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Changing society – changing language learning and teaching practices?

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Abstract

Swift and unexpected changes have taken place in society over the past few decades: globalisation, increasing mobility, labour market changes and fast technological development have transformed society, making it multicultural, multilingual and multimodal. Education – and here above all language education – is at the centre of most societal activities and should be able to react to the changes quickly and flexibly. However, the changes in education are slow, and the views of the parties involved in the various levels of education as to the changes and their consequences do not always correspond. The purpose of this article is to outline the field of language education in the midst of the current societal changes through the conceptions and activities of three different actor levels: teacher educators, practising teachers, and student teachers (i.e. future teachers). The article draws from the results of two studies. The first is used to outline the different actors' conceptions of the on-going societal changes and their effects on language education. In the second study, we will take a closer look at the phenomena behind the findings presented in the first study. More specifically, the aim is to examine the media uses, conceptions and mindsets from the perspective of the future teachers.

1 Starting points

Language education is facing remarkable pressures for change; such factors as technological development and globalisation have strongly affected our use of language in terms of how, why and when. Technologisation alone has greatly changed the way in which our social networks are shaped and developed, and the way in which we study or work (see for instance, Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Kalantzis & Cope 2008a, 2008b; Gee 2003, 2004; Hargreaves, 2003; Jenkins, 2006; Kern, 2000; Pennycook, 2010). The conception of knowledge has simultaneously changed: an increasing number of people have access to information and knowledge, and particularly in the Western societies we are also relatively free to produce and share information. The interpretation by Lankshear and Knobel (2003) of two parallel but conflicting mindsets gives reason for reflection. In the world of mindset 1, people operate in a traditional way, and technology has primarily an instrumental value. It enables the use of new kinds of communication media and ensures that citizens have access to information, but the conceptions regarding the nature of knowledge and learning have remained largely unchanged. In this society products are still material, and society aims to educate citizens who have sufficient knowledge and skills to produce these products. The world thus appears rather similar to what it used to be; it is only slightly more technological. By contrast, mindset 2 of a post-industrial knowledge society differs, according to the authors, fundamentally from mindset 1. This new world is characterised by unpredictability and change. In addition to material products, the operation of societies is increasingly based on immaterial products, and their character and diversity are

difficult to predict. Economic success increasingly depends on one's ability to create, productise and sell different services, expertise, knowledge and skills. The entire society operates in a more networked and collaborative manner. Indeed, knowledge and expertise are not possessed only by individuals but ever increasingly by communities. The nature of knowledge is collective and shared, no longer stable, ad hoc and bound to institutions.

In a post-industrial knowledge society, technology does not only have instrumental value, but it affects above all people's activities with texts, language and other people (see also Kress, 2003). The operating culture is characterised by interaction, speed and multimodality. It is important to understand that people's participation in different multilingual and -cultural communities also shapes their identities and relationship to the surrounding world. This further changes and develops the way in which individuals interpret the world and participate in it in different languages and media (see e.g. Lankshear & Knobel, 2006; Kern, 2000). These kinds of practices related to communication and the use of languages should not remain too distant from language (including mother tongue) teaching at schools, and they should not be seen as separate and irrelevant from the point of view of learning and competence. Similar ideas have been presented by Scardamalia and Bereiter when they highlight the static attitude of schools to information and knowledge (see e.g. Scardamalia & Bereiter, 2006). They talk about 'knowledge of' and 'knowledge about' as two very different approaches to teaching and learning. They claim that the content offered at school is superficially 'nailed' to texts books, exams and curricula, which only seldom is constructed into authentic and meaningful knowledge for the pupil.

Extensive investments have been made in Finland in developing schools' information technology connections and teachers' IT skills. Unfortunately these investments have not had a sustainable impact on pedagogical thinking in schools. According to recent studies, particularly language and mathematics teachers utilise the various media in teaching only infrequently (see Kankaanranta & Puhakka, 2008; Kankaanranta & Ilomäki, 2009). The studies concerning language (including mother tongue) teachers also demonstrate that teachers have relatively little knowledge, in particular, of the social and multilingual uses of the various media (Luukka et al., 2008). One can assume this to be partly due to the fact that teachers simply have not seen the additional value of technology in their classrooms, nor have they experienced technology as an essential part of their teacher identity and pedagogical thinking. However, as the various media are an increasingly natural part of our lives (see for instance, Leppänen et al., 2011), we language teachers should at least begin to look for ways of bringing pupils' experiences of media use in their leisure, as well as their language use experiences, closer to the classroom. Our aim is to unravel practitioners' understanding of the societal changes taking place around us, and to explore how they reflect on their relationship to the changes and their ways of action in the midst of these.

3 Material and methods

3.1 Study 1

The objective of the first study was, on the one hand, to identify societal changes that presently affect language teaching and, on the other, to study how these changes are recognised in teacher education and in schools, how their existence is acknowledged, and how they are reacted to by

practitioners. Our aim was to stimulate discussion between the actors at the various levels of language education. The data were collected in March-April 2011 from language teacher educators, practising language teachers and student teachers in languages with an online questionnaire. As this was a pilot study, the number of respondents in each group was intentionally limited to 10–12 (33 in total), and all of them came from Central Finland.

The questionnaire was outlined to include three content sections: (1) awareness of the notion of changes to teaching and learning in general, (2) attitude to these recognised changes and ways of dealing with them in the workplace, and (3) main changes and their effects on existing practices in the classroom. In the first section, the respondents were asked what societal changes they thought were taking place and how these changes affect the future of language learning and teaching as well as teacher education. The second section included statements to which the respondents used a 5-point Likert scale for their replies. These statements were about whether teacher education and/or in-service training offered tools for coping with these changes. Some statements were attitudinal probes to the use and integration of technology in teaching and learning. In the third section, the respondents were asked to identify the most central on-going change and its impact on their own language learning and teaching practices. The questionnaires were largely similar for all three responder groups, but questions were naturally modified to accommodate for the context of each three groups. All three questionnaires were in Finnish and were created by using the Webropol online questionnaire tool. For the purposes of this article the questions and responses were translated by the authors.

The open-ended answers were analysed using content analysis, i.e. grouping the answers into thematic categories. The approach here is qualitative with the focus being on what themes come up in the responses and how the different groups weight them in their answers. Thus no quantitative comparisons between the groups were made. The sections with Likert scales were numerically processed. The numerical data were analysed using descriptive statistics, i.e. frequencies and percentages. Due to the small number of participants in each group, the groups were not statistically compared. The purpose of the analysis of this pilot sample was to uncover trends that could be further studied with larger groups of participants and therefore statistical significance was not sought.

3.2 Study 2

In the second, longitudinal study, we have observed the development of language students' pedagogical thinking in relation to the utilisation of ICT in language teaching. The research data have been collected since autumn semester 2009 in the 'Common European Framework of Reference for Languages and ELP' course organised by the University of Jyväskylä's Department of Languages. The course is attended yearly by dozens of students of foreign languages and Finnish, of whom 30 are presently participating in this study.

In the course, the students work on a concrete course plan for vocational education and examine how different perspectives (contents, objectives, assessment, learning environments) are concretised in the course plan. In their blogs the students simultaneously reflect on the things they may have realised while examining the plans from different perspectives. Student reflection

has also been supported through online discussions, in which the participants can exchange ideas as to the critical points in planning and take new initiatives regarding the teaching practices.

The online learning environment included in the course has been developed at the University of Jyväskylä since 2003. This learning environment has enabled us to develop the linear course design toward a more multilayered structure. The content of the online module consists of materials and assignments related to the pedagogical use of technology, assessment, and conceptions of language learning. The primary aim has been to find modes of study that would motivate students to think about the potential of new teaching models – but also to model good practices in multimodal pedagogy[i].

The data consist of course plans devised by these 30 students and of different assignments implemented in online learning environments (e.g. online discussions and blog entries). For the purposes of this article the responses were translated by the authors.

The aim of the study is to investigate the pedagogical designs that future teachers have created on this particular course. For this article, the following research questions are proposed:

1. Who has expertise in a language classroom? How is expertise manifested?

2. Do future teachers use technology in a classroom context? What purposes is technology used for?

3. What elements promote/hinder the pedagogical use of technology in language teaching?

The data have been analysed with the methods of qualitative content analysis in two phases. First, the data have been thematically categorised. Then, the themes emerging in the first phase have been studied against the research questions. The trends that apply to the whole data are reported in this article.

4 Changing society

This section presents the outcomes of the first study, grouped according to the content areas of the questionnaire: awareness, attitudes, and effects.

4.1 Awareness of changes

The results of the first content section in the questionnaire demonstrate that the actors at different levels perceive the changes, to some extent, in differing ways, each group naturally from their own perspectives. The answers did share some common features, but also brought out some interesting differences. These will be dealt in more detail below.

Multiculturalism and globalisation were changes that were highlighted as the most prominent ones in the responses of the teacher educators. It is curious here that even though multiculturalism is highlighted by most of the respondents in this group, multilingualism[ii] is not mentioned at all. Another theme that was brought up in the responses was an increasing social

inequality; in other words, the growing gap between the privileged and the underprivileged. It is again noteworthy that technological changes were almost completely ignored.

The practising teachers found that the most essential change was a growing social inequality and related changes in individuals' attitudes and values. Globalisation, internationality, technology and social media were also themes spotlighted in the answers. Some of the teachers also regarded the changes taking place in working life as a factor worth mentioning.

The future teachers emphasised the 'increasingly inhumane' social values and the changes in individual attitudes and values in their answers. Unlike the teacher educators and teachers, these student teachers frequently mentioned technological changes but multiculturalism only seldom. Consistent with previous studies (Luukka et al., 2008; Leppänen et al., 2011), we can also note that the changes associated with technology most closely touch young people. It is noteworthy that this was the only group that also regarded the changes as opportunities. In other words, the student teacher group had at least a partly positive attitude toward the changes, whereas the teacher educators and teachers often saw them in a negative light, almost as threats.

Thus it appears that all of the groups recognise similar changes in society but the weight that is given to each change varies between the groups. Teacher educators raise multiculturalism as a prominent change, teachers growing inequality, and student teachers the inhumane social values.

4.2 Attitude to changes

In the second section of the questionnaire, we focused on finding out how the respondents thought the identified social changes affect language education, as well as what their attitudes to the changes are.

One of the effects that the teacher educators highlighted was the danger that studying languages would no longer be valued and that the differences between 'good' and 'bad' schools would result in increasing differences in pupils' language competence levels. On the other hand, they thought that language teaching should be more holistic and that it, on the whole, is undergoing a phase of fundamental change. One should increasingly reflect on which languages to teach, to whom, at which educational levels, and how.

The ideas of the practising teachers seemed to be welling up – perhaps even naturally – from everyday activities. These teachers believed that, in parallel with the changes taking place in society, the use of technology should be increased in education and the focus of language teaching shifted toward communication and oral language competence. However, the teachers also shared the teacher educators' concern about students' declining interest in studying languages.

The future teachers' views differed rather clearly from both of the other groups' views. They thought that the most significant impact of societal change on teaching is manifested as growing requirements and heaviness of work. They also expressed their concern about pupils becoming more demanding along with the changes. Their ideas are clearly edged with a worry over their

own ability to meet the requirements of their future profession and with insecurity about the future.

The second section of the questionnaire also mapped the respondents' attitudes toward the consequences of the changes taking place in society. These results are presented in Figures 1, 2 and 3. Figure 1 represents the various actors' ideas of the role of language learning and their attitude toward migrants and multidisciplinary cooperation. Again the groups are not statistically compared. The percentages are meant to show tendencies in the responses of the different groups.
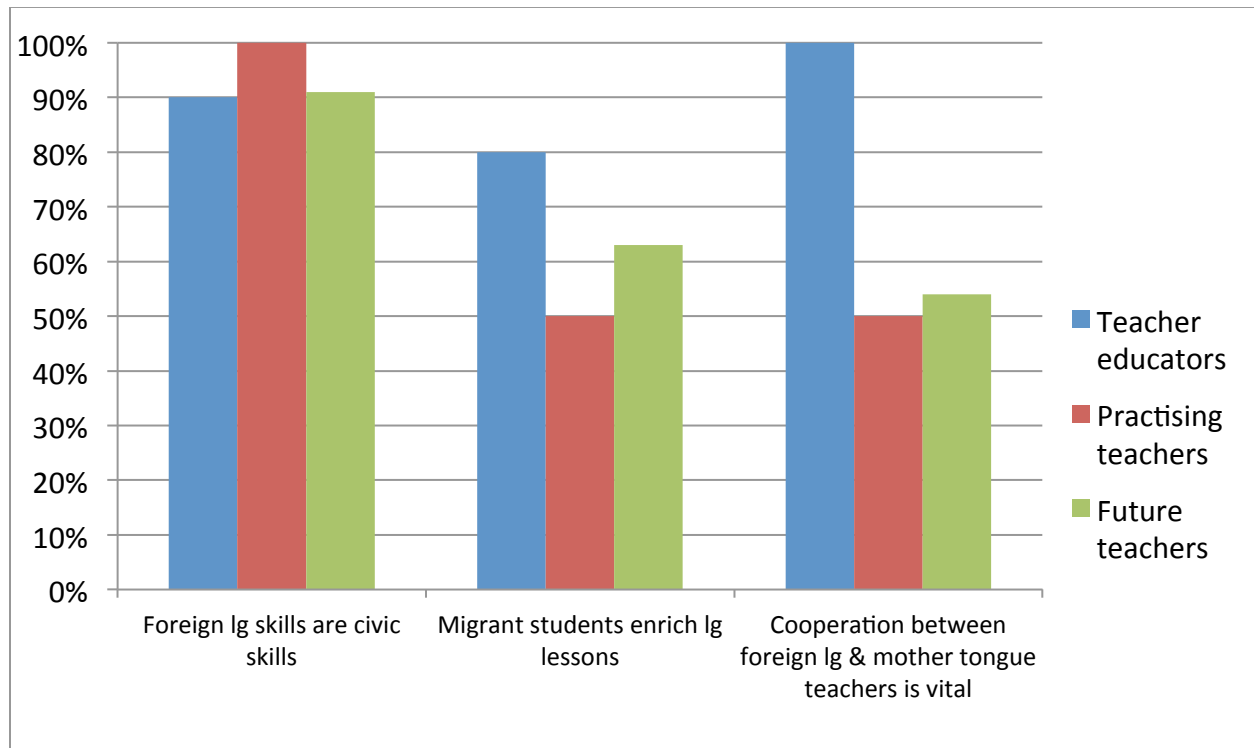

Figure 1. Respondents' ideas of the role of language learning and attitudes toward migrants and multidisciplinary cooperation

Figure 1 illustrates that all of the groups almost unanimously regarded foreign language skills as civic skills necessary for acting in society. The practising teachers held to this opinion even more often than the other groups. The attitudes toward migrant students in language lessons varied to some extent: the teacher educators' outlooks were the most positive and the practising teachers' the most negative. The teachers-to-be were placed between the two extremes. This may demonstrate how practical experience in teaching influences attitudes. As regards cooperation between mother tongue and foreign language teachers, the teacher educators' attitudes were unanimously positive. This attitude differed significantly from the outlook of the practising and future teachers: only approximately half of them regarded this kind of collaboration as indispensable. Does this mean that teacher education and school reality do not meet?

Figure 2 presents the distributions of statements concerning young people's language skills and use of technology.
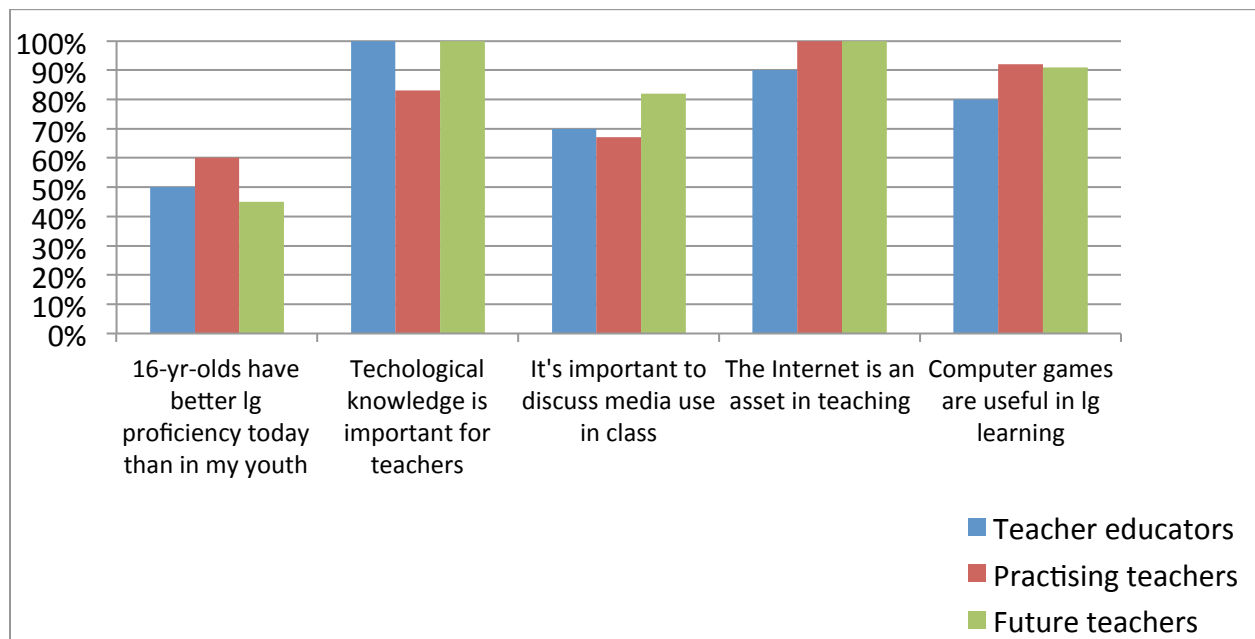

Figure 2.   Distributions of statements concerning young people's language skills and use of technology.

Sixty percent of the teachers felt that today's 16-year-olds demonstrate better language skills than the teachers themselves at the same age, whereas the teacher educators and future teachers slightly less often thought so. Based on the statements concerning technology and media, we can summarise that all of the groups had a positive attitude toward them. The teachers' attitudes were the most positive on most of the questions. The teachers agreed slightly less than the other two groups only on the statement *technological knowledge is important for teachers*. Discussing media use in class was more important for the future teachers than for the others. The teacher educators, on the other hand, were slightly less in favour of the pedagogical use of the Internet and computer games than the practising and future teachers (cf. also Luukka et al., 2008).

The respondents were also presented statements concerning the role of either teacher education or in-service education in preparing teachers, teacher educators and student teachers for the changes taking place in society. Here the questions were different for the different groups: the question for the student teachers included teacher education both in their subject studies and in pedagogical studies, and for the practising teachers and teacher educators the question concerned in-service training only. Only 30 % of the teacher educators and 36 % of teachers were of the opinion that in-service training gives tools to cope with the changes in society. This is alarming and can either indicate that the amount of in-service training, on the whole, is insufficient, or that the educational contents do not meet current needs.

Figure 3 presents the student teachers' opinion concerning the role of teacher education, both in their subject studies and in pedagogical studies, to equip them with tools to cope with societal changes.
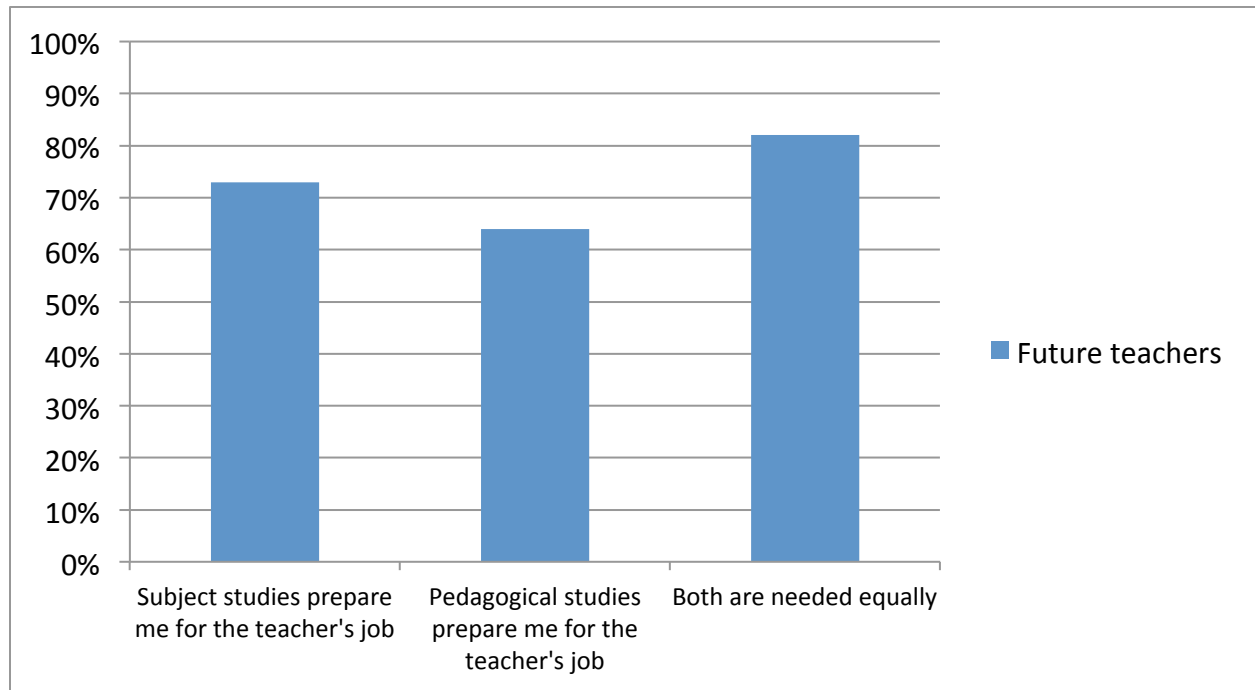

Figure 3. Student teachers' opinions on the role of teacher education in providing tools to cope with societal changes

From the perspective of organising teacher education, it was gratifying to note that the student teachers found both their subject studies and pedagogical studies useful for their future teaching profession, and the subject studies were even regarded as slightly more useful. As the sample was small and all of the respondents were students at the University of Jyväskylä, the result only tells about this unit's teaching arrangements and contents. However, the qualitative data collected from the same context (Jalkanen, 2010) strongly indicates that teacher education does not prepare future teachers to, for example, meet the challenges related to the pedagogical use of technology. The respondents may have found subject studies beneficial for their future teaching profession partly because of the fact that the University of Jyväskylä has persistently developed 'direct selection' to teacher education, which allows student teachers to orientate toward language teaching at an early stage in their studies.

5 The changing language learning landscape

So far we have been outlining the views of the various parties involved in language education regarding the on-going societal changes and transitions, as well as their relationship to these changes and conceptions of their impact on language education. In this section we will focus on exploring how the changes in society are manifested in teaching practices, and even in practical activities. First we will examine the various actors' own practices at a general level based on a

survey (study 1), and then concentrate more thoroughly on the future teachers' views regarding the designs for language teaching and learning (study 2).

5.1 Changing practices?

In light of our results, the teacher educators, practising teachers and future teachers all seem to be aware of the present societal changes, even though their conceptions differ to some extent – both from each other's and from the presuppositions we as researchers had. It is of primary importance to hear from the actors themselves which of the changes they find the most critical with regard to their own activities, instead of relying on changes that have generally been postulated, even in research (such as globalisation, technologisation, multiculturalism). Which changes do the respondents then regard as the most crucial, and how have these changes affected their own practices as well as the practices in language learning and teaching at a more general level?

The teacher educators and practising teachers highlighted in their answers the same two changes as the most crucial: growing inequality and technological changes. In the student teachers' answers, technological changes were also ranked first, but they considered the inhumane values gaining more ground in society to be a visible change as well.

When asked about their own teaching and learning practices, the teacher educators brought to the fore the following experiences: as a consequence of the changes, one is forced to continuously develop oneself and re-evaluate one's practices, as well as to react to the development at school and in society; this also seems to require the adoption of a new mindset, which is not quite easy.

The practising teachers found that the changes directly affect the languages taught at school, reducing the language offerings. On the other hand, they also thought that the utilisation of technology in education has increased. The student teachers highlighted as a changed practice the increased use of technology both in their personal lives and at school.

As the respondents were specifically asked about the potential effects of technological change on language education, interesting and clear differences could be observed between the three groups. The teacher educators found that no effects could be noticed, at least not yet. The practising teachers found that technological innovations are more commonly utilised in schools, but that this is not yet visible in teacher education. According to the student teachers' views, technology has certainly affected language learning, particularly through the everyday utilisation of technology, but it has had no impact at all on language teaching

5.2 Change in the making?

The results of the first part leave many questions unanswered. In order to get a more holistic view of the on-going changes and their impact on language teaching there is a need to look at the actual design work of future teachers. In this section we will present the results from our second study and aim at illustrating how the results from study 1 are translated into teaching activities. We realize that the plans do not translate into action until the actual teaching situation that is a complex and multidimensional event. In the light of our research questions (described in section

3.2) it is our aim here to investigate how future teachers plan their teaching activities and what kind of discussions take place around the design work.

5.2.1 Expertise

The data strongly echo the idea of the teacher as the gatekeeper of information (cf. Scardamalia & Bereiter 2006). In the course plans, this is manifested by the assignments given to the learners: the plans typically enable the teachers – and often also the learners – to stay in their own comfort zones. Expertise clearly appears in the data as a property of the teacher, even if 'enhancing professional competence' were listed among the objectives in the students' course plans.

Several student teachers share the concern that the use of ICT could weaken teachers' expert role. This concern is curious, because it is associated with one of the subareas of teachers' expertise in the new millennium. Australian researchers Kalantzis and Cope (2008a) have suggested that teachers' 'new' expertise consists of the ability to operate in different environments, which are characterised by such things as shared expertise. As illustrated by the following example, it seems to be an unpleasant idea for the future teachers to think that the learner would know the applied technology better than the teacher:

> "Many pupils or students can find the teacher's attempts to use the computer as one-sided and awkward – particularly if the pupils spend a lot of their free time using IT applications and clearly know more than the teacher." (K10-02-T1)

The data often explicitly refer to teaching. As shown by the following example, (future) teachers are often interested in technology and use it abundantly in their leisure; this has also been evidenced in other recent research (see for instance Luukka et al., 2008; Taalas, 2005). Nevertheless, the respondents do not feel that technology promotes language teaching in practice.

> "Even though I'm interested in IT and use it a lot, I've never felt it would significantly improve language teaching in actual teaching situations." (K10-02-T1)

This is in line with the results of the survey presented in the first section of this article: the change processes have affected language learning – but not teaching. This can result from the fact that the use of technology in the language classroom is teacher-driven, whereby the teacher provides the learners with access to a specific resource, irrespective of whether this is material or a tool. In reality, an approach like this does not promote the idea that the learners construct their ownership in relation to the activity and environment in question.

Particular attention has been paid to the following perspectives: in what kind of spaces do the learning activities take place and who carries out the action in a school context. In the following excerpt, the student teacher contrasts 'traditional teaching' with technology-oriented teaching. However, a closer examination of the example still reveals that it is not necessarily a question of media choice, but rather of 'who the agent is': in the student's example, the pupils get the opportunity to write on the blackboard, whereas the 'power points' mentioned by the student could be understood to refer to the teacher's activities.

"On the other hand, there's the danger that pupils tire of continuous technology-centred lessons. In my classes I've let pupils come and write answers on the blackboard; their feedback on this was that writing on the blackboard was real fun as an alternative to the constant 'power points'. I do think technology is a genuinely good thing in teaching, provided that you can find a balance between 'traditional teaching' and technology-oriented teaching." (K09-06-T1)

When the student teachers speak about the utilisation of technology, the teacher is often the agent. The learner is seldom assigned the role of an active information processor or producer. Rethinking the roles of teacher and learner is one prerequisite for innovative teaching and learning models (Jalkanen & Toomar, 2011; Lipponen & Kumpulainen, 2011).

5.2.2 Traditional mindsets

In the beginning of this article we described the two mindsets proposed by Lankshear and Knobel (2006). At the beginning of the course (described in section 3.2) the student teachers were asked to reflect on their own relationship to the utilisation of technology in language teaching, and to briefly tell about their own experiences as technology users. These were compared to the participants' later blog entries, online discussions and course plans in order to capture the participants' perceptions of technologies, language and language learning.

Taken into account that during their (university) studies students are being informed of the latest learning theories, it is interesting in the student teachers' responses that their mindsets in terms of language and learning seem to be very traditional. Even though some of the participants also try to accomplish innovative solutions in their course plans, their blog entries, online discussions and course plans still echo a concern as to whether the learners also will have access to 'traditional' teaching.

"My own relationship to IT as a pedagogical tool is quite positive. One must keep up with development and adapt to new challenges, be constantly well-informed. IT can be utilised in order to add different intriguing dimensions to teaching and learning, and to add variety to pedagogical practices. Of course, it should not outcompete 'traditional' teaching, but they should exist side by side." (K10-08-T1)

In other words, it seems that student teachers are lacking confidence as regards the sufficiency of the new pedagogical models. It occasionally even seems that they feel somehow guilty if they do something less traditional in class. One of the students reflects on the phenomenon as follows:

"Perhaps the most important thing I learned through the planning assignment was that I am not the only one with a slightly… if not suspicious, at least… contradictory attitude toward the potential uses of technology in education. One could commonly see in the assignments that the use of technology at some level is almost self-evident. Even if it had not been explicitly told in the data collection section that the pupils would use the Internet, what else could it have meant? In practice, it is unavoidable that at that stage the pupils rush to Google and Wikipedia. For many of us, technology is thus so useful and self-evident that we don't feel it's necessary to expressly say it aloud. That's why it is

extremely interesting that many of us shun the use of IT in the classroom. I don't know if this is due to reflections from our own school years or to the characteristics of educational philosophies; in any case, we really often heard speeches for the defence of 'traditional' methods." (S10-10-K2)

Data acquisition is a central way of action in almost all of the course plans, and the development of data acquisition skills and source criticism has commonly been mentioned as an objective in the plans as well as in the students' online discussions. However, it is worth noting that only in very few plans are these skills systematically developed. Data acquisition is carried out in the plans mainly in two ways: the learners are either assigned to independently search for information on the Internet, or they are to locate online pieces of information that the teacher has in advance sought for them, like in the following example:

> "One problem in the use of IT is exactly how and from where the material is chosen. The actual data collection can begin to wildly meander in class, if the teacher does not sufficiently clarify in advance what they want to show the students, for instance, on the Internet." (K10-07-T1)

The example distinctly elucidates that the focus is on contents, not on developing data acquisition skills (for similar results, see Taalas, 2005: 143–144). Of course, it is evident that goal-oriented planning is needed in order to achieve additional value, and predefined contents sometimes facilitate the management of teaching situations. The essential point is what kinds of objectives are determined for teaching and learning. The development of data acquisition skills also calls for systematic training. However, the kind of approach described above does not help students to control the information flow around them, nor does it prepare them for the knowledge society.

None of the respondents explicitly state what they mean by 'traditional', but based on the analysis of the course plans it can be argued that traditional in this context indicates the teaching methods students have acquired during their own studies.

5.2.3 Learning or entertainment?

Taalas (2005) has made a distinction between the *add-in* and *add-on* use of technology. The distinction can also be applied to examine the role of technology in this context. With *add-in use* the author refers to such use of technology in which the applied technology is integrated into the activities and goals, and is thus an integral part of the learning environment. However, it seems that the participants in our study mainly saw technology as something disconnected, extra, an *add-on*. Technology is often used as a diversion in teaching:

> "I would be very willing to use IT as an aid in my teaching. If only the classroom allowed me to do so, I think I would use IT to some extent in every lesson. A brief music video to break the ice, language drills, newspapers in the target language... I don't mean that all of the learners should have a personal computer under their noses, but one computer and video projector would do." (K10-17-T1)

The example also demonstrates that it is the teacher who manages the activities by presenting the learners contents from his/her computer via the beamer. It is also interesting how the gap between school and young people's modes of action in their leisure is concretised in the participants' perceptions. One participant's statement in the following extract shows that the direction of influence is clearly from school to leisure:

> "I think that IT provides greater depth in teaching and helps us get closer to today's adolescents – teenagers spend a lot of time on the computer anyway, so they might accidentally also have a look at the websites handled in class." (K10-17-T1)

In the data, the role of technology is twofold: it either does not benefit teaching at all or its utilisation automatically motivates learners. This is visible in some course plans, for example, so that the choice of technology has not been planned in relation to the activities and objectives; as a consequence, the idea of broadening the learning spaces is concretised by booking a computer classroom for work. The choice of medium commonly appears in the material so that when one returns to 'traditional teaching', a more traditional medium is also adopted – in the following extract, the blackboard:

> "I believe that in the future I will also utilise the net, the language studio and a video projector. Of course, more or less, I still want that the sentences in assignments are written on the blackboard, so that I can 'play' a little with coloured pieces of chalk while correcting the sentences. :) But at the moment I'm particularly interested in the SMART Board, which has been advertised on TV and newspapers. I've heard there are now such things in some classrooms at our teacher training school, and it would be really interesting to see and try one." (K10-03-T1)

SmartBoards are found to be fascinating and there is an interest to try them. This opportunity has been provided at least at the University of Jyväskylä's Teacher Training School. However, it is still problematic that this kind of user training that focuses only on one medium, in which the examples given have scarcely been planned from a pedagogical perspective, easily remains distant from real-life teaching situations and their objectives. The following example illustrates that, in addition to developing the users' technological skills, there is a distinct need to discuss, as a whole, the basic reasons for using technology:

> "I find technology a good servant but a bad master. Its use should not be opposed just for the fun of conservatism, but there are too many experiences of how teachers' insufficient IT skills only impair learning. It makes me wonder if technology occasionally is used just because a) that is simply what we are expected to do, or because b) it is so cool and gives us street cred. Things can be taught in different ways, but if something works well, why should we change it?" (K10-04-T1)

In a way the question is returned to the definition of objectives and teachers' expertise: what is the purpose of the activity, who is the active agent, and what kind of expertise are the different agents expected to have at the different stages of the activities?

5.2.4 From objectives to activities

One key result at this stage is that, in many cases, the objectives are not translated into activities at all. For example, the course plan may include the objective of promoting professional competence and lifelong learning, but the activities performed include mechanical vocabulary exercises and grammar tests. It is thought-provoking that even though the focus is on planning a course for vocational education, the connection of language proficiency and its development to vocational competence is chiefly manifested at the level of learning field-specific terminology.

Nearly all of the plans concentrated on activities within one's own subject. One student actually planned to integrate the language portfolio course with a basic IT course in order to free resources for the technical implementation of course projects. Cooperation between different subjects is highlighted in the discussions but not in the plans.

As the main benefits of technology-assisted learning, the data highlight flexibility in terms of time and place, and the authenticity of materials (from Internet sources). A closer analysis of the plans shows that the utilisation of the tools is seldom linked to the objectives and assessment. A new medium frequently replaces the former one, and the activities performed around the contents remain unchanged. Language learning outside of school is mentioned in some of the plans, but it is not systematically developed as an integral part of learning at school. Technology is commonly used for entertainment purposes, as is also stated by one of the participants:

> "I admit that I like to try and take technology into account when planning my courses, but I usually don't have a pedagogical reason for it – I do so to have some variety in the classes." (S10-14-K1)

We do not intend to claim that learning should not be entertaining. However, it is essential to pay attention to the fact that learning is not set as the objective of technology utilisation – which is, after all, typical of informal learning. The above student later notes:

> "I think teacher education offers no tools for teaching technology, but each student is personally responsible for it. Teacher education does present some ways of utilising IT (chiefly the Smart Board), but no time is reserved for learning how to use it. – – I find that it would be easier for teachers to enhance the utilisation of IT in their teaching if they received collegial support, as I might not be the only one whose IT skills are still very much in its infancy." (S10-14-K1)

The role of teacher education as a change agent is also highlighted in the other student teachers' comments.

5.2.5 Room for discussion

In the midst of all the development, it is good to remember that the focus is not always on inventing something new, but also on exploiting good old ideas as parts of a goal-oriented continuum. The following student comment is an example of this:

"All things considered, this online course discussion forum is a really great idea for sharing experiences, opinions and ideas. It is nice to hear the others' experiences of the topics and get good, innovative tips to be applied later. It's true that networking is also otherwise a 'must' today! ;)" (S10-15-K1)

In addition to instructed discussion assignments, the student teachers got carried away discussing the pedagogical use of technology and related challenges, and sharing good practices. There was clearly need for this kind of discussion, which made it genuinely meaningful for the participants. In this case the course and its online environment offered a natural forum for the discussion. One of the participants reflected on her own work in the course as follows:

"This kind of online discussion enables co-reflection and co-learning. The knowledge construction process will in any case be recorded for observation by us students and by the teacher." (S10-08-K1)

The student teachers clearly believe in change. However, it seems that there are insufficient resources for changing deeply-rooted teaching cultures and practices – which is actually no wonder, as the change would involve re-thinking the entire multi-level system. There is certainly need for structures that promote change in teacher education, and this research project is one concrete initiative to that end.

6 In conclusion

Based on the two studies presented in this article, it seems that the different parties involved in language education have different ideas of the changes taking place in society, as well as of their effects both on their own activities and on language education in general. The student teachers were the most optimistic about the opportunities provided by the changes – in other words, they also saw these changes as opportunities, not only as threats. On the other hand, they were concerned about their future work and the continuously growing demands. Currently practising teachers had the most concerns about changes that are clearly visible in their daily work, such as pupils' decreasing interest in language studies and everyday problems in class. As for the teacher educators, they were perhaps the most conscious of and concerned about the changes and their effects. They also reflected more on the practices and the implications of the changes for teacher education. Neither the teachers nor the teacher educators felt that in-service training meets the current needs, which is probably indicative of current developmental needs. It is alarming from the perspective of language teaching that multiculturalism was frequently mentioned in the participants' answers, but not multilingualism as its consequence. From the standpoint of ICT, it is interesting that the teacher educators admitted that knowledge of technology is an essential element of teacher's professional competence, but they also stated that technological changes are not yet visible in language education. This may result from the fact that there still are but few structures that support the pedagogical use of ICT in teacher education. Based on the results of our second study, it seems that the student teachers feel that they are insufficiently supported in teacher education in order to be empowered as designers and implementers of innovative pedagogical models. This study strongly highlights that the student teachers repeat the practices and mindsets they have acquired during their studies (for similar results, see for instance Jalkanen, 2010). Teacher's changing expertise is crystallised as the core of both of our studies.

Different strategies and initiatives have long tried to portray and promote the future knowledge society. In order to achieve the goals set in these strategies, permanent and systemic structures are needed in teacher education. These structures will support the growth of expertise in teaching and offer future teachers the resources for which they are ready at the different stages of their studies. For instance, the system of direct selection to teacher education enables orientation to a teaching career at an early stage of the studies. More dialogue between the various parties involved in language education is also needed, as the readiness to respond to the changes calls for a shared idea of the ongoing social changes and their implications for language education. Our case example (study 2) comes from a subject department course; in the future, it will be necessary to outline the student teachers' learning path as a whole, to reinforce the bridges between the subject departments and the teacher education department, and to try to ensure that all aspiring teachers, at some stage of their studies, are familiarised with the themes (and even have a chance to internalise them) that we identify as the core areas of expertise in teaching. We need space and opportunities for the problematisation and collaborative development of these central themes, as well as dynamic operating environments, in which student teachers have the opportunity to try novel teaching practices under supervision and guidance. It is also of utmost importance that the student teachers are provided with practical examples of how the boundaries of traditional teaching can be crossed and broadened. The way they themselves have been taught simply will not cut it anymore, and the student teachers will need time and space for both realising that and for developing their own pedagogical identities. Agency to function in dynamic learning environments, which is the foundation for future teachers' expertise, should be promoted throughout the entire learning path. Efficient teacher education should naturally also be supported through systematic in-service training.

Changes in society are inevitable and unpredictable, and many of these have significant repercussions on language education. It is essential that the parties involved in language education are engaged in a constant dialogue. This is a must if we want to ensure a common understanding of the changes affecting language teaching. We need a willingness to continuous reassessment of language learning and language teaching practices across all stages of language education.

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[i] In this arcticle, we use the concept of multimodal pedagogy which means that the different technologies and media are used for designing for learning, the terminology is thus not limited to learning technologies as such. See for instance, Taalas (2005).

[ii] We use the term "multilingualism" to refer to the societies and not to individuals (cf. plurilingualism)