrete response is a written text, e.g. a letter, a filled-in questionnaire, or an answer to an exam question. Abstract responses are answers to questions a writer asks him/herself when trying to formulate a text so that it accurately reflects the thoughts he/she wishes to express. (Kern 2003:55)

Revising language is a central element in literacy-based teaching. It can present itself in many different forms; in rereading, rewriting, rethinking, reframing, and redesigning. Learners develop their communicative potential in a foreign language, when they read a text again from a different angle, when they consider the text they have written and make alterations, or when they take turns in telling the same story in their own words. It is the teacher‘s task to make revising meaningful to the learners. They need a specific purpose to redo something they have already done, as well as specific instructions for doing it. (Kern 2003:55-56)

Reflecting is connected with the evaluation that learners perform in connection with their foreign language use. When they are using the language receptively, i.e. listening, reading, or viewing something, they make evaluations concerning the speaker’s or writer’s beliefs, attitudes, or intentions based on their choice of words or non-verbal signs. When learners use language expressively, i.e. speaking or writing, they consider the effect their own choice of words has on the recipient. (Kern 2003:56)

Cultural norms and cultural knowledge are also connected to these issues. Kern (2003:56-57) reminds us, that the only culture present in the classroom is not that which is tied in with the foreign language. Also the learners, as well as the teacher, bring their own culture, or cultures, into the classroom, and this influences the interaction in the classroom and the participants’ ideas of the teacher- and learner roles. By taking into account these cultural values, it is possible for the teacher to help the learners understand “the cultural frames surrounding language use” in a broader scale.

2.6. Sociocognitive view and the Finnish comprehensive school

Although Kern has designed his sociocognitive view of literacy especially with academic foreign language teaching in mind, many of its ideas can well be transferred into the framework of compulsory education. First of all, they both share the study of foreign language texts as the starting point of systematic study. Secondly, I find that the broadening of acceptable texts has already taken place in the Finnish text- and exercise books which nowadays include also genuine texts, such as ads, notices, or comic strips, as well as an occational longer text. The idea of real communication tasks is one that I find very intriguing and which could be integrated into language lessons fairly easily. I believe that pupils would find it also exciting and motivating. Another area which I believe the pupils would find interesting, is the cultural communication practices, provided that the examples were kept practical and relevant to the learners‘ state of development. It would be possible to share features related to this with pupils to greater extent that is being done at the present, but the time-consuming strategies that Kern recommends would have to be replaced with more teacher centered methods. In addition to this, I suspect that this is an area that teachers themselves find challenging and would need guidance and materials for.

The main goals of literacy-based curriculum present a challenge for the comprehensive school. The first goal - the development of communicative ability- is shared with Kern and lower secondary school alike, but the second goal - to learn to analyze, interpret, and transform texts and to view them critically in their social context of use - is far more challenging. I feel that to apply Kern's literacy-based curriculum as such to lower secondary school is not possible without clearly modifying this goal. Especially the latter part of viewing texts critically in their social context is something that I feel pupils of this age are not equipped to do. It is true that some level of analysis and interpretation of texts would be possible in the form of teacher's questions and well-structured exercises, but instead of a real analysis it might rather be described as raising pupils' awareness of these matters. Different transformations of texts, which take several different forms in Kern's list of writing activities that will be looked at in the following chapter, would be a very effective way of achieving this raising of awareness.

Kern's views on how to facilitate and improve the acts of reading and writing itself are also applicable to the comprehensive school in various degrees. Reading and writing activities could overlap more, which might make writing tasks easier. Pupils should not be left to work alone with their writing assignments. Instead, they should be done in class where direct assistance is available. Additionally, learners need ample time for their writing. On the other hand, Kern's methods also require learners to have a more active role in the class that Finnish teenagers perhaps are used to, or willing to, have. They would have to actively evaluate and revise their own and their peers' writing, and actively respond and reflect on their reading, factors that I will discuss further in the following chapter. All these activities also take up more time that teachers are used to 'investing' in writing activities, which in its turn tends to create problems in terms of course contents.

A final point that I find interesting, is Kern's comment on the cultural norms and cultural knowledge which are present in the classroom, and which could help learners better understand also the different practices that affect language use. Especially in a classroom where pupils are of immigrant background it is easy to see and find different perceptions of cultural norms. It is possible that discussing these norms and pupils' views would also provide a practical way of illustrating something about language use.

After discussing literacy in a larger framework and in foreign language teaching in particular, I will now move on to discuss the teaching of writing in a foreign language in more detail. The focus has been on communicative, and especially literacy-based, curriculum and this state of affairs will continue also in the discussion of the teaching of writing. It is still important to bear in mind that reading and writing are interrelated skills and that, in order to discuss writing, also reading has to be included, at least to some extent. Furthermore, practicing writing alone does not guarantee successful acquisition of writing skills; also extensive reading is needed (Hyland 2005:17).

3. IN SEARCH OF EFFICIENT PRACTICES IN THE TEACHING OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE WRITING

This chapter discusses the different emphases that have been presented in the field of teaching of writing in a foreign language, and introduces four different teaching agendas by Richard Kern, Ken Hyland, Jeremy Harmer, and Tricia Hedge. They all share the emphasis on communicative and functional aspects of writing which are essential for the purposes of this paper. Some include more theoretical aspects than others which are, in their turn, first and foremost practical tools for teachers to be applied in their teaching. Both these approaches offer useful insights for teaching writing in a sociocognitive framework. It is my intention to consider these agendas together with the Common European Framework of Reference and the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education when forming the categories of writing activities I will use in the analysis of writing assignments in an English language course book later on in this paper.

Since the Finnish National Core Curriculum states the goals of foreign language teaching to be communicative and functional in nature, I have concentrated on discussing literacy as a communicative and contextual phenomenon in the previous chapter. For the same reasons, I chose the sociocognitive view of literacy and its implications for the teaching of foreign languages in the form of literacy-based curriculum as the subject of closer examination. Another, and obvious, reason for choosing Kern’s literacy-based curriculum is the fact that the actual aim of this paper is to examine writing assignments in an English course book and, therefore, literacy - and writing in particular- has to be the center of attention.

3.1. On methods and methodologies in teaching of writing in second- and foreign languages

Since the 1980’s, several methodologies based on different theories concerning second or foreign language writing have been introduced. Each theory can be said to focus on one major aspect in their teaching of writing. While it is true that each of these foci are reflections of different theories of language learning and have historically succeeded each other, they should rather be seen as different perspectives and complementary aspects of writing than mutually exclusive methods.

Hyland (2005:2) lists seven different aspects which second or foreign language writing teaching can focus on: (1) language structures, (2) text functions, (3) themes or topics, (4) creative expression, (5) composing processes, (6) content, or (7) genre and contexts of writing. Nevertheless, these methods are rarely represented in the foreign language classroom in their ‘pure’ form. Instead, teachers tend to adopt and use a range of methods depending on what suits their needs and beliefs (Hyland 2005:2-3).

On college- and university levels it is probable or even likely for entire language courses to concentrate on writing and emphasize one or two of the above-mentioned aspects, but the case is different for primary- and secondary school pupils who usually study what might be called ’general purpose language‘. In these classrooms writing is primarily used for learning other language skills such as grammatical structures, vocabulary, or communicative phrases. This division is perceivable also in the classifications and discussions of different types of writing in the work of those writers who will be discussed next.

3.2. Teaching writing as design

Since I have previously concentrated on the sociocognitive view of literacy, it is now logical that I should first consider how this approach sees writing and what are its implications on teaching writing in a foreign language classroom.

Kern (2000:186) describes writing as “a dynamic process of designing meaning through texts within a community”. This implies that writing is both an individual and a social process. Likewise, Hyland (2005: 23) defines writing as “a sociocognitive activity which involves skills in planning and drafting as well as knowledge of language, contexts, and audiences“.

Kern uses the term *Available Designs (ADs)* introduced by the New London Group (a team of ten scholars from Australia, Great Britain, and the U.S.) to refer to the “resources for meaning” which are available to a person when s/he begins to create - or design- meaning in a sociocultural and communicative context. Available Designs can be linguistic or schematic and they are shared by a person’s mother tongue and second or foreign language(s). After initiating the design, also the text itself influences the choices the person in question makes. Kern mentions eight types of Available Designs in literacy: *writing system, vocabulary, grammar, declarative knowledge (schemata), stories, style, genres,* and *procedural knowledge.* (Kern 2000:54-55, 62-63)

According to Kern (2000:177), there is evidence from second language writing research that both the first and the second language writing involve similar processes. The difference lies in the fact that when writing in a language other than one’s mother tongue, the process becomes more complex because the resources and norms of this other language are added to the knowledge of what one already has concerning writing in the mother tongue. However, the knowledge one possesses of writing in one’s first language can also facilitate the writing in the second or foreign language, since one is able to draw upon those first language Available Designs also when writing in the new language (Kern 2000: 175, 177). It has to be remembered, however, that the learner has to have acquired a certain level of language proficiency in the second (or foreign) language in order to be able to do so (Weigle, 2002:35).

However, since there are usually considerable differences in functions and conventions of writing in different cultures and social contexts, it cannot be said that merely being able to write in one’s mother tongue would make a person a good writer in another language (Kern 2000: 175). Similarly, Kern (2000:180) points out that fluency in speaking or a general language proficiency are not indicators of writing ability in any language. The reason for this is that writing is best defined “in terms of contextually appropriate practices” instead of processes, and, therefore, it is something that has to be taught. Also Weigle (2002:35) mentions that second language proficiency and expertise in writing are different, but related, abilities.

Kern’s (2000:180) orientation to teaching writing comprises three traditions which, according to him, are ordinarily seen as “mutually incompatible“, namely product-, process-, and genre-based approaches. By including all three orientations, literacy-based teaching of writing focuses on three points: textual features, writer-processes, and social context. In Kern’s (2000:192) words: “a literacy-based approach integrates the teaching of Available Designs (elements of product- and genre-based instruction) with the teaching of design itself (process-based instruction)”.

Also Hyland (2005: 22-23) sees the need to create a synthesis of different approaches to teaching writing. According to him, while it is true that teachers use a mixture of orientations in their teaching, most teachers tend to favor either a process- or genre approach, which has also been the cause of some heated debates over the years. Nevertheless, as was pointed out earlier, none of these approaches alone is sufficient. Hyland also is of the opinion that all the three, process, purpose, and context need to be taken into account if students are to effectively learn to write in a foreign language.

Hyland (2005:23-24) is in accordance with Kern also when he states that an effective methodology for teaching writing in a foreign language includes the teaching of the social purposes behind the used forms of language, and the respecting of students’ needs for relevant content with the help of “stimulating reading and source materials“. They both also stress the importance of teaching the students different genres by planning and revising their texts, and see the importance of creating an audience for writing assignments as well as linking them to “broader social structures“. Hyland (2005:26) also points out that teachers should build their teaching of writing on the practices and perceptions of writing that the students bring with them into the foreign language classroom. The students should be taught to value their own writing and to see “writing as relative to particular groups and contexts”.

3.2.1. Types of writing activities by Kern

Initially Kern (2000:191) places the most common writing activity types in a foreign language classroom on a continuum according to ‘emphasis on formal accuracy’ in one end, and ‘emphasis on content/ ideas’ in the other, as the following table demonstrates.

Table 1 The most common writing activity types in a foreign language classroom by Kern

Emphasis on formal accuracy Emphasis on content/ ideas

| ---------- | ------------ | ------------ | ---------- | ----------- | ------------ | ------------ |

copying, dictation	grammar exercises, controlled compositions	translation	analytical essays	creative writing	letter writing, e-mail, computer conferencing	journal writing, notetaking	freewriting

Additionally Kern (2000:191-192) discusses briefly the demands that some of these activity types hold for the language learner, and what elements in the Available Designs these tasks involve. *Transcription exercises* in general, which include *copying* and *dictation* mentioned on the continuum as requiring the most emphasis on formal accuracy, focus on handwriting, spelling, and punctuation. *Workbook exercises*, which refer to *grammar exercises* and *controlled composition* on the continuum, are said to emphasize grammar, vocabulary, and mechanical writing skills. *Controlled composition* tasks refer here to tasks in which some sort of systematic transformations or substitutions are required, e.g. changing the tense of a story from present to past.

Comparing these writing tasks, which Kern rates as the most common types of activities in college-level foreign language courses, with the task types that are generally associated with lower secondary school English instruction in Finland, it can safely be said, that most of these activity types are shared by both levels, with the exception of *computer conferencing*, *journal writing* and *freewriting.* Short essays are written also in comprehensive school, but they might not be called analytical, and often *creative writing* exercises are those, which are optional and recommended for those pupils who ’are interested’ or ‘have time’.

In organizing the different writing activities Kern (2000:133) uses the four curricular components originally presented by the New London Group, which are (1) *situated practice,* (2) *overt instruction,* (3) *critical framing,* and (4) *transformed practice. Situated practice*- also called *immersion*- differs from the other three, because it involves meaningful, communicative language use on a personal level , whereas the remaining three categories deal with metacognitive language skills and abilities to analyze and discuss contextual factors of texts, as well as transforming texts to be used in different contexts; all skills that are emphasized in academic contexts.

These four activity types teach writing as meaning design, not as grammar or vocabulary practice (Kern 2000:192), and therefore those types of exercises mentioned earlier, which deal with grammar or vocabulary, are not included in these four groups. Also the types of exercises earlier referred to as *transcription*, as well as *workbook exercises*, are not represented here. Therefore, I would argue, that all the following activities are different types of productive writing exercises.

The specific writing activities that are included in each of the four categories (Kern 2000:192-212) are listed below. I have also added a brief, clarifying explanation after those writing activities which may be less transparent.

(1) *situated practice*:

- **letter writing**
- **journal writing**
- **freewriting**
  form of process writing, writing without stopping
- **creative writing**

(2) *overt instruction*:

- **mapping**
  to help develop and organize ideas before writing
- **teaching genres**
- **use of models**
  as examples and resources, not as ideals

- **revising and editing**
  one's own writing

(3) *critical framing*:

- **sensitization through reading**
  awareness of the significance of lexical and structural choices
- **shifting contextual parameters**
  variations of the same situational theme
- **peer-group response/ editing**

(4) *transformed practice*:

- **experimental syntax and reformulation**
  restructuring texts, e.g. poem to narrative
- **redesigning stories**
  'intratextual variations', e.g. different order
- **stylistic reformulation**
  to produce 'native-like' style
- **genre reformulation**
  refraiming the text's purpose and audience
- **inventing story continuations**
- **using writing (and reading) for speaking**
  e.g. writing and editing drafts of oral presentation

In the category of *situated practice* the activities mentioned are examples of a wider range of activities, which aim at improving learner's fluency and automaticity in writing (Kern 2000:1929). It is relatively easy to think of other writing tasks that fit this category by providing learners a chance of personal, meaningful communication, e.g. the earlier mentioned activities of writing *e-mail*, or *computer conferencing*.

Journal writing is mentioned as being an excellent way of helping the learner form a writing 'habit' and of improving his/her motivation and attitude towards writing (Kern 2000:193). The same could perhaps be said of all the activities in the first category, provided that the writing occurs frequently enough. Kern (2000:218) describes the best way to motivate learners to write in the following way:

> The more students can be made aware of their acts of writing as particular solutions to a communicative situation, seeing writing not merely as 'language practice' but as a personally meaningful activity, the more interest they will take in writing.

Viewing these different types of activities as regarding their suitability for the Finnish lower secondary school syllabi, there is really nothing that strikes as being impossible to include, as such. Some of these activities are already being used to some extent, e.g. *letter writing* and *creative writing* from the first category. *Mapping* as a technique, is introduced to pupils already in primary school, and pupils are often recommended to use it when planning their essays in a foreign language. *Use of models* is being used when pupils practice writing letters, CVs, or summer job applications. Different *genres* are present in the textbooks in the form of journal texts, newspaper- or magazine articles or letters to the editor, e-mails, poems, lyrics, and literary extracts, etc., but the writing of most of these is not practiced, nor are the distinctive features particularly analyzed.

The difficulties and restrictions for using these types of writing activities lie elsewhere than in the communicatively-oriented language curriculum, and can be summarized in two words: time and attitude. Firstly, all of these activities are time-consuming and time is of the essence in the Finnish foreign language classroom. Teachers would find it impossible to include lengthy writing and rewriting processes as part of regular classroom activities, when they already have difficulties to manage with what they perceive as “compulsory” material during the school year. It would also be impossible to use the activities as homework because, as it was discussed earlier, pupils require assistance and instruction in order to benefit from them.

Secondly, the term ‘attitude’ here includes several different aspects related to the characteristics of the pupils. A significant factor here is the pupils’ age which has a great effect on attitudes. I would argue that it is quite challenging to motivate 14-16-year-old pupils to systematically reread and rewrite the same text for several times, since the attitude with pupils seems to be, that once an exercise or assignment is completed, it is ready and finished. Also the physical act of handwriting presents problems for many of the students even at this age; they find it too tenuous, especially if they have to work on the same piece of writing. Furthermore, pupils of this age are generally quite sensitive in regard to the feedback they receive from their peers, and it is not said that activities related to this could work in every class or with every pupil. Also analyzing the different aspects of genres, for example, through discussion in class is not something that lower secondary school pupils would be able to participate in for any significant period of time. It would seem to me that those metacognitive skills that are needed for this type of learning are yet not available for learners of this age.

Having said all this, I still find it possible to use these types of activites in lower secondary school, provided that they are adapted to fit the time frame available and the stage of development of the pupils in question. In practice, this means that the writing tasks should be quite short and the instructions very explicit. For the sake of motivation, the tasks should be linked to the pupils’ personal lives as closely as possible and activity types should be varied. Analyzing different genres and styles etc. should be restricted to include only few, carefully selected points at a time. The pupils usually have a wide range of texts in their English textbooks which could be used to incorporate these kinds of written activities, and thus integrate them to become a part of the “normal” language learning.

The initial step would be the teacher’s realization of the importance of the skills that are learnt through these activities and a conscious decision to include more of these types of activities in his/her teaching. It would be important to start experimenting with small steps. I am quite convinced that there already exist a good many exercises in the exercise books which could be used as raw material towards the ends of literacy-based instruction. Later, when the pupils were familiar with the exercise types and knew what was to be expected, the time used for the tasks would shorten. I also believe that it is quite possible to introduce an element of fun or surprise to many of these tasks, and by doing so also increase pupils‘ motivation.

3.2.2. Types of writing tasks by Hyland

While Kern uses the term ‘writing activities’ to refer to the different types of writing exercises performed in the foreign language classroom, Hyland discusses different ‘writing tasks’. He defines a task as “any activity with meaning as its main focus and which is accomplished using language” (Hyland 2005:112). These tasks are either *real-world tasks* or *pedagogic tasks*. The former are tasks which relate directly to the communicative goals in the target language, and the latter help the learners to develop their knowledge of different genres and their composing skills (Hyland 2005:113).

Hyland, like Kern, seems to concentrate on writing instruction that takes place in a specific course for teaching writing instead of a ‘general purpose language’ course. Hyland’s suggestion for the arrangement of a writing course is clearly task -based. The contents of a course are based on the results of a needs analysis, which gives a list of target tasks that the students need to master in order to be able to perform those communicative acts they are preparing for. He describes different task -types by providing a list of the most common example tasks (28 in all) in order of increasing difficulty. The tasks are also described in terms of what areas of writing knowledge they contribute to. According to Hyland, there are five areas of language knowledge, which learners have to master in order to create effective texts. These are *content*, *system*, *process*, *genre*, and *context*. Examples of easy tasks would be Extract information from a written text or Generate word lists for writing, the former contributing to the competence of *content*, and the latter of *content* and *process*. An example of a difficult task would be Research, write, and revise a workplace/ disciplinary text, which contributes to the learning of all five areas of language knowledge. (Hyland 2005:113-115).

Although Hyland’s list of different tasks is based on a variety of activities in various writing textbooks (Hyland 2005:113), it is not very useful for my purposes as such. Firstly, it would appear that these textbooks were designed to be used in classes that concentrate solely on writing. Probably for this reason a large number of the tasks are to do with quite extensive amounts of writing, or writing of full texts, like essays or different kinds of documents. Secondly, many tasks listed here are actually preparation for writing assignments, such as identifying genres or purposes of texts, or analyzing a text for certain features. Tasks like these are not likely to be very relevant for my present purposes of analyzing a course book for beginners. Finally, since the task descriptions are quite specific they would not work well as classes into which different exercises could be placed.

Some of the listed tasks, however, correspond to exercise types that are relevant also for Finnish course books in lower secondary school. The following tasks are examples of these: Combine sentences provided in materials, Complete gapped paragraphs with target structures/ lexis, Create a parallel text following a given model, Create a text using visual information, or Draft a text based on the outcome of pre-writing activities (Hyland 2005:114). These tasks can all be found toward the beginning of the list, which implies that Hyland rates them as easy or fairly easy tasks.

Hyland also presents three different categories into which different tasks can be placed according to the degree of support or assistance which is provided either by the materials or the teacher. These groups are (1) *graphological tasks*, (2) *language scaffolding tasks*, and (3) *composing tasks*, the first group offering the most support for writing and the last having the most independence. (Hyland 2005:120) These categories are more general and could better be used for the present analysis.

(1) *Graphological tasks* include basic writing mechanics; handwriting, keyboarding, spelling, punctuation, and layout.

(2) *Language scaffolding tasks* consist of four subgroups which are also placed in the order of growing independence. The ultimate goal for the teacher is to “bring learners to the point where they can write a target text without assistance” (Hyland 2005:123). This is achieved by first starting with basic noticing activities and moving gradually on to manipulation of model tasks, and finally independent production (ibid.124). The four subgroups and task descriptions are as follows:

(a) Language familiarization (comparisons, gap-fil, feature identification)
(b) Model analysis and manipulation (re-ordering, transforming, or combining features)
(c) Controlled composition based on models (text completion and parallel writing)
(d) Guided composition (data transfer, information transfer, medium transfer)

‘Parallel writing’, which is mentioned in the third group, is a way of practicing formulating sentences, paragraphs, and texts by imitating a written model (Harmer 2004:44, 54). The guided composition tasks refer to tasks where the basis for students’ writing is either information which is provided by another student, a graph, a table, or notes, a list of key words, or a picture sequence (Hyland 2005:128).

(3) *Composing tasks* include (a) composition heuristics such as planning, pre-writing, multidrafting, and editing techniques, and (b) extended writing, which entails the independent creation of a text for a particular audience. Whereas controlled composition and guided composition tasks are mainly intended for beginning and intermediate level students, extended writing is the desired goal for the foreign language writing class (Hyland 2005:128, 132).

3.3. Practical guides to teaching writing

Jeremy Harmer is Series Editor for the series *How to…*, which has been written by teachers and teacher trainers for teachers of English. He mentions that *How to teach writing* is intended for teachers who are “interested in writing as a process and in the variety of types of writing” (Harmer 2004: v). It is, as the title of this section indicates, a practical guide, which concentrates on the possibilities of teaching writing in classroom conditions. Although based on research, it lacks any theoretical discussion of the nature of literacy as such, nor does it present any organized framework for the teaching of writing.

Harmer (2004:v) shares Kern’s views that in language teaching writing has long been perceived only as a tool for teaching grammar and vocabulary, and not as a skill in itself. He, too, emphasizes the “recursive” nature of the writing process as opposed to the linear one, and describes it with the help of *the process wheel,* which demonstrates how the writer can move in all directions replanning, redrafting and reediting until s/he arrives at the final version of a text (Harmer 2004:5-6). He, like Kern, uses the terms “reflecting” and “revising”. They are used to describe what happens during the editing - and reediting- of a draft, i.e. a version of a text.

Harmer (2004: 11) continues along Kern's lines also, when he considers the different approaches to teaching writing. He mentions that the product approach was previously in the focus of attention at the expense of the writing process. At the same time that Harmer (2004:11) finds it important to concentrate on the process of writing, he points out that also concentrating on form can be very beneficial to many students.

Later on he also discusses the need to include the studying of different genres in the teaching of writing, since the writers have to be aware of the typical vocabulary and text constructions associated with different purposes of writing (Harmer 2004:17, 27). Likewise, he (ibid.17) also briefly refers to the schematic knowledge, i.e. also sociocultural knowledge, that the reader of a text brings to the task of reading, and which the writer needs to consider. In other words, both authors see the need to include all the three approaches -product, process and genre- in foreign language teaching of writing in order to achieve the best possible results in learning.

Also the idea of the interrelatedness of the four language skills is shared by Kern and Harmer. Harmer (2004: 11-13, 28) discusses the differences between speaking and writing, on one hand, and the relationship between reading and writing, on the other.

Harmer (2004:11-12) lists three points that teachers should consider in connection with the planning of the writing process. The first point has to do with how to get students to plan their writing. This can be done in different ways; in pairs, in groups, or individually. In place of this *brainstorming* also the teacher or the course book can provide activities which prepare the learner and gradually lead him/her towards the writing task. The second point is how to encourage the students to draft, reflect, and revise. The book provides three suggestions: correction symbols that the teacher uses to mark the draft with, revision checklists that are given to the students, and collaborative writing, where a pair or a group of students read and give suggestions for each others' texts. The final point is how to respond to the students' writing. In question of process-writing, the response should be given also during the writing, not just of the final version. The response can be provided by the teacher or a fellow student, and the response can be spoken or written. Harmer (2004:12) also suggests that sometimes the teacher can write his/her own version of a paragraph or a section of a student's text and the student can benefit from comparing the two versions.

Harmer (2004:12-13, 29-30) warns against over-emphasis on both process- and genre elements, which he calls *the process trap* and *the genre trap.* In addition to taking up too much time, over-planning can restrict spontaneity and creativity. Too much concentration on the study and analysis of different genres in the form of examples provided for the students, in its turn, will cause the students to perceive them as restrictive models they have to follow, not as examples. An attempt to avoid this can be made by offering the students several different text varieties of the same genre.

Tricia Hedge is the author of another practical guide which is quite laconically called *Writing*, and which is a part of a series called *Resource books for teachers*. In the foreword of this book it is described as "common -sense, practical, and non -technical approach" to the teaching of writing in foreign language classrooms. It is intended to be used by teachers of teenage or adult learners of English as a foreign language, but is also applicable to be used even with younger learners (Hedge 2008:8). Furthermore, the material is primarily intended for general purpose classes, although it has been used also for multilingual groups of short course learners, and ESL groups of ethnic minority students, among others (Hedge 2008:8).

Any theoretical discussion in Hedge's book is limited to estabilishing a framework for the writing activities she presents. She discusses briefly several aspects that are involved in a writing process, such as reasons for writing, the craft of writing, the processes of communicating, composing, and improving, and sources of help in writing, among others (Hedge 2008: 9-15). On the basis of these discussions she formulates 10 assumptions which form the framework for her writing activities.

After examining these assumptions it becomes clear that Hedge and the other three authors discussed in this chapter share the view of writing as a process which involves cycles of planning, organizing, composing, and revising. They also share the idea of the necessity of a communicative purpose behind each writing activity and the learners' realization of the audience - real or imagined- for whom the writing is directed. Hedge points out that students are much more likely to write effectively and appropriately if they fully understand the context for their piece of writing, and that one of the most important tasks teachers face is to contextualize writing tasks (Hedge 2008: 10-12, 20)

Hedge also concurs with Kern, when she argues that students need time and help for writing in the classroom. Teachers need to provide activities which support even the poor writers and guide them through the different stages of creating a piece of writing. In order to become a good writer, a person needs to write a lot, and succeeding in class will encourage students to do more writing also outside the class. They both also agree that students need to be told about the different stages of the writing process and be given access to models of good writing (Hedge 2008:13-14, 55).

Harmer (2004:84) and Hedge (2008:12) both point out the dangers of over-correcting or - marking. Instead of teachers concentrating on error correction, students should be encouraged in revising their own work and regarding this as well as receiving feedback also from other students as a normal part of the writing process. Teachers should also pay more attention in their feedback to the strengths the students have. Another point that both these authors find important, is the teacher's role in writing. This was a novel idea to me, and could certainly be worth experimenting also in Finnish secondary schools. The idea is that teachers should also participate in the writing process by writing with their students or for them. While providing his/her own response to a task given to students, the teacher sets a motivating example for students, but also gains a clear understanding of the demands this activity sets on the students (Hedge 2008:15). Hedge also suggests that teachers can write letters, stories, etc. to their students also based on the activities provided in her book. Harmer's (2004:125, 127) discussion of journal writing, which is referred to later on in this chapter, also includes the point that teachers are expected to read the journals and comment on them in writing. Also Harmer discusses the possibility of giving the students a chance of corresponding with their teacher during the course.

3.3.1. Harmer's classification of writing activities

Unlike Kern, Harmer (2004:30) stresses the idea that the teaching and analyzing of genres and the types of writing related to them are only "one part of the picture" for the students, and it is essential to find a balance between teaching the genres and teaching of writing as a process that involves the students and, by doing so, help them learn the language. The above-mentioned desire for finding a balance is reflected in Harmer's (2004:31-34) way of dividing writing into two main categories: *writing for learning* and *writing for writing*. *Writing for learning* includes writing in order to produce and reinforce the learning of grammar and vocabulary (Harmer 2004:31), whereas *writing for writing* entails learning to write in different genres and registers, and writing in order to become a better writer (Harmer 2004:34).

Harmer distinguishes three kinds of *writing for learning*: (1) *reinforcement writing*
(2) *preparation writing*,
and (3) *activity writing*.

Reinforcement writing refers to the reinforcing of previously taught grammatical structures or vocabulary by writing. The aim is to give students opportunities to reflect on the newly learned language and remember it better (Harmer 2004:33).The length of writing can vary from one sentence to a paragraph or an entire composition. Harmer (2004:32) gives examples, such as the writing of sentences using the third conditional, or writing a description of someone with the help of given vocabulary.

Preparation writing, as the name indicates, is used when a student is preparing for another language activity, particularly a discussion. According to Harmer (2004:33) this is a very enabling skill, since it gives students time to think and reflect on their ideas before speaking. As an example, students can be given a beginning of a sentence related to the topic of discussion and asked to complete it, or students can first talk in groups, prepare their arguments, and make written notes before the discussion.

Activity writing, as *preparation writing*, is used to facilitate another activity -usually kinaesthetic-, which is in the focus of attention. Such activites can be the acting out of a dialogue the students have first written, or the gathering of information by asking questions in the class based on a questionnaire the students have previously filled (Harmer 2004:33).

Harmer (2004:34) finds that, unlike *writing for learning*- and especially *reinforcement writing*- general language improvement is not the main goal for *writing for writing*, although it may, in some cases, be a by-product of it. Although Harmer (2004:34) mentions students needing help with matters such as punctuation and ortography, he concurs with Kern in saying, that the essence of teaching writing (for writing) is about "helping students to communicate real messages in an appropriate manner", and doing so "for real audiences", or at least practicing tasks that they will find useful in their future encounters with the foreign language (2004:39). However, I think that it could be argued that 'communicating in appropriate manner' would include also the use of correct grammatical forms. Also, provided that learners are expected to reread and revise their writing, it would be fairly easy to encourage them to pay attention to a particular grammatical structure, e.g. tenses, that need systematic correcting. Often it is difficult for learners to make a connection with their knowledge of grammatical structures in the process of writing, and feedback on grammar has proven to improve grammatical accuracy and the overall quality of writing significantly (Hinkel 2002:182-183).

In addition to *writing for learning* and *writing for writing*, Harmer (2004:44) also discusses the teaching of, what he calls, the *'mechanical' components of writing*. These components include handwriting, spelling, punctuation, and the construction of well-formed sentences, paragraphs, and texts. He also introduces two techniques which help students practice and achieve a basic mechanical competence: *copying* and *parallel writing*. This competence learners will then be able to use in their more creative writing.

Copying as a term is straightforward enough. Students can practice language by copying single or clusters of letters, words, or even sentences. Many exercises also in Finnish course books which may initially seem varied are, in fact, different versions of copying exercises provided for the learner in order to help them memorize newly learnt words or expressions and their spelling. Harmer (2004:52) points out that, apart from a technique in language learning, copying is a useful skill also outside the classroom, and presents difficulties to many people. Furthermore, copying by hand, instead of using the copy- and paste functions of the computer, forces students to pay attention to the way words are formed (Harmer 2004:52-53).

Harmer (2004:55-59) gives examples of *parallel writing* exercise types which are also well represented in Finnish foreign language exercise books in general;

(1) substituting elements in sentences connected with and and but;
(2) writing pairs of sentences with the help of given information and using substituting pronouns in the latter sentence;
(3) writing a passage similar to the model one but substituting new information;
(4) arranging the mixed passages into a coherent text, completing the given exercises, and finally writing a new text with similar paragraphs;
(5) reading a story, answering questions about it, and finally writing a story of one's own with the help of a ready-made beginning and support questions.

It is also good to bear in mind that not all students are keen on writing. This may be because they feel insecure of their writing abilities or because they are not used to writing even in their native language. It is very important to provide these reluctant writers writing tasks which they are able to complete successfully in order to prevent the reinforcement of the negative attitude. (Harmer 2004:61)

A successful writing task requires also personal involvement and emotional engagement. Students can be helped to achieve this by providing writing tasks of appropriate level and enough language material to aid the writing. Other ways to help are appealing, relevant activities, possibly the use of music, pictures, or tasks involving kinaesthetic stimulation such as writing jointly on the board or swapping papers around. It is good to remember that variety is important in all areas of language learning, also in writing. (Harmer 2004:61-62)

Harmer (2004:63) introduces yet another group of writing tasks which he calls *habit-building writing.* Their purpose is to make students accustomed to writing in a foreign language spontaneously and with little preparation unlike in process- or genre-based writing. The aim here is to make students more fluent and motivated writers. The ultimate goal is not to correct these texts 'to death', but to let the students enjoy their work and be motivated by it (Harmer 2004:84). *Habit-building writing* has three sub-groups: (1) *instant writing,*
(2) *collaborative writing,*
and (3) *writing to each other.*

Instant writing can occur at any point of teacher's choosing during the lesson. It takes 10 to 15 minutes or less, and there is no preparation for this writing task. According to Harmer (2004:63-64), regular tasks of this kind can be very motivating for the students because at the end of the exercise they have something concrete to show for their efforts. Harmer (2004:64-73) provides several examples of the following types of *instant writing*: (1) sentence writing according to teacher's instructions, (2) using music as stimulus, (3) using pictures as stimuli, and (4) writing poems assisted. Elsewhere (Harmer 2004:13) he also mentions that games, which involve writing, are good examples of *instant writing*, and help to develop writing fluency.

Collaborative writing activities are group exercises, which can make it very motivating, since the members of the group share each others' knowledge and thus learn from each other. Additionally, no-one is alone responsible for either a possible success or a failure. (Harmer 2004:73) These activities can be performed either by using the board or writing in groups or pairs. Harmer (2004:73-81) provides several examples of both types of activities.

The final sub-group of *habit-building writing* is *writing to each other*. The name is self-explanatory, and Harmer (2004:81) includes in it pen-pals, e-mails, and live chat. These activities are especially motivating because of their genuinely communicative nature.

Harmer (2004:125-135) also dedicates an entire chapter to journal writing which he, like Kern, finds a very useful learning activity. Writing a journal gives students an opportunity to reflect on their learning and to freely express themselves. By writing regularly they also develop their writing fluency and their skills as writers. Although students write for themselves, teachers are expected to read the journals regularly and to respond to their students' writing. Therefore, yet another benefit of journal writing is the new, confidential channel of communication between the student and the teacher, which also gives teachers useful information for his/her future teaching. (Harmer 2004:125-127)

All in all, Harmer's book offers valuable insights for teaching writing in a foreign language classroom. The activities he describes are concrete and realistic enough to be adopted by language teachers without much difficulty. Harmer (2004: 12-13, 61) also discusses realistically the restrictions and difficulties that teachers face in teaching writing, as well as suggests possible solutions. The construction of the book is somewhat confusing, however, if the reader tries to place all the different types of writing mentioned into relation to one another in order to form a concise overall picture of what has been discussed. In the introduction Harmer (2004:v) lists the contents of the book chapter by chapter, which explains the order he has chosen for the book, but some kind of a summary at the end would have been useful. The following table is my summary of the writing activities in Harmer's book. The types of writing which have been discussed in this section are highlighted.

Table 2 Different types of writing activities by Harmer

WRITING FOR LEARNING	WRITING FOR WRITING	MECHANICAL WRITING	HABIT-BUILDING WRITING
reinforcement writing	genre	handwriting	***instant writing***
grammar exerc.	registers	spelling	sentence
vocabulary exerc.		punctuation	music
preparation writing	a better writer	form	picture
			poem
activity writing		***copying***	***collaborative writing***
		parallel writing	(group exercises)
		(written model)	***writing to each other***

However, I would like to point out that in my opinion some of the categories are overlapping and some activities could be placed in more than one category. As mentioned earlier, Harmer initially divides writing into only two main categories: *writing for learning* and *writing for writing*. This gives us an indication that these four types of writing presented above are actually not four hierarchically equal dimensions of writing, but rather a list of different aspects of it.

The activities of *parallel writing* and *copying*, which were later mentioned as helpful activities in enhancing the skills of *mechanical writing*, could just as well be included in *reinforcement writing* for the practicing of grammatical structures or vocabulary, or even in *writing for writing* for the practicing of different genres and registers. Likewise, *habit -building writing* lists activities which can also be used in practicing *writing for writing*, or even *writing for learning* as *preparation writing* or *activity writing* exercises.

Although *journal writing* and *creative writing* are also included in Harmer's discussions elsewhere, he does not place them under any of the four headings. Instead, he discusses them separately. In my opinion, they could be placed either under *writing for writing* or *habit-building writing*, or both.

3.3.2. Hedge's classification of writing activities

Hedge's book is first and foremost a catalogue of different types of exercises, which are organized under four headings of (1) *Communicating*, (2) *Composing*, (3) *Crafting*, and (4) *Improving*. According to Hedge (2008:17) these headings "reflect the stages of the writing process itself". The exercises are described in detail and each description includes the level, time and aims of the exercise, possible preparation required, description of the procedure itself, and possibly some additional comments at the end of the explanation.

The exercises in the first group, *Communicating*, share two common goals. The first is that of context; activities which show how the teacher can create different contexts for classroom writing and thus develop a sense of audience for the students. The second goal is to show students how the style of writing is dependent on the context. *Composing* includes activities which encourage students to acquire good pre-writing and drafting practices, i.e. they give students a chance to practice the planning of a writing assignment. *Crafting* has to do with cohesion, structures and appropriate vocabulary. Activities in this group provide the teacher with means of helping students create coherent and appropriate texts. Hedge (2008:81) describes *crafting* as “the way in which a writer puts together the pieces of the text, developing ideas through sentences and paragraphs within an overall structure”. Finally, *Improving* consists of activities which help teachers and students work together in reviewing and revising their piece of writing, and then finally producing the final version of it. (Hedge 2008:17)

Here are some examples of the writing activities in each of these groups in order to illustrate their nature more clearly:

(1) *Communicating:* Keeping a reading journal
Sharing cultural information (on superstitions)
Making a class magazine
Giving directions
(2) *Composing:* Making mind maps
Imagining dialogues
Working from opening sentences
Reporting interviews
(3) *Crafting:* Describing a person
Writing a biography
Developing a case and effect argument
Using connectives of addition/ concession
(4) *Improving:* Raising awareness about writing
Writing in a group
Self-editing for language accuracy

Hedge’s list of various activities resemble Hyland’s task descriptions because of their detailed and precise nature. The four categories, or titles of the chapters, under which they are placed, could be more applicable for my purposes in the categorization of different writing activities.

All in all, I find Hedge’s book to be very useful in providing “food for thought” when considering different possibilities for writing exercises. Especially the ‘aims’ which are included in the descriptions of every activity help teachers realize what these activities actually do for the learning, and, in doing so, help teachers also think of other, similar types of activities which would have the same effect.

3.4. Summary of the writing activities

Although all the above-discussed authors share the same basic views of communicative and context-based teaching of writing, their classifications of writing activities differ from each other in several ways. Firstly, authors define the grounds for their categories differently; Kern has writing as meaning design as his starting point, Hyland concentrates on different tasks and arranges them according to how much assistance they provide to the learner, Harmer’s focus is on the realities and practices of the classroom, and Hedge organizes her list of activities to reflect the different steps of a writing process.

Secondly, Kern and Hedge do not include writing activities which are quite central in general purpose English classes. These include Hyland's and Harmer's *graphological tasks/ mechanical writing,* respectively, as well as Harmer's *reinforcement writing,* which refers to writing in order to learn grammatical structures and vocabulary. Kern refers to these in his discussion but excludes them from his classification, for the reasons I discussed earlier. Even Hyland's and Harmer's classes differ from each other, because Harmer's *mechanical writing* includes also the construction of well-formed sentences, paragraphs, and texts, and Hyland's does not.

Thirdly, authors may have same subgroups, but distribute them differently in their classifications. One example of this is the category of *composing* which, for Hedge, contains only the planning and drafting of a writing assignment, whereas for Hyland it includes the whole writing process. In other words, finding two categories that correspond to each other is difficult, since it may be that only parts of their contents correlate with each other, while the rest do not. Another good example is Kern's second category, *Overt instruction*. It has four elements, which are distributed quite differently in Harmer's and Hedge's lists.

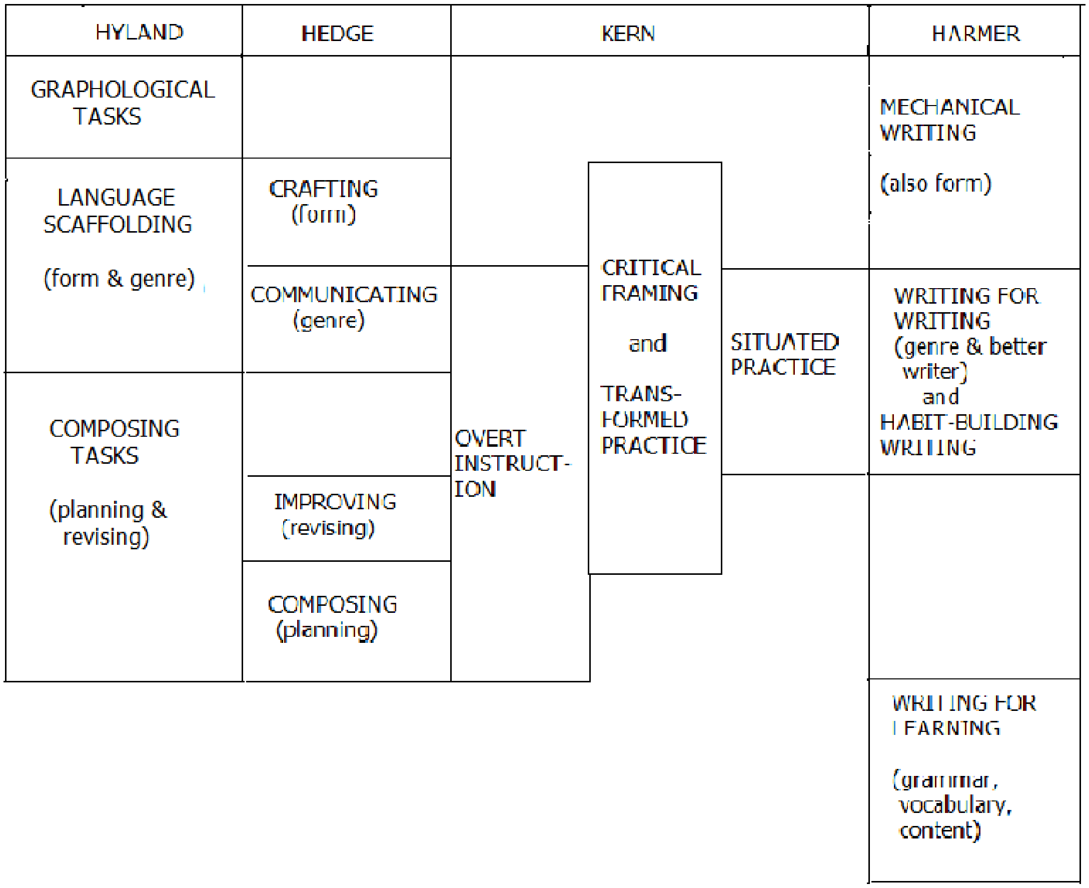
Table 3 Kern's category of *Overt instruction* in comparison with Harmer's and Hedge's classifications

HARMER:	**KERN:**	**HEDGE:**
	(2) *Overt instruction*	
	• **mapping**	*Composing*
Writing for writing	• **teaching genres**	*Communicating*
Mechanical writing	• **use of models**	
	• **revising and editing**	*Improving*

In spite of these difficulties, I make an attempt to compare the categories of these four authors to each other. The presentation is in form of a table. I have joined *writing for writing* and *habit-building writing* together, mainly because of the fact that Harmer describes *writing for writing* also as 'writing in order to become a better writer', and I feel that this is what *habit-building writing* is really all about.

The table is arranged in such a way that the categories which are horizontally on the same level share same characteristics. The most difficult presentation to place into the table turned out to be Kern's. Nearly all his groups have elements of several groups in the other authors' classifications, and, due to this, they also turned out to be overlapping. For this reason, I have placed Kern's classes horizontally, while the others are placed vertically. In brackets I have placed key words which I feel best describe the elements that make up the class in question, although this may give a somewhat simplified picture of the state of affairs.

Table 4 Summary of the writing activities by Hyland, Hedge, Kern, and Harmer



HYLAND	HEDGE	KERN			HARMER
GRAPHOLOGICAL TASKS					MECHANICAL WRITING (also form)
LANGUAGE SCAFFOLDING (form & genre)	CRAFTING (form)		CRITICAL FRAMING and TRANSFORMED PRACTICE		
	COMMUNICATING (genre)	OVERT INSTRUCTION		SITUATED PRACTICE	WRITING FOR WRITING (genre & better writer) and HABIT-BUILDING WRITING
COMPOSING TASKS (planning & revising)					
	IMPROVING (revising)				
	COMPOSING (planning)				
					WRITING FOR LEARNING (grammar, vocabulary, content)

4. THE ROLE OF WRITING IN A FINNISH FOREIGN LANGUAGE CLASSROOM

This chapter discusses the framework that the European Framework of Reference and the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education provide for the teaching of foreign languages in lower secondary school in Finland. Only those parts of these documents are discussed which contribute something to the teaching of writing in a foreign language in general and the teaching of a B1-language in particular. This chapter also contains my views of the role that writing generally plays in a Finnish foreign language classroom.

4.1.Writing in the teaching of foreign languages in the Common European Framework of Reference (CEF)

The Common European Framework of Reference for languages (CEFR) was published by the Council of Europe to provide a common basis for the planning and evaluation of language education in European countries (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Learning, Teaching, Assessment. 2002:1). Since the ultimate goal of the Council is to promote improved communication between Europeans with diverse language and cultural backgrounds, it does not attempt to dictate common objectives or methods for the teaching of languages in these countries (CEFR 2002: xi). Instead, it's aim is to "describe what learners have to learn to do in order to use a language for communication and what knowledge and skills they have to develop so as to be able to act effectively"(CEFR 2002:1).

CEFR perceives the needs for foreign language learning to be essentially the same as those described by the sociocognitive view. CEFR sees language for communication and individual learner needs in different social and cultural contexts as the corner stones in planning or executing language teaching on any level. It also urges all those involved in language teaching to have learners' motivation and resources as starting point for their work.(CEFR 2002: xii, 142) The Framework emphasizes the idea that competence in any language is always incomplete and partial and that the ultimate goal in foreign language teaching (or learning) is not to achieve a native language- like competence (Salo 2006: 582).

The approach of the Framework is to present important questions which educators in the countries in question can answer locally according to their specific needs (Salo 2006: 581). It also provides descriptions of different levels of language proficiency which can be used to measure learners' progress. On each of these six levels - A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 - it describes what the learner can do with the language and how well s/he performs. Levels A1 and A2 are elementary, B1 and B2 are intermediate, and C1 and C2 are advanced levels.

It is also noteworthy that CEFR does not make any specific distinction between learners' first language and second or foreign languages until in chapter 6, where second or foreign languages are specifically mentioned. In this particular chapter the question how learners are expected to learn a second or foreign language is discussed. This implies that the six proficiency levels can be used to describe learners' progress in any language, including the mother tongue.

Specific references to writing in CEFR can be found in chapter 4.4 where different communicative language activities and strategies are described. Writing is mentioned in three different kinds of communicative activities, namely (1) *written production*, (2) *written interaction,* and (3) *written mediation.* In each case there is a list of examples of writing activities and in the case of the first two categories also illustrative scales to provide descriptions of language proficiency are provided.

(1) *Written production* (or *writing*) activities include written texts which are received by one or more readers. The list of examples includes forms and questionnaires, articles, posters, reports, letters, messages from dictation, creative writing, etc. Illustrative scales are provided for *Overall written production, Creative writing* and *Reports and essays.* (CEFR 2002: 61-62)

(2) *Written interaction* involves written communication between participants in situations such as passing and exchanging notes or memos, correspondence, negotiating agreements or contracts, participating in computer conferences, etc. Illustrative scales are provided for *Overall written interaction, Correspondence* and *Notes, messages and forms*. (CEFR 2002:82-84)

Mediating activities are needed in a situation where participants of a communicative act are unable to understand each other, often due to the lack of a common language. Examples of (3) *written mediation* are translation, summary and paraphrasing. (CEFR 2002:87)

CEFR defines texts as “any sequence or discourse (spoken and/or written) related to a specific domain” (CEFR 2002:10). Chapter 6.4, which presents methodological options for language learning and teaching, raises some questions related to the part spoken or written texts should play in language learning and teaching. Examples given here of written text types possibly produced by learners are: dictated passages, written exercises, essays, translations, written reports, project work, letters to pen friends, and contributions to class links using fax or e-mail (CEFR 2002:146).

Furthermore, CEFR suggests that it would be useful for the users of the Framework to consider what their principles for selecting or composing certain types of texts are, and how the texts are presented. Also the issues of possibly grading the texts and the way of introducing (or not introducing) different text types to the learners are mentioned as important points to consider .(CEFR 2002:147) This means that CEFR does not give any recommendations on the teaching of different genres. Rather, the choice of the genres taught is dependent on the needs of the learners in any given situation. Also teaching - or not teaching - the learners to recognize the typical features of different genres, or to be able to create such texts is left for local decision-makers.

4.2. The role of writing in foreign language teaching in The Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education

In Finnish foreign language learning, reading and writing have always played an important part. Compared to many other countries, where the focus is more on spoken language, Finnish foreign language teachers generally rely heavily on the teaching materials presented in the course books and writing as a way of learning the language.

The Finnish Core Curriculum is based on the Common European Framework of Reference. Both documents emphasize the communicative and functional goals in language learning and see the teaching of the target culture as an inseparable part of language teaching. Furthermore, the common reference levels for language learning presented in CEFR are used also in the Finnish curriculum to describe the final assessment criteria for a grade of 8 in the ninth grade. (Salo 2006: 581-582)

The Finnish National Core Curriculum forms an explicit framework for all those who work in the field of basic education in Finland (Hildén 2011: 216). However, there are not very many concrete examples of e.g. different text types or types of language activities in the curriculum. As far as writing is concerned, it has also been suggested that the desired lengths of written assignments for each year should also be stated in the national curriculum in order to facilitate teachers‘ work and to ensure fair and equal evaluation for all pupils (Hildén 2011:217).

At this point, the role of writing in the national curriculum is discussed only in terms of the teaching of the so called B1-language. This term refers to the language that the pupils start studying in the seventh grade. The language is studied at the rate of two lessons per week throughout the lower secondary school (grades 7-9). The decision is due to the fact that the textbook, which will later on be analyzed, is used to teach English according to the above-mentioned principles.

In the case of B1-languages, the final assessment criteria for a grade of 8 sets the level of written language performance at A1.3, i.e. *functional elementary language proficiency* (National Core Curriculum for basic education 2004: 145). This means that the pupil can write simple messages in familiar situations and can use language, which is related to his/her personal everyday life. The sentences are short with single clauses and different kinds of errors are common in free writing. The text types mentioned on this level in the curriculum are postcards, personal details and dictation. (NCC 2004: 281, see Appendix 2) The core contents of the study are likewise related to pupil's immediate surroundings and everyday life such as family, hobbies, shopping, public services, and travelling. The main grammatical structures are to be learnt from the standpoint of communication. (ibid: 144- 145)

4.3. The role of writing in a Finnish FL classroom

Although the goals of the foreign language curricula in the Finnish comprehensive school emphasize communicative skills, writing activities have always played an important part in the foreign language classroom. The following discussion of Finnish foreign language classroom practices is based on my 10 years of experience as a foreign language teacher in several lower secondary schools, and the information I have gained on the subject over the years. Half of the said time (five years) I have also taught pupils with migrant backgrounds.

Throughout the comprehensive school, foreign language teaching materials usually include both a textbook and an exercise book, or a course book which includes both texts and exercises. Very rarely do teachers even attempt to teach a foreign language without an exercise book, although, in recent years, many have been forced to recycle also exercise books from one year to the next due to too tight school budgets. This entails that pupils have to write down the answers or complete the exercises in their notebooks, since they are not allowed to fill in the exercise books. This makes learning even more challenging for some pupils and lowers motivation for all.

In lower secondary school, a significant part of the lesson is used to perform writing-related activities, such as completing different types of exercises, checking and correcting completed exercises, or sometimes copying text from the blackboard into the notebooks. Especially at the beginning stages of learning, pupils are also encouraged to copy the new words, or even the texts in the textbook, into their notebooks to ensure learning. This is also the case where English as a B1-language is concerned, since the pupils are beginners in their English studies.

The occasions of creative writing and essay writing are normally quite limited even with the more advanced pupils who have studied English since the third grade, often 1 to 3 assignments per course. These are usually done in class, sometimes with the possibility of finishing them at home if necessary. The topics are usually related to a text or theme in the textbook, which has previously been discussed and studied, and writing is facilitated by providing questions or other additional material, as well as the possibility of using a dictionary or the textbook as reference. Some of these writing assignments can be characterized more as practicing of different genres with the help of different models, such as letter writing, writing of a CV, or a summer job application, than actual creative writing or an essay, although pupils also write on topics such as their summer holiday, plans for the future, or the favorite TV-show. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, additional writing assignments are more often recommended to those pupils who have already finished other given assignments, or who are otherwise motivated to write. Writing assignments for the pupils who study English as a B-language are naturally more modest than the ones I have described above, since they are just starting to study this new language.

The pupils who have English as a B1-language are usually those whose mother tongue is other than Finnish and who have not had a chance to study English in the primary school, or have studied it only one or two years. Therefore, before introducing the framework for the course book analysis, it is necessary to briefly discuss the specific circumstances that effect teaching a foreign language to pupils of migrant backgrounds.

5. PUPILS OF MIGRANT BACKGROUNDS AS LEARNERS OF A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

The pupils of migrant backgrounds who start studying English as a B-language usually have a very different linguistic background from the Finnish pupils who study English as an A-language. First of all, many of them, but by no means all, already know several languages besides their mother tongue at least to some extent. The level of their knowledge can vary significantly from one language to the other, since they may be used to using a specific language in specific contexts only, e.g. one at school and the other for communicating with people from other ethnic groups. This is especially the case with pupils who come from African countries. Secondly, all these students have spent a relatively short time in Finland and their knowledge of the Finnish language, which is now their second language, is quite limited. Some may start the seventh grade -and the studying of English- after only one year of preparatory instruction in Finnish. Yet they study English through Finnish since it is the only common language that all the participants in the class, including the teacher, share. From this it follows that the studying of English also often involves studying Finnish, at least to the extent of negotiating the meaning of a word, an expression, or a sentence. In these circumstances English is being learnt as a third or additional language and the possible strains, as well as advantages, that the situation causes to the pupils should be considered carefully.

Until fairly recently researchers have considered the acquisition of third and additional languages to be essentially the same as that of a second language. This approach has lately been challenged by writers like De Angelis who argues that there is an acknowledgeable difference between these two processes. She summarizes the findings in the third language acquisition so far by saying that multilinguals have clearly “more knowledge that can be used and drawn upon during the acquisition and production process which bilinguals do not have at their disposal", and that this additional knowledge has a more important role than what has previously been assumed (De Angelis 2007:130). Nevertheless, it is not yet known how much knowledge in the second language or other languages the learner needs to have for it to have an effect on the learning processes of the third or additional language (i.e. what the threshold level is). According to De Angelis some studies indicate that "even one year of formal instruction can affect third or additional language performance to a significant extent". Furthermore, research has shown that prior language knowledge has mostly a positive effect on third or additional language learning processes, and that one important factor in it is literacy in the previous languages. Finally, non-native language influence has been found to have an impact on almost all levels of language competence, including lexis and syntax. (ibid. 131-132, 137)

Unfortunately, the area of multilingualism has been largely neglected in Finnish academic research, and therefore it is not surprising that there is virtually no research that would involve pupils of migrant backgrounds and their achievement in learning English as a third language, and even less research specifically on the development of their writing abilities in the said language. More is known about diverse aspects of literacy development in the native language, i.e. Finnish, and also Finnish as the second language for immigrants has received growing attention in recent years. The ToLP (Towards Future Literacy Pedagogies) at the University of Jyväskylä also involved immigrants in its research on "mother tongue and foreign language literacy practices in school and out-of-school contexts" (ToLP: 3). Nevertheless, this project concentrated more on reading and literacy pedagogy than writing.

Also international studies of literacy in second or foreign languages are few and far between, and their scope has been quite limited (ToLP: 3). Dooley (2009: 87) mentions in her article on students of African origin in Australia that according to long-estabilished evidence it can take up to ten years to reach the academic language level that is required for average achievement if the learner has had little schooling or schooling has been severely interrupted prior to arriving in the West.

In the absence of research results on migrants as learners of a third or additional language, it is still possible to list out several factors that the teacher has to consider in his/her teaching. Firstly, the pupils should be made aware of their knowledge in their native language as well as possible other languages. They should be encouraged to compare English vocabulary and syntactic features etc. with both their mother tongue and Finnish, as well as the additional languages. It is important and possibly empowering for the learner to know that his/her mother tongue and all prior language knowledge is valuable and as important as Finnish or English. Secondly, the teacher has to acknowledge the fact that learning a third language in addition to learning Finnish as a second language simultaneously is a demanding task. Learning vocabulary in both languages may sees to the pupils like an endless effort and a strain to the memory. Often the word has to be learnt both in Finnish and English, and it is possible that the learner is not able to think of an equivalent in his/her native language, either. This may be due to the lack of the concept or phenomenon in that language, or because the learner does not know the word in question in the native language (or any other language). The use of pictures in learning vocabulary, especially at the initial stages, as well as all kinds of pair - and group exercises and games is very helpful here. Thirdly, the teacher has to remember that Finnish is learnt also in the English class and that explanations and clarifications of different types take up class time, as vocabulary, exercise types and other instructions may be unfamiliar to the pupils. Often it is also easier to ask questions in a class where there are less students and where all, in a way, share the same background. In classes where immigrant children are in the minority, signaling confusion and asking for help often causes anxiety in the pupils in question (Dooley 2009:88).

6. FRAMEWORK FOR THE CURRENT COURSEBOOK ANALYSIS

In this chapter I will outline the framework for the analysis of the writing exercises in *Steps into English 3,* a course book for beginning learners of English. I will also introduce the classes formed for, and describe the different steps involved in the analysis. This particular course book was chosen for the analysis because of the fact that it was originally not written for comprehensive school. The goals and recommendations for the contents that have to be taken into account when writing a course book for comprehensive school need not have been considered in the writing of this teaching material, and since the book is being used in the said context it is of importance to examine how well it corresponds to the said goals and contents. Also, from the sociocognitive point of view it is of interest to see what genres are present and how well meaningful communication activities are represented.

6.1. Goals of the course book analysis

The aim of this study is to see what types of writing tasks the book includes and what kinds of tasks are rare or missing altogether. With the ideas of the sociocognitive view in mind, the ultimate purpose is to help the teachers who use this course book to complement the teaching material by concluding what kinds of additional writing tasks are needed to assist the pupils in acquiring as good writing skills as possible in the areas relevant to their needs, as well as acquiring fondness for writing.

Therefore, my research question is the following:

1. What types of writing tasks are presented in *Steps into English 3* and what is the level of response required?

Based on the results of the analysis I will also discuss the implications that the results have on using this course book for teaching material in lower secondary school English classes.

6.2. Setting

An overwhelming majority of Finnish lower secondary school pupils study English as their first foreign language - or as their A1-language, as it is called in the curriculum. The studying of an A1-language starts in the third grade in primary school and continues until the end of the comprehensive school, i.e. for seven years.

The language, which starts at the beginning of the lower secondary school, that is, in the seventh grade, is called a B1-language. Again, an overwhelming majority of the pupils in Finland study Swedish as their B1-language. Only exceptions to this rule are those pupils who have already started Swedish before the seventh grade and those who are exempted from studying it altogether. This is often the case with immigrant pupils who have fairly recently arrived in Finland and have studied English very little or not at all before. For these pupils taking up yet another new language, i.e. Swedish, would be too demanding at this point of their studies.

The textbook, which I will use for analysis in chapter 7, is used to teach English for immigrant pupils as a B1-language. The pupils have English two lessons per week through grades 7 - 9. The descriptions of pupils and circumstances in this chapter and the following analysis are based on the experience that I have gained during those four years I have taught English as a B1-language for immigrants.

As mentioned before, the pupils who begin their English studies in the seventh grade have all immigrated to Finland in their fairly recent past. This means that they have either not attended Finnish primary school at all, or have done so for a period of a couple of years only. It may be that they have not previously studied English at all, or, althoug they may already have studied English to some extent, their language proficiency in Finnish is yet so elementary that attempting to study English as an A1-language would present too great a challenge at this point, since English is studied through Finnish. The pupils with immigrant backgrounds are normally slightly older than their peers in the same grade. Normally the age difference varies between 1-2 years and is due to the time spent in a preparatory class to study the Finnish school system and the language.

The sizes of the B1-English study groups vary, but are normally between 3 and 10. Even though the groups are fairly small, they are very heterogeneous. Some pupils have been able to attend school uninterruptedly before moving to Finland, whereas others have hardly had any schooling or it has been interrupted for a shorter or longer period of time. Some pupils may already be bi- or multilingual, whereas others have not had much experience in learning languages. An important factor is also that some pupils come from countries where the school system and the way of studying resembles the Finnish system quite closely, while others find the new system very different from what they are used to. These pupils often find it challenging to understand what the teacher expects of them or how they are expected to learn. Also the exercise types that are used in the textbooks or during the lessons are often unfamiliar and take time getting used to. Many are also used to the unquestioned authority of the teacher and expect him/her to provide the one right answer to every question. These pupils often find it difficult to believe that they can express their own views and opinions as answers to the teacher’s questions, or in their writing. All these factors amount to the observation that trusting atmosphere, encouragement and positive feedback are especially essential for successful learning in these groups.

6.3. The course book

To choose a course book for B1- English is somewhat problematic because there are no course books written specifically for the beginning learners of English in grades 7-9. The course books available are either meant for children in the primary school, or for adults who wish to learn the language after their formal education either for their own enjoyment or for career purposes. In the first case, the topics and themes are usually too childish for teenagers, the characters in the books are too young, and the overall appearance is too childlike. The course books that are intended for adult learners, in their turn, often concentrate on vocabulary that is related to jobs and careers. The topics in the texts are also often work-related, or deal with other aspects of adult life, such as marriage, wining and dining, or retirement. Needless to say, the characters presented in these course books are adults.

The course book that I have analyzed in this study belongs to the latter category. It is the last part of a series of three course books called *Steps into English 1-3*, and has been written by Liisa Huhtala-Halme, Nanna Qvist, and Jim Thompson in 2008. The fact that it has been written for adults does not come across too strongly in the overall appearance of the book. The themes are, in general, suitable for 14-17-year-olds as well, and the vocabulary is not too disturbingly related to adult life. It is true that there are quite many texts related to work, holidays, and traveling, but these contain vocabulary that are also useful for the pupils in question. Additionally, it is good to remember that all the material in the book need not be included in the course. There is also plenty of good extra material: picture- and word cards, scrambled sentences, guided dialogues, etc., Pictures are especially useful for pupils whose native language is not the same as the language of instruction, i.e. Finnish, which is also the other language used in the course book besides English.

6.4. Overall arrangement of the course book

The course book in question is the last one in the series of three books and is called *Steps 3* by L. Huhtala-Halme, N. Qvist, and J. Thompson. It is used in the 9th grade and was chosen for the analysis for this particular reason. The National Core Curriculum's assessment criteria for the grade of 8, i.e. the grade 'good', which implies that the goals set for teaching are met, describes pupils' skills at the end of the 9th grade, and therefore offers a standard point of comparison for the contents of the course book.

The book consists of ten 'steps', i.e. chapters, which all contain several quite short texts, e.g. five in the first 'step', and four in the second, and so on. Each text is followed by exercises which are related to it. One of the texts is usually the 'main' one, and the last text is marked as more extensive reading. It is usually longer than others and not followed by any exercises. The same course book contains both texts and exercises, unlike most of foreign language teaching series for secondary schools, which normally have a textbook and a separate exercise book for each level.

A vocabulary list is given at the end of each chapter, and it includes also possible new words that appear in the exercises. The words are in the same order as they appear in the course of the chapter, which makes it easier e.g. to find them in the said list, or to mark the words that should be memorized. After every three 'steps' there is a section for revision, which includes tables of grammatical structures and exercises related to them, as well as vocabulary exercises. All of these 'Stop and think'- sections are eight pages long. A relatively large section (92 of 292 pages) at the end of the course book consists of a mini-grammar, a list of useful phrases, and two alphabetical vocabulary lists. All in all, the overall appearance of the book is quite inviting with abundance of photographs, drawings, and overall use of color.

6.5. Analysis of the writing activities

The classes that I have formed for the purpose of analyzing the writing tasks in *Steps 3* are a combination of the different classifications included in the four teaching agendas by Kern, Hyland, Harmer, and Hedge, the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), and the Finnish National Core Curriculum for basic education (NCC). I feel that these classes include those exercise types that best describe general purpose English teaching and the goals that are set for it, as well as the core concepts of a literacy-based curriculum. The different classes are presented below, followed by a more detailed explanation of the nature of these classes.

I WORD / SENTENCE LEVEL

    (1) TRANSCRIPTION WRITING
        Copying
        Dictation
        Phonetic symbols

    (2) REINFORCEMENT WRITING
        Grammar
        Vocabulary
        Content

II PARAGRAPH / TEXT LEVEL

    (1) CONTROLLED COMPOSITION
    (2) GUIDED COMPOSITION
    (3) CREATIVE WRITING

III TRANSLATION

- - - - - - - - - - - - - - - -

IV GENRE

    (1) genres mentioned in CEFR and NCC
    (2) TRANSFORMATIONS

V REAL-LIFE COMMUNICATION

VI HABIT-BUILDING WRITING

The classification bears a resemblance to Harmer’s in the sense that the six main categories are not parts of a whole, i.e. hierarchically they are not on the same level. Categories I, II, and III form a whole which perhaps could best be described as ‘traditional workbook exercises‘. Category I contains exercises where the required response is on word- or sentence level. The subgroup ‘Transcription writing’ comes from Kern, but it was not included in his actual classification of writing activities, which only included writing as design. Kern mentioned copying and dictation, and I added phonetic symbols to the list. This involves exercises where you have to write down an English word or sentence which has been written using phonetic symbols.

The idea of the second subgroup, ’Reinforcement writing’, comes from Harmer. This category includes different types of exercises, such as gap-fils, or rewriting sentences or parts of them, where learners practice grammatical structures or vocabulary which they have previously been taught. In this instance the length of writing is not as long as in Harmer’s, where the length varies from one sentence to an entire composition. The difference between reinforcement writing of vocabulary and copying needs to be clarified. Reinforcement writing takes place in an exercise which requires producing the word or selecting the right alternative and writing it down, whereas copying occurs in an exercise where you regroup or rearrange words under given headings, for example.

The final subgroup in category I, ‘Content’, includes exercises where the learner responds to questions based on the text s/he has first read, or questions that involve him/her personally. The response required is usually on sentence level, but occasionally also words or phrases suffice. This category also includes questions that learners create on basis of given answers, or missing responses in a dialogue they have to complete.

Category II contains exercises where the required length of writing is a paragraph or a whole text. Texts can be long or short, e.g. letters, notes, or essays. The first two subgroups come from Hyland’s class of *Language scaffolding*, which had four subgroups. My class of ‘Controlled composition’ has features from two of these subgroups: ’Model analysis and manipulation’ and ’Controlled composition based on models’. ‘Controlled composition’ provides the writer help with his/her writing in different ways, such as beginnings of sentences, features that can be combined or chosen from, a model for substituting information, etc. ’Guided composition’ refers to writing tasks where pupils are given information in the form of an interview, notes, a list of key words, pictures, or a list of questions, which their writing is based on. In ‘Creative writing’ only the topic is provided, and perhaps some helping questions which are not in target language.

Category III, ‘Translation’, is left as a class of its own because translation exercises can potentially be either on sentence, paragraph, or text level. Categories I-III are mutually exclusive, i.e. an exercise can be placed only in one category.

Categories IV, V, and VI are separate categories which each describe a different aspect of writing. I feel that they are categories which best describe the essence of sociocognitive literacy and the ideas of literacy-based curriculum, and for this reason it is also very interesting to see whether these types of exercises can be found in the course book. ‘Habit-building writing’ contributes to motivation and encourages learners to express their thoughts in a foreign language and experiment with language, all very valuable qualities. ‘Real-life communication’ and ‘Genres’ are core concepts of a literacy-based curriculum. Also ’Real-life communication’ contributes to motivation and gives a possibility to use language in those social and cultural contexts that it is being studied for. In this classification ‘Genre’ includes those types of texts which are typical for the level A1.3. of the assessment criteria, and which can be found in CEFR and/or NCC. ‘Genre’ also includes another subgroup, ‘Transformations’. It includes all exercises where a given text is transformed into a text of another genre, e.g. a shopping list is rewritten as a note to another person saying what s/he should buy, and what not. This could also be called ‘parallel writing’, and this term was used by at least two of the four authors: Hyland and Harmer.

The categories IV, V, and VI are not mutually exclusive, i.e. even though an exercise belongs to category V, it can also belong to category VI, for example. A good example of this would be a letter or a note written to another person in class. In addition to being real-life communication, it would also represent the genre of informal letter (or note). Provided that pupils would write these letters to each other e.g. once a week at the beginning of the lesson, it could also be classified as habit-building writing. Additionally an exercise could belong to one of the categories in the 'traditional workbook exercises', i.e. categories I - III. In this case the letter could be either in the subcategory (2) or (3) of category II, depending on the instructions the pupils were given at the beginning of the exercise.

The following is a summary which illustrates the origins of the different classes. Since 'Creative writing' and 'Translation' are terms which are used by several authors, the origins of these classes are not specified. Except for Hedge, all the sources for writing activities that were discussed in chapters 3 and 4 are represented.

TRANSCRIPTION WRITING • • • KERN

REINFORCEMENT WRITING • • • HARMER

CONTROLLED COMPOSITION • • • HYLAND

GUIDED COMPOSITION • • • HYLAND

CREATIVE WRITING

TRANSLATION

GENRE • • • The European Framework, The National Core Curriculum

TRANSFORMATIONS • • • KERN

REAL-LIFE COMMUNICATION • • • KERN

HABIT-BUILDING WRITING • • • HARMER

I started the analysis by listing all the exercises where writing was required. Because majority of the exercises consisted of two or more parts which belonged to different categories in my analysis I treated them as separate exercises. Therefore the total number of writing exercises in this analysis, which was 202, is greater than the total number of writing exercises marked in the course book. Also those listening exercises which required writing were included in the analysis, whereas those questionnaires which only required marking a suitable alternative were not.

Secondly, I categorized all exercises according to the first three categories, i.e. each exercise belonged either to one of the subcategories in ‘Transcription writing’, ‘Reinforcement writing’, one of the compositions, or ’Translation’. The classes of ‘Transcription writing’ and ‘Translation’ were quite straightforward, but ‘Reinforcement writing’ and the compositions required more consideration. In ‘Reinforcement writing’ the subcategory of ‘Content’ turned out to function as a kind of all-purpose category, which contained several different types of exercises, but a common nominator was that they all functioned on sentence level. Distinguishing between these sentences and those belonging to the groups of ‘Vocabulary’ and ‘Grammar’ which also functioned on sentence level often needed careful consideration. If a certain grammatical structure was practiced throughout the entire exercise, it was classified as belonging to ‘Grammar’. Similarly, if sentences systematically involved vocabulary which had shortly before been introduced in previous exercises, it was classified as belonging to ‘Vocabulary’. The remaining sentence-level exercises were placed in ‘Content’. Likewise, distinguishing between the three different types of compositions required strict guidelines.

After placing the exercises in their respective categories, I further categorized the exercises in the subcategories of ‘Transcription writing’ and ‘Reinforcement writing’ by describing their level of response and type of writing required. The findings of the analysis at this point were presented in the form of figures, percentages and various tables. The analysis of the three types of compositions, in its turn, was purely descriptive and it consisted of describing the criteria for each group, and the contents of the writing exercises in the form of instructions and titles.

Next, I went through all the exercises again to see what types of genres were present. Initially I included the genres that were mentioned in NCC and CEFR, and added the ones that I found in the exercises. Finally, I examined the writing exercises again in hope of finding real-life communication and habit-building writing exercises. Again, the findings were presented in a descriptive form and with the help of examples, as was done throughout this analysis.

All in all, the method used in this analysis was descriptive and a fair amount of examples were used to illustrate the discussion. Various tables and figures containing rough figures and percentages were also used to demonstrate the findings which will be presented next.

7. THE FINDINGS

In all the ten chapters of the course book the order of the exercises is more or less the same. The chapter begins with exercises that contain new vocabulary and/or others that contain a certain grammatical structure. As mentioned before, there are always several shorter texts in one chapter, and one or two of them are ‘main’ texts. Following the ‘main’ text there is always an exercise, where you have to find certain sentences or expressions in the text and write them down. The sentences and phrases are given in Finnish. Likewise, there are questions of the text in English for which the answers are more or less directly found in the text. Within each chapter the exercises form a pattern where different texts and exercises connected to them alternate with vocabulary- and grammar exercises. All chapters also end the same way. There is nearly always a translation exercise, a phonetic exercise, and a longer text, which is intended for extensive reading.

In addition to the ten chapters I have also included the three revision sections, which follow after chapters 3, 6, and 9, in my analysis. These sections contain mainly grammar- and vocabulary exercises, and some translations, since the goal for these sections seems to be the revision of grammatical structures included in the preceding three chapters, as well as the revision of said vocabulary. Additionally, I want to point out that many exercises, which are marked with numbers in the course book, have been broken down to two or sometimes three separate parts in the analysis because they belong to different exercise types. These parts are referred to as exercises throughout the analysis.

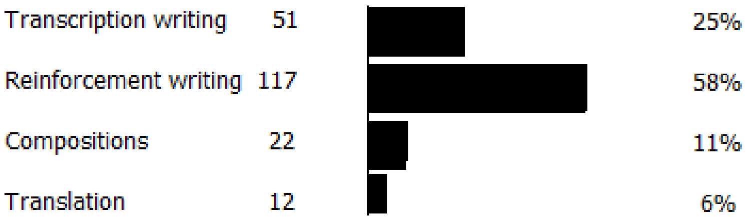
In this subchapter I will first consider the different categories of the writing exercises one by one, and then sum up the findings. I will describe the types of exercises that belong to each class in more detail and with the help of examples, and, if necessary, explain why these exercises belong to this particular class. Categories I - III are discussed as a group of their own, followed by categories IV, V, and VI separately.

7.1. Part 1: Transcription writing, Reinforcement writing, Compositions, and Translation

The first part of the analysis consists of three main categories: I Word/sentence level, II Paragraph/ text level, and III Translation. The four main groups that the exercises are divided into are Transcription writing, Reinforcement writing, different Compositions, and Translation.

The following two graphs illustrate the findings of the first half of the analysis. The first graph shows the distribution of exercises in the four main groups that are included in categories I - III. ’Compositions’ include the classes of ‘Controlled composition’, ‘Guided composition‘, and ’Creative writing’. The figure after each group is the number of exercises that belong to the category in question. On the right hand side are the percentages which show how many percent of all the exercises belong to each group.

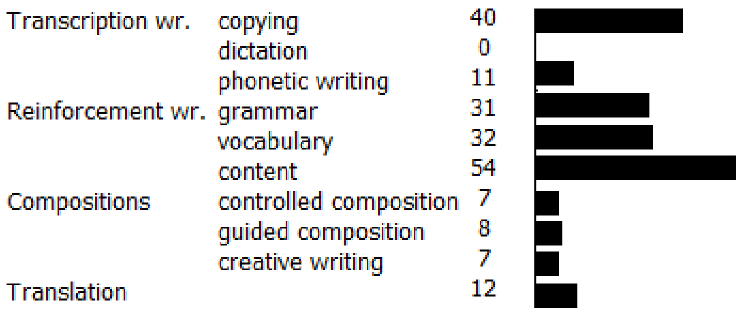
Figure 1   The distribution of exercises into the four main groups in categories I-III



total number of exercises: 202

The second graph shows the distribution of all the different types of writing exercises in *Steps 3* that are included in categories I - III. The figure after each type is the number of exercises of the type in question that the course book contains.

Figure 2 The number of exercises in all the different groups included in categories I- III



total number of exercises: 202

7.1.1. Transcription writing

This class consists of three subcategories: **copying, dictation**, and **phonetic writing**. **Copying** takes place on both word-, phrase-, and sentence level. Most frequently copying occured on sentence level - 18 exercises out of 40 -, followed by word -level: 17 exercises. The least frequent copying was on phrase-level: 5 exercises. The average number of copying exercises in each chapter was nearly four. All exercises where copying occured either on **phrase-** or **sentence level**, were those of the type "read the preceding text and find these expressions / sentences in it". Example 1 comes from *chapter 3, exercise 13* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:49):

Example 1

How do you ask in English?

1. Milloin muutitte tänne?

____

2. Kuinka löysitte tämän talon?

____

3. Miksi halusitte muuttaa maalle?

____

How do you say it in English?

4. pienen tien päässä ____________________________
5. talon nimi ____________________________
6. paljon työtä ____________________________
7. rakkautta ensi silmäyksellä ____________________________
8. Terryn ajatus ____________________________
9. niihin tottuu ____________________________

Answer the questions.

10. What did Terry and Julia do before they moved in?
____

11. What are they going to do?
____

12. Why did they move from London to the countryside?
____

This exercise illustrates also a feature that is typical for this book: one single exercise consists of different parts that in themselves represent different types of exercises. The first two parts are classified as copying exercises but on different levels: The first on sentence level and the second on phrase level. The third part is classified as 'Content' and belongs to the class of **'Reinforcement writing'**, which will be discussed later in more detail.

Exercises involving copying on **word level** were basically all of the same type. Words are given either in a box or as a list and they are to be categorized under different headings or placed into a sentence. In some exercises there are questions, which learners answer by choosing one or more words from the said box or list. Often words relate to different themes, such as moods, adjectives describing different characteristics, temperature, modern conveniences, or countable / uncountable /plural nouns. Examples 2 and 3, this time from *chapter 4, exercise 17*, and *chapter 5, exercise 13* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:74, 87):

Example 2

Do I have to buy everything?

I can borrow ____________________________________
I can rent ____________________________________
I can make ____________________________________
I can grow ____________________________________
I can recycle ____________________________________

baby things
clothes tools
garden tools food
sports equipment
things to read
kitchen things

In the case of the following example, the previous exercise 12 provided a list of different occupations the learners can refer to.

Example 3

Mitä arvelet eri ihmisten töistä? Kerro oma mielipiteesi.
Keskustele parisi kanssa.

Who has an interesting job? A teacher, ____________________________
boring job? ____
a stressful job? ____
etc.

There were no findings of **Dictation**-type exercises in this course book. Initially my intention was to include some of the listening exercises that included writing as dictation because in them the level of response was on word level and the words to be picked out were present in the (aural) text. After closer examination I gave up this idea, however, because there was not a single exercise where all the questions would have been only on word level.

Phonetic writing was represented in every chapter, and in one of the three revision sections, by one exercise in each, which made the total 11. These exercises were all of the following type:

Example 4

What's the word?

	English	**Finnish**
1. /wudn/	________________	_________________
2. /ri'si:t/	________________	_________________
3. /jel/	________________	_________________
4. /mi'steik/	________________	_________________

All in all, there were 51 exercises in this book that fell into the category of Transcription writing. Since the total amount of exercises was 202, Transcription exercises made up **25%** of all the exercises in *Steps 3.* Table 5 offers a summary of Transcription writing exercises.

Table 5 Transcription writing exercises

Copying on word level	17
Place under headings	
Answer questions	
on phrase level	5
Find in the text	
on sentence level	18
Find in the text	
Dictation	0
Phonetic writing	11
Write in English and in Finnish	
total	51

7.1.2. Reinforcement writing

Like ‘Transcription writing’**, ‘**Reinforcement writing’ consists of three different subcategories. They are **grammar**, **vocabulary**, and **content**. This is also the biggest class with its 117 exercises, which is **58%** of all the exercises in *Steps* 3. All exercises in this class have the purpose of reinforcing the structures and vocabulary that has been learnt or is being learnt, i.e. they aid learners in committing new material into the memory.

Grammar reinforcement turned out not to be a very substantial part of the exercises according to this analysis. The amount of exercises was 31, out of which 10 were placed in the revision sections. This means that in average there were less than two grammar exercises per chapter, which is not much, considering that there are close to 20 exercises in each chapter. Grammar teaching seemed to be concentrated into the revision sections which contained also several tables of various grammatical structures not present in the chapters themselves. The types of grammar exercises varied from ‘find all past tense verb forms in the text’ (exercise type (1) in the list) to writing complete sentences independently with the help of one model sentence (exercise type (5) in the list). I found six different task types which are presented in Table 6.

Table 6 Different types of grammar exercises

	number of exercises
(1) find in the text	2
(2) choose items and form a sentence	7
(3) complete a sentence	8
(4) parallel sentences	3
(5) write a sentence	8
(6) mixed features	3
	total 31

‘Parallel sentences’ involve rewriting given sentences by changing the tense, or changing positive sentences into negative ones. ‘Mixed features’ contains the exercises where one or more of the previous task types are combined. Example 5 is of an exercise where task types (3) and (5) are mixed. It is from *chapter 3, exercise 15* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:50):

Example 5

Kuvittele, minkälaista Terryn ja Julian kodissa on. Kirjoita. Kerro eri huoneista ja niiden väreistä.

The owners of the house are Terry and Julia.
The door of the house is blue.___________________________
Talon ovi on sininen.

The ceiling of ____

Kylpyhuoneen katto

____

Olohuoneen seinät

____

____

____

The first sentence functions as a model. After that, the second sentence requires completion, while the third sentence has to be written independently, but with the help of a Finnish translation. The last few empty lines indicate that the learner should create additional sentences independently. Without the first three sentences this exercise could even have been classified as ‘guided composition’.

Another example of ‘mixed features’ involves the writing of full sentences with the help of the contents of a previous text and model sentences. Also ’parallel sentences’ are involved, since the tenses used in the text are systematically being replaced. Also, the latter part of the exercise is not based on the text, but belongs to exercise type (5). *Chapter 8, exercise 12* (Huhtanen-Halme et al. 2008: 141):

Example 6

Illalla Ben mietti päiväänsä. Mitä kaikkea oli tapahtunut koulussa ja kotona? Kirjoita lauseita pluskvamperfektissä.

In the evening Ben thought about his day. What had happened at home and at school?

He had played football in the school yard.________________________

____

____

And you? What had you done by ten o’clock last night?

I had brushed my teeth.____

____

____

The number of **vocabulary** reinforcement exercises and grammar exercises did not differ much. There were 32 exercises related to the learning of vocabulary. Most of them were to do with single words, and only six involved writing sentences. I found four types of vocabulary tasks presented in Table 7.

Table 7 Different types of vocabulary exercises

	number of exercises
(1) produce a single word for a group	2
(2) produce a single word	24
(3) produce a sentence, word(s) given in English	5
(4) produce a sentence, word(s) given in Finnish	1
total	32

An example of the first task type would be names of occupations that are arranged into different groups according to a common feature and learners' task is to write down more occupations that fit in those groups. Task types (3) and (4) involve the writing of complete sentences with the help of words that are provided earlier in the same or previous exercise, or in a place which is mentioned in the instructions for the exercise. Also model sentences are provided at the beginning of these exercises. Examples of this type would be *exercises 1* and *2* in *chapter 4* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:64-65) where pictures and words of different kinds of materials are first provided, followed by a box containing names of different items in English. Using these two lists learners are expected to create sentences in the following way:

Example 7

Mistä aineesta ne on valmistettu?
Kerro parillesi.

My travel card is made of plastic.	*Matkakorttini on tehty muovista.*
My gloves are made of leather.	*Käsineeni on tehty nahasta.*

____
____

Example 8

Tutki tavaroita kotonasi. Mitä ainetta ne ovat?

My curtains are made of cotton.	*Ikkunaverhoni on tehty puuvillasta.*

____
etc.

The difference between this exercise and that of 'Copying' on vocabulary level is that here learners choose words and use them to form sentences, whereas in 'Copying' they only rearrange single words or use them to fill in a gap in a sentence. Likewise, the difference between this exercise and that of 'Copying' on sentence level is that the latter refers to the copying of an entire sentence which is already written in the text whereas here the learner is creating the sentence.

Nearly all vocabulary reinforcement exercises belonged to the second group, 'produce a single word'. Most of the exercises in this biggest group merely required the learners to write down single, unconnected words without any real context other than that of the theme they were related to. This seems to me a rather poor and unimaginative way to revise words. My point here is illustrated best by providing samples of these exercises from *chapters 9* and *4* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008: 162, 67-68):

Example 9

Mitä muita vesimaisemaan liittyviä sanoja muistat englanniksi?

archipelago	*saaristo*	____
headland	*niemi*	____
mainland	*manner*	____

Example 10

Mitä vaatteita muistat englanniksi? Muistele päästä varpaisiin.

____
____
____

The latter exercise was followed by additional pictures of clothing and their names in English, which are presumably supposed to be new to the learners. The following exercise in the book continued the same theme and was slightly more interesting:

Example 11

Mikä on mielivaatteesi?
What is your favourite piece of clothing? _______________________________
What colour is it? _______________________________
What is it made of? _______________________________
Who was it made by? _______________________________
etc.

What makes this exercise more interesting than the other two above is the fact that it is more personal and involves the learner to a greater extent. These types of exercises occur frequently in this course book series, and I would imagine that the intention is to increase the learners' personal involvement in their English studies. All in all, the book contains quite a lot of vocabulary, but unfortunately it seems to me that after introducing it to the learners nothing much is done with it in terms of real communication or truly meaningful exercises.

Also the repertoire of different vocabulary exercises - as well as exercises in general- is much narrower than would be expected on the basis of different course book series that are used in A-level English courses. In addition to the two vocabulary exercise types that were illustrated above -answering questions, and different types of lists- there are only two additional types: completing sentences, and writing complete sentences, which *exercises 1* and *2* were examples of. Many common exercise types, such as gap-fils, are missing altogether.

The last, and biggest, subgroup of Reinforcement writing was **'Content'. 46%** of reinforcement writing exercises belonged to this subgroup. As explained earlier in chapter 7.2. The classification of the writing tasks, the response required for exercises in this subgroup is on sentence level. Either the learner is expected to form a question when an answer is provided, or to give an answer when a question is provided. Mostly the questions related to the texts presented in the chapters, or to the learner's personal likes and dislikes, etc. There were also exercises where a dialogue needed to be completed, either by initiating or giving responses as in *chapter 1, exercise 4*, (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:15):

Example 12

Täydennä puuttuvat puheenvuorot.

Good evening. ____

How are you? ____

Tea? ____

etc.

____________________________ Here you are.

____________________________ Never mind.

____________________________ No thanks.

etc.

Also some of the listening exercises in the course book are classified as 'content' exercises. These are those listening exercises which require a written response. In this case, instead of a whole sentence, the response required can also consist of single words or expressions which the learner has to pick out from the text he/she hears. The listening exercises amounted to 15 out of 54 'Content' exercises. According to the instructions, learners can answer the listening comprehension exercises either in English or in Finnish, but here they are considered from the point of answering in English. *Chapter 1, excercise 5* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:15)

Example 13

Kuuntele mistä Oliver, Ann ja Ruth keskustelevat.

Weekend plans

It is a sunny Friday afternoon. Oliver and his sister Ruth meet Oliver's neighbour in the street.

Kuuntele vielä kerran. Mitä kohteliaita sanontoja kuulet puhujien käyttävän?

____

____

____

One interesting group of exercises belonging to ‘Content’ consists of writing something that I would call ‘creative sentences’. These are exercises where learners are required to create complete sentences without model sentences or given material other than a single word and/ or instruction. There were 11 of these exercises and six of them followed the phonetic writing exercises. All these were the same type as this one in *Chapter 6, exercise 19* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:107-108):

Example 14

> **Valitse tehtävästä ainakin kolme sanaa. Kirjoita lause tai lauseita, joissa käytät sanoja.**
>
> ____
>
> ____

The remaining five exercises were also connected to the exercises preceding them in the same way as in the previous example. For instance, after creating interview questions for given answers there is the following ‘creative sentence’ exercise (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:33):

Example 15

> **Mitä muuta haluaisit tietää Jimistä? Keksi kolme omaa kysymystä.**
>
> ____
>
> ____

This type of sentence differs from the sentences in the other subgroups of ‘Grammar’ and ‘Vocabulary‘. There is no specific grammatical structure that is expected to be used, and there is not much given in terms of structures, phrases, or vocabulary to facilitate the creating of sentences. In *exercises 1* and *2* of *step 4* (presented on page 60), which belong under the heading of ‘Vocabulary‘**,** English words for both nouns and materials were given, as well as two model sentences, which gave the structure for the sentences that learners needed to write.

In summary, the different types and numbers of exercises to be found in the group ‘Content’ are presented in Table 8.

Table 8 Different types of ‘Content’ exercises

	number of exercises
(1) Ask questions	4
(2) Answer questions	16
(3) Complete/ correct sentence/ dialogue	8
(4) Answer listening comprehension questions	15
(5) Create single sentences independently	11
	total 54

7.1.3. Levels of response

The following table shows what levels of response are required for the different activity types, which have been discussed so far, and which make up category I.

Table 9 Levels of response in the different activity types of ‘Transcription writing’ and ‘Reinforcement writing’

I WORD / SENTENCE LEVEL

	WORD	PART OF SENTENCE	SENTENCE
(1) TRANSCRIPTION WRITING			
Copying	✓	✓	✓
Dictation			
Phonetic symbols	✓		
(2) REINFORCEMENT WRITING			
Grammar		✓	✓
Vocabulary	✓		✓
Content		✓	✓

As the table shows, ‘copying’ is the only subgroup where all three levels of response; word, part of sentence, and sentence, are present. In ‘phonetic writing’ only word level is in use, and in other three remaining subgroups, which make up the class of ‘Reinforcement writing’, there are two levels of use in each.

Exercises that require sentence level response are present in four subgroups, which are ‘Copying’, ‘Grammar’, ‘Vocabulary’, and ‘Content’. In the case of ‘Copying’ the sentences are found in the texts that the course book contains, and no creative effort is required. In the case of ‘Grammar’ and ‘Vocabulary’ most of the exercises that involve producing sentences offer a substantial amount of help in the form of word lists and model sentences. In many occasions only parts of the sentence- usually the end- needs to be produced. In fact, only eight grammar exercises and six vocabulary exercises require the writing of complete sentences, and even then there are model sentences to facilitate the task. This means that the only group where learners are expected to create complete sentences more or less independently to any greater extent is ‘Content’. If we leave out the listening exercises where the level of response may vary, and the learner can choose the language of his/her response, we are left with 39 exercises. In all of them the level of response is a sentence, although in type (3) ‘Complete/ correct sentence/dialogue’ the beginning of a complex sentence may be provided, or there may be a sentence which needs to be rewritten on the basis of given facts etc. Most of the complete sentences that learners need to write are answers to questions concerning the contents of the texts, or ‘creative sentences’ where the choice is free, provided that you include one or more words from the word list in the previous exercise.

My overall impression of this course book is that there is a lot of writing which has to do with asking and especially answering questions. In addition to the questions which are related to the contents of the texts, many are questions which presumably aim at involving learners on personal level and perhaps giving them tools to communicate with others on this level. However, the same impression that I had earlier concerning the vocabulary remains here regarding sentences. Asking and answering the questions does not seem to lead anywhere in terms of real communication or meaningful, personal expression of thought.

7.1.4. Compositions and creative writing

Compositions and creative writing formed only **11%** of all the exercises in this course book. There were 22 exercises, which were divided evenly into three subgroups. ‘Controlled compositions’ amounted to 7, ‘Guided compositions’ to 8, and ‘Creative writing’ to 7 exercises. Before describing the exercises in any more detail, it has to be said that these ‘compositions’ are quite modest and probably nothing like the compositions Hyland had in mind when he used these terms. Nevertheless, I decided to use them to refer to those exercises that involve producing sentences that are connected together in order to form a paragraph or a longer text. In the case of these exercises the ‘compositions’ are more likely to consist of a single paragraph with a few sentences, although there is no reason why they could not be turned into longer texts with the help of teacher instruction.

As I described earlier, a **controlled composition** is a piece of writing for which learners receive extensive help in various forms. In the 7 exercises of this type found in this material, the most frequent form of help was ‘beginnings of sentences’ (2 exercises), as well as ‘vocabulary and model sentences’ (2 exercises). Next came ‘picture and model sentences‘, a word list, and a model text, which were used as help in one exercise each. The topics or titles for the writing exercises are listed below. The topics which were provided in the exercises by the authors of the course book are listed here without inverted commas, whereas those topics where inverted commas are used are my attempts to describe the Finnish instructions in a title form. The exercises can be found on pages 13, 19, 102, 143, 152-153, 157, and 162 (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008).

This is me
“I wish…”
“*My way to school”*
“*I: before and now”*
“*My outdoor hobbies”*
“*Weather in Australia”*
“*Things I would take to the summer cottage”*

This is me and *“I wish…”* are both exercises where the beginnings of all sentences are given, in the first case there are 12, but in the second only 3 sentences. Also translations for the beginnings are given at the end of each line. *“My way to school”* is an exercise for practicing giving directions, and five different prepositions are given, as well as the beginning of the first sentence. *”I: before and now”* provides a model text of three sentences. *“My outdoor hobbies” and “Things I would take to the summer cottage”* both provide some words and two model sentences. In the first case the words are different outdoor activities and adjectives, and in the second case a list of items.

"Weather in Australia" has a map of the continent with different weather symbols and temperatures. Also the different directions and vocabulary for temperatures, as well as two model sentences are given.

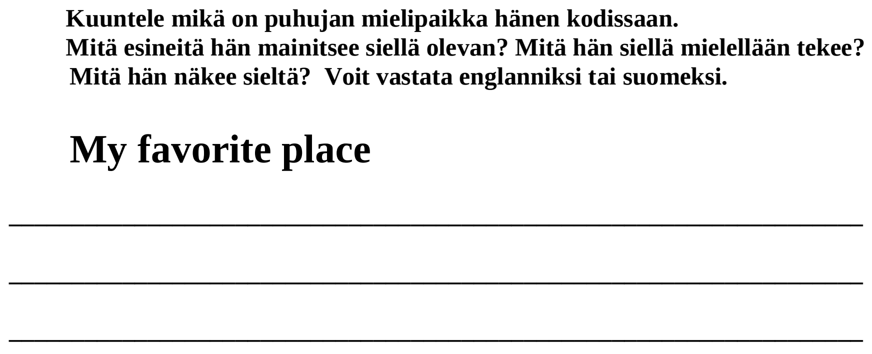
Other than the first two exercises where the beginnings were given, the length of the composition was not limited. However, there were a certain amount of empty lines, which might give an indication of the maximum length of the desired production for the learner. Of course there is nothing to stop the teacher from expanding the composition into something more extensive, and giving the instruction to write the composition down into a notebook or on a separate sheet of paper.

The difference between 'Controlled composition' and '**Guided composition'** is not always easy to bear in mind when classifying the exercises. The best guideline is that in 'Guided composition' there is always information in one form or another of which the learners are to write about. In 'Controlled composition' help is provided to facilitate the writing of sentences in forms of vocabulary, model sentences, etc., whereas in 'Guided composition' learners are expected to interpret the information given and tell about it in their own words.

In the eight exercises of 'Guided composition' there were five different sources of information: texts, pictures, words, 'pictures and sentence beginnings', and sentence beginnings. Three listening exercises were also included in this subgroup , and they fell under the 'text' category, the text being oral information on which the written assignment was based. The topics of these exercises were *My favorite place*
Ella is back home
Holiday homes,

and they can be found on pages 47,125, and 161 (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008). In all of these compositions topics were provided for in the exercise, and instructions for the contents were given in Finnish in the form of statements and/ or questions, as in *chapter 3 exercise 10* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:47):

Example 16



Kuuntele mikä on puhujan mielipaikka hänen kodissaan.
Mitä esineitä hän mainitsee siellä olevan? Mitä hän siellä mielellään tekee?
Mitä hän näkee sieltä? Voit vastata englanniksi tai suomeksi.

My favorite place

The remaining five topics were *"What do you know about Matthew and Larry?"*
"What is it like elsewhere?"
"A person in a picture"
"What I look like"
"My cottage"

The topics are again placed inside inverted commas because I have formulated them in order to describe the intended contents. These exercises can be found on pages 18, 52, 137, and 161 (ibid.). In *“What do you know about Matthew and Larry?”* the information is provided in the preceding text, which is a dialogue between the two. Learners are asked to write three things about Matthew and Larry each. *“What is it like elsewhere?”* provides a list of six place names around the world and asks learners to tell what they think about different places. It is not said that they have to use these particular places in their writing. As the name indicates, *“A person in a picture”* asks you to choose one person in a given picture and tell about him/her and his/her life. *“What I look like”* asks the learner to describe him/herself so that he/she will be recognized by a stranger. Both these exercises provide short beginnings of sentences, in the first “He/She is…” “He /She has…” “He/She is wearing…”, and in the second the same in the first person singular. Finally, *“My cottage”* tells the learner to choose from three pictures the best place for spending a holiday and give reasons for the choice.

In the class of **‘Creative writing’** only the topic for writing is given, alongside with some questions in Finnish in order to give ideas for where to start. The topics are once again formulated to correspond to the given instructions. The exercises can be found on pages 48,74,88,90,130, 183, and 193 (ibid).

“My favorite place at home”
“I as a shopper”
“A profession”
“Firefighter’s job”
“A film I saw”
“Places to see in Finland”
“My local area before and now”

There are some additional clues or hints to get the writing started, such as the beginning of the first sentence: “My favourite place is…”, expressions “I always” and “I never” on the side, or the mentioning of some exercises completed earlier which learners might find helpful, but they are not enough to cause the exercises to be classified as ’Controlled compositions’. Some of the writing required is quite short: in *“Firefighter’s job”* the instruction is to write only two sentences, and in *“My local area…”* the headings “In the past” and “Now” are placed in such a way that it encourages the writing of single sentences under both headings instead of a coherent text. There are only two exercises which , given the space reserved for writing and the style of the Finnish questions, give an impression of a slightly longer writing assignment, namely *“A film I saw”* and *“Places to see in Finland*”. Again, as mentioned earlier in connection with the compositions, there is nothing that would stop the teacher or the learner from expanding these writing assignments further.

7.1.5. Translation

All translation exercises were translations from Finnish into English. As mentioned before, there is always one such exercise towards the end of each chapter. Together with the two exercises in the revision sections, this made the total of 12 translation exercises in *Steps 3*, which was about **6%** of all the exercises.

Each exercise consisted of two to six sentences to be translated into English. Interestingly, from the point of writing compositions, the sentences were usually linked together and formed a kind of short story, which *chapter 2, exercise 20* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:37) is a good example of:

Example 17

> **How do you say it in English?**
> Miten Ada oppi uimaan? Hänen isoäitinsä opetti häntä mökillä vuosi sitten.
> Oliko se vaikeaa? Ei, mutta hän ei halunnut uida, jos vesi oli liian kylmää.
> Syksyllä hän osasi uida hyvin uima-altaassa.

It could be said that the translation exercises in this course book function on paragraph level. When translating these sentences pupils need to consider this in their use of articles, pronouns, etc., and this could present an opportunity for the teacher to raise their consciousness in relation to these factors also for the future reference of more creative writing exercises.

7.1.6. Summary of Part I

In the beginning of this chapter I presented two graphs which illustrate the findings of the analysis as far as the distribution of exercises into the four main groups. Directly or indirectly these graphs lead to three important points that I would like to discuss further, and which in my opinion sum up the findings of this analysis so far. The first is the part that vocabulary- and grammar exercises play in this course book, the second is the amount and type of writing of complete sentences as preparation for meaningful communication and longer texts, and the third is the opportunities and assistance the exercises in this book provide for creating coherent paragraphs or texts.

As the first graph shows, exercises in the group of **‘Reinforcement writing’** represented an overwhelming majority of all the exercises where writing is involved in *Steps 3*, **58%** in all. This seems to imply that the most important task signed to writing activities in this course book is the reinforcing of vocabulary and grammatical structures. Grammar and vocabulary made up over half of the ‘Reinforcement writing’ exercises, and the remaining 46% belonged to ’Content’. However, vocabulary and grammar play a big role even in this category. As was mentioned before, the most frequent activities in this subgroup are related to questions. All in all, 35 exercises out of the total of 54 had to do with either asking or answering questions. Here again a significant part is played by answering questions that have to do with the contents of the texts in the chapters, and which, in their turn, emphasize the structures and vocabulary that is being rehearsed. The emphasis of vocabulary and grammatical structures is also further reinforced by ‘**Transcription writing’**, which was the second largest group with **25%**, or one quarter, of all the exercises. Nearly half of ‘copying’ and all of ‘phonetic writing’ consisted of word-level exercises, and also those copying exercises which function on phrase- and sentence levels involve new words and grammatical structures which are considered important and which are being reinforced by copying them.

The following table attempts to illustrate this emphasis by providing an overall picture of the extent of vocabulary- and grammar -related exercises in the first two main groups of the analysis. The black areas are those which consist of vocabulary- or grammar exercises entirely and the gray areas show where these elements are also present, but only to a degree.

Table 10 Vocabulary- and grammar related exercises in 'Transcription writing' and 'Reinforcement writing'

	TRANSCRIPTION WRITING			REINFORCEMENT WRITING		
	copying		phonetic writing	grammar	vocabulary	content
vocabulary		■	■		■	▨
grammar	▨			■		▨

As we can see, all subcategories in 'Transcription writing' and 'Reinforcement writing' are connected to the learning and teaching of vocabulary and/ or grammar. Together these categories make up **83%** of all exercises in the course book, leaving **17%** for exercises the function of which is directed to something else, such as expressing oneself in a foreign language.

The second point I want to discuss further has to do with the exercises that involve sentence level response. The following table illustrates the distribution of exercises in the categories of 'Transcription -' and 'Reinforcement writing' that function on sentence level on one hand, and the exercises that actually require the writing of whole sentences, on the other. The first category refers to all those exercises where full sentences are involved, be it either a gap-fil, an uncompleted sentence, the copying of a sentence, or a 'creative' sentence. The second category lists all the exercises where the learner actually needs to write down a complete sentence with or without assistance.

Table 11 The writing of sentences in 'Transcription writing' and 'Reinforcement writing'

	Exercises that function on sentence level:	Exercises that require writing on sentence level:
Copied:	**18**	**18**
Assisted:	**30**	**11**
Grammar	19	7
Vocabulary	8	1
Content	3	3
Composed:	**53**	**53**
Grammar	11	11
Vocabulary	6	6
Content	36	36
Total	**101**	**82**

‘Assisted’ sentences refer here to those exercises where different types of help is provided for the creating of the sentences, and ‘Composed’ sentences are those which learners create without assistance. All ‘copied’ sentences belong to the category of ‘Transcription writing’. The listening exercises are not included in this table because they do not require sentence level answers. Also, in addition to those eight grammar exercises which involve the creating of complete sentences (discussed in the section of ‘Reinforcement writing‘), I have here added also the three exercises in the group of ‘mixed features’ since they also include parts of this type.

The total amount of exercises in ‘Transcription writing’ and ‘Reinforcement writing’ categories is 168. The amount of exercises that operate on sentence level is 101, which makes it **60%** of all the exercises. The writing of complete sentences on behalf of the learner is required in 82 exercises, which is **49%** of all the exercises in these two categories. The difference in the figures is due to the assisted exercises, where the exercises consist of complete sentences but in the majority of the exercises the learner’s task is either to fill in or complete the provided sentences.

These percentages indicate that learners do quite a lot of writing on sentence level. This would seem to be a good thing with the thought of developing the abilities for writing paragraphs and other types of longer texts. However, these exercises share a few factors which may work against this assumption. First of all, the exercises are in many cases quite short. It has to be remembered that what I have counted as separate exercises are often only parts of what constitutes one exercise in the course book. As I mentioned before, exercises in this course book tend to consist of two or more parts which include different types of exercises, such as ‘find in the text’, ‘answer questions in Finnish’, ‘answer questions in English’ and finally even questions asking the learner‘s opinion. This means that these parts usually consist of only a few sentences each, and in some instances only one sentence. Therefore, the number of exercises involving sentence writing may be somewhat misleading when the actual amount of writing is compared with word - and phrase level writing, where exercises tend to be longer.

The question of length is connected to the second factor, which is a certain lack of continuity and a feeling of disconnectedness that these short ‘bits’ of exercise create. Each chapter -or ‘step’- in the book follows basically the same plan of contents but it fails to create a sense of direction as to where the chapter is going with all its ‘bits’ and pieces. The sentences that learners write seem to be separate from each other. For example, there is no activity or exercise at the end of the chapter which would give the learner an opportunity to use his/her newly learnt vocabulary, phrases, and grammatical structures creatively for his/her communicative needs in order to see what he/she is now able to do with the language, unless the translation exercise which is present at the end of most of the chapters is considered as one.

The third factor is to do with the types of sentences that these exercises require. I mentioned earlier that there are actually not very many exercises where learners would get an opportunity to write full sentences of their own choice. Of those **53** exercises where learners are able to write sentences freely, 14 exercises are those which ask questions of the course book texts. Since the answers are to be found in the texts, and finding these answers is the aim of these exercises, they cannot be said to be creative in the true sense of the word. This leaves us with **39** exercises; 11 dealing with grammar, 6 with vocabulary, and 22 with content. The grammar exercises each involve a certain grammatical structure which has been practiced earlier, whereas the vocabulary- and content exercises consist of asking (4) and answering (2) questions, completing dialogues or complex sentences (5), creating sentences based on exercise instructions (5), or creating sentences around words chosen from a list of words, which I earlier referred to as ’creative sentences’ (12). Disregarding the asking of questions, where the desired sentence is fairly well predetermined, we are left with **35** exercises where learners have an opportunity to use their imagination and creativity when writing complete sentences. This is **21%** of all the exercises in ‘Transcription- ‘and ‘Reinforcement writing’ categories. This percentage sounds quite promising, but we have to remember the restricting factors that I discussed before: these exercises are short and the sentences the learners write are for the most part disconnected and have no meaningful context.

The third, and last, point that I want to discuss is the opportunities and assistance this book provides for the learners in creating coherent paragraphs or texts. In the previous paragraph I discussed the role of complete sentences in this course book. In this discussion I would like to consider the working with and writing of complete sentences to be preparation for the writing of single paragraphs and longer texts. As was seen earlier, there are a fair amount of exercises where learners are required to write complete sentences. The problem here is that they are mostly single sentences and not pieces of any meaningful puzzle which could later on be connected under a common context to form meaningful communication or coherent texts. There are no exercises which would lead the learner through the process of first forming sentences that belong together and then using these sentences to build paragraphs and, later, entire texts. The only forms of instruction for building a coherent paragraph are given in the form of few controlled compositions and translation exercises. In controlled compositions there are only two exercises where the structure of the paragraph can be seen: in the first exercise all the beginnings of the sentences are given, and in the second a model text of three sentences is provided for support. The translation exercises are coherent paragraphs of two to six sentences and provide the learner with perhaps the best structured practice in this course book in creating coherent texts. In the other paragraph- or text- level exercises no help is provided for the structure or the use of cohesive features. In ‘Guided compositions’ and ‘Creative writing’ only help with the content or merely the topic are given. In other words, although the sheer amount of exercises involving creative writing on sentence- paragraph-, and text level may seem adequate, the nature and arrangement of the exercises are such that they offer little practice in or support for writing.

7.2. Part 2: Genres, Real-life communication, and Habit-building writing

In this second part I examine the course book from the point of view of the different genres present in the exercises that require writing, the possible existence of exercises that function as real-life communication, and exercises that could be used as habit-building writing. At this point it may be useful to mention that the exercises discussed here are the same exercises that were analyzed in Part 1. As was mentioned earlier, the discussion in Part 2 takes into consideration all the writing exercises of the course book for all the three classes: genres, real-life communication, and habit-building writing, separately. This was not the case in Part 1, where the categories were mutually exclusive.

7.2.1. Genres

Firstly, the aim of this subchapter is to determine if those genres which are mentioned in The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) and The Finnish National Core Curriculum (NCC) for the level A1.3. are to be found in this course book. This particular level describes the achievement level for a foreign language that is being studied as a B1-language, i.e. a language in the Finnish comprehensive school that is started on the 7th grade and studied at the rate of two lessons per week. The genres that are mentioned in CEFR in the connection of the level A1.3. are *questionnaires*, *letters*, *notes*, *e-mail*, and *project work*, and the only genre mentioned in NCC in the connection with B1-level languages is *postcards*. Also the possible existence of other genres in *Steps into English 3* will be examined.

Secondly, in this analysis 'Genres' include also the subgroup of 'Transformations', which would include exercises where a given text representing one genre is being transformed into a text of another genre. Here again an exercise can belong to both subgroups (1) CEFR and NCC genres, and (2) 'Transformations'. In subgroup (2) the genre is determined by the text that has to be written by the learner, e.g. if an exercise presents two lists of items, one for what to buy and the other for what is not needed, and the learner's task is to write a note for the person who is going grocery shopping, the genre of that exercise will be 'a note' and not 'a list'.

It has to be said that surprisingly few genres are represented in the writing exercises in this course book, also in comparison with lower secondary school A-level language course books. Only one genre out of those mentioned in either CEF or NCC was found and that was a ***questionnaire*** in *chapter 7, exercise 14* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008: 128) with the title of *Questionnaire about films.* This exercise consists of five questions which require a written answer, and three questions where the learner has to tick a box for the most appropriate answer. This was not the only questionnaire in the course book, there were also five other exercises, but this was the only one which required writing answers. All the other ones simply involved choosing the alternative that best applies to the learner by ticking a box in question. As it follows, these exercises were not included in writing exercises, and therefore in this analysis, at all.

Additionally, I found two other genres which are not included in those two documents that were discussed earlier: an ***interview*** in *chapter 2, exercise 15,* and a ***list*** in *chapter 4, exercise 8* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008: 33, 68). In *exercise 15* the learner has to write all the questions (10 of them) for an interview where all the answers are provided. The interview is based on the preceding text and the learner has to read the text first in order to be able to write the questions. *Exercise 8,* in its turn, asks the learner where and for how long s/he would like to travel and then s/he has to write a list of all the clothes that are needed for this trip.

All the genres that have been mentioned so far are the kinds which can be associated with 'real-world' tasks. Learners are expected to need their foreign language writing skills to fill in questionnaires, to send notes, postcards, letters, and e-mail, and possibly to work in international projects at some point in their future careers. One genre which is not used for any particular task in the ‘real world’ and which can be associated particularly with classroom learning, or academic writing in general, is that of ***composition***. In foreign language classrooms where general purpose language is studied, compositions are used primarily for practicing the use of the foreign language in general, and for practicing the writing of complete, coherent sentences, and paragraphs in order to express the writer’s intended meanings. I find that those exercises which in the first part of the analysis belonged to class II Paragraph/ Text level, and included ‘Controlled compositions’, ’Guided compositions’, and ’Creative writing’, represent this genre of *composition.* As mentioned earlier in the discussion of class II, many of these ’compositions’ are very modest, consisting of no more than a couple of sentences that proceed each other, and can thus not be considered ’real’ compositions in the sense of the word that we usually associate with this term. On closer examination of these compositions, I found four, slightly different types. The differences relate to the intentions or purposes of the written paragraphs, and I will refer to them as *telling, reporting, describing,* and *comparing.*

Most of the compositions belong to the group of ***telling***, since there is no other way of describing their contents than by saying that the learner is asked to tell what he/she knows or thinks of something, e.g. firefighter’s job, the characters in the previous text, or different countries or places of his/ her choosing, etc. 14 of 22 compositions exercises belong to this group. ***Reporting*** involves writing based on information that is first heard in the form of a listening exercise. There are 3 exercises of this type and they are discussed in more detail in connection with ’Transformations’. ***Describing*** is characteristic for 4 exercises, and ***comparing*** for 2 exercises out of 22. The total of these three types is 23, and not 22, which is the real amount of compositions exercises, because one exercise is included in two groups, since it involves both comparing and describing. In those four exercises the learner is asked to describe the weather in Australia based on the information provided by a weather map, the learner’s favorite place at home, the learner’s appearance so that he/she will be recognized by a stranger at the station, and the learner’s personality before and now. The last exercise is also classified as ‘comparing’, and the other exercise in the same class involves comparing the learner’s place of residence before and now.

Steps into English 3 does not have any exercises that would include transformations, unless we take into account the three listening exercises where the learners first hear someone telling what happened to them, and then write the story down in their own words, guided by questions in Finnish. All these exercises were originally placed in the class of ‘Guided composition’, and in the genre analysis they belonged to the class of *reporting.* The transformation here could be described so that the text type of *telling* is transformed into *reporting* of something that someone has told. In the first exercise the learner has to report on what a person tells about his/her favorite place in his/her home, in the second exercise he/she has to report on Ella’s visit to Finland, and in the last exercise the subject of the reporting are two people’s stories about their favorite holiday resorts and the activities there. Example 18 is from *chapter 9, exercise 11* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008: 161):

Example 18

Missä ympäristössä nämä puhujat viihtyvät vapaa-aikanaan?
Mitä he siellä tekevät? Mikä heitä siellä erityisesti viehättää?

Holiday homes

1. ____
____
____

2. ____
____
____

It should be noted, however, that the first text is not in writing, and since the original purpose for transformations- exercise was to practice transforming a text of one genre into a text in another genre, and paying particular attention to the structural and syntactic changes in the process, it can be said that the original focus is compromised here.

To sum up this section, Table 12 provides a summary of the different genres found in *Steps 3*:

Table 12 Genres found in *Steps 3*

	Number of exercises
Genres in CEF:	
Questionnaires	**1**
Letters	**-**
Notes	**-**
E-mail	**-**
Project work	**-**
Genres in NCC:	
Postcards	**-**
Other genres	
Interviews	**1**
Lists	**1**
Compositions	**22**
Telling	14
Reporting	3
Describing	4
Comparing	2
Transformations:	
Telling → Reporting	**3**

7.2.2. Real-life communication

For an exercise to belong to this subgroup, it would have to involve another person or persons in addition to the learner, and a real-life communicative purpose for the act of writing either in the classroom or in the ‘real world’. In other words, the learner creates an authentic piece of writing in order to communicate something, and also expects some kind of response. First of all, it has to be said that there are very few exercises that fit this description in this course book even to a degree. The only other ‘real-life’ persons that are mentioned in the exercise instructions are the teacher, fellow students and ‘a partner’, which refers to another student in the class. The teacher is only referred to in contexts such as ‘show your sentences to the teacher’ and ‘a partner‘ most often appears in the instructions for oral exercises which are not a part of this analysis. However, there are two, possibly three, exercises which could be seen as including real-life communication, in a broad sense of the term. The first exercise is placed after an exercise where the learner tells about him/ herself by completing 12 sentences. This exercise is found in *chapter 1, exercise 2* (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008: 13).

Example 19

> **Vertaa vastauksiasi parisi kanssa. Kuinka monessa asiassa olette samanlaisia?**
> **Mitä vielä haluaisit tietää opiskelijatovereistasi? Tee kolme kysymystä.**
>
> ____
> ____
> ____

This could be counted as a real-life communication exercise on the condition that it involves real persons, i.e. the fellow students in the same class, and that the questions are ‘real’ in the sense that the writer has chosen them as something he/ she finds important. For it to classify as a real communication writing exercise, though, the questions would have to be presented to chosen receivers in written form and not orally, and the answers should also be given in writing. The most probable procedure with this exercise is, however, that after writing down the questions the students take turns either in pairs or groups asking the questions and answering them orally. It is also possible that the questions are only written down but never asked or answered.

The second exercise can be seen as real-life communication for the same reasons as the first one, but with the exception that it does not really involve writing other than that of numbers. This is the reason why it is not included in the Part 1 analysis. The questions, though, are ones that involve personal details and other information concerning numbers that can be of real interest to other class members, such as a person’s shoe size or height, or the age of their house, etc. The same difficulty as with the first exercise remains, though, since these questions are meant to be asked and answered orally, as the instruction indicates (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008: 19):

Example 20

Muistatko numerot? Vastaa kysymyksiin. Kysele sitten pariltasi.

My life in numbers

What’s your postal code? ________________
What’s your shoe size? ________________
How tall are you? ________________

The last exercise that includes elements of real communication is the exercise presented in example 7, where learners tell real-life information about possessions that they are carrying at the time. While this information may be at least partly interesting to the other students, the delivery of the information is again more than likely to be conveyed in oral form. There is also no real reason or necessity for passing this information, and this is another profound reason for the failure to see this exercise, as well as the exercise in example 20, as a valid example of real-life communication. All in all, I would say that there are really no exercises in this course book which can truly fulfill the criteria for ‘Real-life communication’.

7.2.3. Habit-building writing

Habit-building writing was characterized by Harmer (2004:63) as an activity that helps students gain a habit of writing spontaneously in a foreign language. In order to achieve this, habit-building writing should be practiced regularly and several different forms of exercises, including also group - and pair exercises, were discussed earlier in chapter 3. The concepts of ‘real communication’ and ‘habit-building writing’ are somewhat overlapping, since habit-building writing includes such activity types as *‘writing to each other’* and *‘collaborative writing’*. As was mentioned earlier in the discussion of ‘Real-life communication’, exercises involving working in pairs are limited to oral pair work in this course book. Likewise, there are no group work exercises. This excludes the two subgroups just mentioned and leaves us with the third subgroup of *instant writing* activities. Examples listed for this are using music or pictures as stimuli, writing sentences according to instructions, writing poems assisted, or playing games that involve writing. None of these types of exercises are presented in *Steps 3*, except for one exercise where the learner is asked to choose one person from a picture and tell about him/her (Huhtala-Halme et al. 2008:136):

Example 21

Valitse joku kuvien henkilöistä. ja kirjoita hänestä ja hänen elämästään, esimerkiksi perheestä, työstä ja harrastuksista.

____
____
____

The list of different types of exercises that Harmer (2004: 64-73) provides is by no means exhaustive; exercises using other stimuli and other means can be included to achieve the same effect: writing spontaneously for a short period of time.

The lack of these types of exercises in the course book does not mean that the materials, such as pictures, word lists, or other parts of the existing exercises could not be used as stimuli for habit-building writing by the teacher. The whole concept of habit-building writing is such that, even if the authors wanted to support this type of writing, it would not be necessary to include instructions or space for it in the course book itself. Rather, the place for instructions could be the teacher's file or a supply of extra material. *Steps into English-* series includes a good supply of extra material, including picture- and word cards as well as scrambled sentences and pictures on transparencies, which could well be used to promote habit-building writing.

7.2.4. Summary of Part II

The results of analysis in Part 2 in terms of finding exercises containing different genres, real-life communication, or habit-building writing proved to be quite meagre. Only one genre of those six which were originally listed in the two documents that are the basis of foreign language instruction in Finland was found in this course book. It has to be born in mind, however, that this course book was originally designed for needs other than those of the comprehensive school, and thus the official guidelines need not apply. Nevertheless, it is strange that even such basic genres as *notes, letters* or *postcards,* or even *e-mail,* which are relevant for learners of all ages and life-situations, are not included in any shape or form.

The classes of 'Real-life communication' and 'Habit-building writing' were not found in this course book in the true sense of these terms. Any communication between the students in the class is restricted to oral pair work, and there are no indications for contacts, either oral or written, to any other 'real' persons or institutions outside the classroom. Even the questionnaires are not authentic-looking and the questions asked are not 'real', and while they may in themselves be (or not be) interesting - and thus motivating - for the students, they would not be asked in any authentic questionnaire outside the classroom.

While it is probably true that it may be challenging to place habit-building writing exercises in a course book in a meaningful way, this type of writing could be promoted by simply including suggestions of topics with possible instructions at the end of each chapter or in a separate appendix at the end of the course book. This would not take up much space and the instructions being in the course book, instead of teacher's separate file, for example, would give the students an opportunity to practice their writing also independently outside the classroom if they were interested.

7.3. Recommended additional writing tasks

For a teacher to use *Steps into English 3* (along with parts 1 and 2) as a course book for compulsory education in Finland, some steps have to be taken in order to ensure that the skills mentioned in the National Core Curriculum and the Common European Framework of Reference will be acquired satisfactorily. These documents promote communicational skills and the ability to function in a multilingual environment. Especially in the case of a B-language, which is studied only for a period of three years, and especially in this case when the language in question is English, which plays a significant role as an international language, it is very important to introduce the learners to a variety of different genres that they are likely to come in contact with sooner or later. This goal is not met using this particular course book unless the teacher provides additional activities that represent such genres. At the very least those genres mentioned earlier should be included, but I would suggest also the introduction of others such as *ads, notices, timetables, menus, instructions,* samples of *poetry* or *song lyrics,* etc. This is not to say that the learners would have to practice the writing of all of the above-mentioned text types from start to finish. Instead, samples of these genres could be included as texts that the learners read and learner attention should be focused on the textual features that they contain. It is possible, of course, that the earlier parts, *Steps 1 and Steps 2,* include some of these genres, but it is likely that the style in all these three course books is quite similar, and on the basis of *Steps 3* it is safe to assume that the amount of genres introduced does not vary considerably.

The concepts of ‘real-life communication’ and ‘habit-building writing’ also go hand in hand with the goals of communicative language teaching. These concepts offer concrete and usable tools for encouraging and motivating students to write for both communication and for their own enjoyment. I believe that these exercises would also facilitate the task of writing compositions by helping the students to get rid of the anxiety that many feel when they have to create a text of their own. I have noticed that especially for migrant pupils it is for some reason difficult to trust their own choice or judgement in these situations. Of course it is possible that this is due to the lack of practice in this type of writing, or lack of linguistic skills, since they have only studied English for a short time, rather than the migrant background. In any case, I would recommend additional writing tasks that are based on the principles of real-life communication and habitual writing. The teacher could include a short *instant writing*- or *writing to each other* task e.g. at the beginning of lessons, say, once a week, or arrange *collaborative writing* tasks at appropriate times. These tasks need not be very time-consuming, especially after the pupils have become used to such activities. I think it would also be motivating to provide a special folder or file for these types of writing exercises so that the pupils could see what they have accomplished. In time this could develop into a kind of portfolio portraying the pupil’s progress through the lower secondary school years. In these writing activities the teacher could make full use of the already existing pictures and exercises that are available in the book and in the extra material, but I feel that it would also be of vital importance to include authentic written materials, which can be obtained e.g. with the help of the Internet.

The final suggestion is that the teacher should consider how to use the composition exercises that were discussed in the first part of the analysis. These exercises offer either too little support for the writing process (as in the group of ‘Creative writing‘), or are too narrow and too much in the exercise is provided for them to qualify as real compositions (as in the group of ‘Controlled writing’). They should be modified somehow so that they would suit their purposes better. The pupils should also be encouraged to white more extensively on the subjects. At the same time, it is to be noted that not any kinds of compositions are mentioned in the goals of B1-languages, and that at this stage of language learning they would have to be very modest.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper I set out to examine the writing exercises in the English course book that I myself have used in the teaching of beginning language English courses in a lower secondary school. I wanted to see what kind of writing the exercises in this book actually involve, and whether the exercise types are in accordance with the goals of the National Core Curriculum. The results would then indicate what areas of writing were neglected in using this course book, and what kinds of exercises should be added.

Because of the communicative and functional nature of the Finnish language curriculum, and because the focus of my analysis was on written exercises, I chose to approach literacy from the sociocultural perspective and introduce the literacy-based curriculum as basis for my analysis. The categories for the analysis were a synthesis of the genres mentioned in the National Core Curriculum and the European Framework of Reference, and some of the categories and characterizations of different writing activities in the teaching agendas for writing introduced by four authors who all approach writing from communicative and functional perspective.

The results of the analysis revealed that the majority of the course book writing exercises were related either to vocabulary, grammar, or the content of the texts in the course book and very few exercises gave the learner an opportunity to express him/herself freely in writing. Many of the exercises functioned on word level and a considerable amount of those exercises which functioned on sentence level were copying exercises related to the texts in the course book. All in all, the writing exercises turned out to mainly consist of series of more or less unrelated questions to which the learners write answers either on word -, phrase-, or sentence level.

The central elements of the sociocognitive view of literacy: real, meaningful communication in different social and cultural contexts, which are reflected in the teaching of different genres, were very weakly represented in this course book. It has to be said that, although I have used this book for teaching, the lack of different genres and meaningful communication, both in the writing exercises and in general, came as a surprise. Even though the communicative goals for English as a B1-language in the National Core Curriculum are for obvious reasons much more moderate than those for English as an A1-language, the textbook in question does not meet them in terms of written exercises. Very few genres were included in the writing exercises, and the state of affairs can be said to be the same also for the rest of the book, although other than the writing exercises were not included in this analysis. Furthermore, there were no exercises where the process of writing - also one of the corner stones of literacy-based curriculum - would be practiced in the form of transformational exercises or otherwise.

Using this book as the basis for teaching requires learners to do quite a lot of writing, since only few exercises are oral pair work and an overwhelming majority requires the use of a pencil. The quality of writing, however, is not one to meet the requirements of a literacy-based curriculum or even a truly communicative curriculum. It is true that especially for the beginning learners of a language it is beneficial to practice words, phrases, and even entire sentences by writing them down in order to memorize the vocabulary and its correct spelling, and possibly learn something of the syntax in the process. However, there is quite a lot of vocabulary, and some of it is not so relevant for the immediate needs of the learners. Also, the vocabulary exercises are not very varied in nature and do not engage the learners' imagination or creativity to any great extent, neither do they provide any logical stepping stone for more creative or extensive writing activities. The same dilemma is present also on sentence level, whether the focus is on grammar, vocabulary, or content since these exercises normally fail to provide a meaningful unit of related sentences. The total lack of transformational exercises as well as the nature of the compositions gives no support either for the teacher in introducing different genres or writing as a process, or for the pupils in creating different types of texts.

Also the fact that the pupils who use this course book are of migrant backgrounds emphasizes the importance of both model texts and meaningful writing activities. Depending on the distance between English and the language(s) already familiar to the learners, and their knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of different genres, it is especially important to introduce accepted ways of writing in English. Also, the pupils are usually quite concerned of the fact that their peers have already studied English, which they, with almost no exception, find an important language, much longer than they have. They often have explicit notions of what they need to learn and I feel that writing exercises which they perceived useful in the world outside the classroom would be especially motivating for them. Also the writing of traditional compositions, normally associated with classroom learning, would give the opportunity of autobiographical writing and the presenting of one’s opinions and views, which would increase motivation and much-needed self confidence in writing.

Since these elements discussed above are not present in the readily-provided material, it is the teacher’s responsibility to think of ways to fill the void. While the length of the writing exercises is moderate at this elementary (or, for some, intermediate) level of language learning, it is important to concentrate on experimenting a more varied presentation of genres than what is to be found in the course book and aiming to create real audiences for the writing activities, if not in real life, at least in the writers’ minds. I would also encourage the teachers to experiment in the field of habit-building writing and teacher involvement, e.g. by giving the pupils an opportunity to correspond with them.

Considered from the point of view of language research, the present analysis was very limited in its scope since it included only one course book used in the teaching of English as a B1-language. Analyzing the course books that are widely used in teaching English as an A1-language, which is the usual case in Finland, would provide important implications for the teaching of English in general in this country. Also the designing of communicative writing activities especially intended to promote the teaching of writing as a process, and presenting varied genres especially for the beginning and intermediate levels of language proficiency would help teachers to include more meaningful writing activities in their teaching. Furthermore, research involving migrant students’ foreign language learning and achievement would give much needed information for the teachers who teach these classes.

From the viewpoint of the analysis itself, I found the categories that I used to be well suited for the purpose. The categories of the first part: ‘Transcription writing‘, ‘Reinforcement writing’, different compositions, and ’Translation’, examine the exercises from a more traditional point of view, whereas the second part takes into account the core concepts of the literacy-based curriculum: genres, transformations, real-life communication, and habit-building writing, which are an essential part of a literacy-based curriculum and this paper. I feel convinced that these are the exercise types that should be introduced to the teaching of foreign languages at all levels of language teaching in order to give the learners motivation and tools to use their foreign language skills to function in a communicative, multicultural world; on pathways to better writing practices in foreign language teaching.

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Appendix 1 Classification of texts and authors by Street and Lefstein

Appendix 2 Proficiency level A1 in NCC. Limited communication in the most familiar situations. Level A1.3.