# Exploiting Children's Literature in EFL Teaching from the Different Learners' Point of View

A Differentiated Teaching Material Package for Fourth Graders

Master's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Kirjallisuuden hyödyntäminen kieltenopetuksessa Suomessa on ollut suhteellisen vähäistä. Kirjallisuuden käyttö kielten opetuksessa tarjoaa kuitenkin enemmän hyötyjä kuin haasteita. Kielen oppimisen lisäksi kirjallisuuden käytöllä voidaan edistää laajempia opetussuunnitelman mukaisia tavoitteita esimerkiksi ihmisenä kasvua. Uusi opetussuunnitelma velvoittaa kehittämään oppilaiden monilukutaitoa eri oppiaineissa, joten se mahdollistaa myös kirjallisuuden käytön kieltenopetuksessa.

Yhtenä syynä kirjallisuuden vähäiselle hyödyntämiselle on varmaan ollut oppimisen ja opettamisen haasteet, joita heterogeeniset oppilasryhmät tarjoavat. Uusi opetussuunnitelma velvoittaa ottamaan huomioon erilaiset oppijat, myös ne jotka tarvitsevat eriyttämistä ylöspäin. Uuden opetussuunnitelman mukaan eriyttäminen on kaiken opetuksen pedagoginen lähtökohta.

Tutkielman teoriaosiossa käsitellään paitsi kirjallisuuden käyttöä kielten opetuksessa mutta myös lukemista ja kuuntelemista yleisesti, mutta erityisesti toisen ja vieraan kielen näkökulmasta. Lisäksi tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys tarjoaa kieltenopettajille tiivistetysti informaatiota tavanomaisista oppimisen haasteista, joita kieltenopettajat yleensä enemmän tai vähemmän kohtaavat. Lisäksi annetaan vinkkejä niiden huomioimiseen opetuksessa.

Materiaalipaketissa hyödynnetään autenttisia englanninkielisiä lastenkirjoja. Materiaalipaketti sisältää opettajanohjeet materiaalipaketissa hyödynnettävien lastenkirjojen käyttöön sekä oppilaan materiaalin. Eriytetty oppimateriaali on suunnattu nelosluokkalaisille, mutta sen jälkimmäistä osiota voidaan käyttää myös vanhempien oppilaiden kanssa. Opetusmateriaalin tavoitteena on toimia motivoivana oppimateriaalina ja kielen oppimisen lisäksi kehittää kuullunymmärtämis- ja luetunymmärtämistaitoja harjoittelemalla luetunymmärtämis- ja kuullunymmärtämis-strategioita. Oppimateriaali eriyttää sekä ylös- että alaspäin

Asiasanat – Keywords children's literature, foreign language teaching, different learners, differentation, teaching material package

Säilytyspaikka – Depository JYX

Muita tietoja – Additional information

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

What people learn depends on the previous knowledge and the interests of the learner although it is not always what the teacher meant it to be (Engeström 1987). Usually things are learned once. The second time is called revision.

Children with special educational needs is a current issue in basic education because of the increasing number of children with special educational needs in mainstream schools after the implementation of the new legislation. As a rule all children receive basic education in the nearest mainstream school, which has implications for instruction.

In the media there have been discussions on the issue of Finnish schools not providing enough challenge for the more able and being too challenging for some. According to the teachers the problem for both of the issues is the size of teaching groups (Opettaja 37/2011: 81). In a big group it is very difficult to cater for all the needs of all pupils (OAJ 2013). Teaching groups in Finland are mixed ability groups and in addition to learning problems, teachers also have to deal with behaviour problems. Thus, also a teacher who is not a special education teacher, teaches pupils with special educational needs. However, the teacher training does not meet the requirements of the teachers' job anymore and teachers feel that they have not received enough in-service training for the requirements of new responsibilities of the job (OAJ 2013: 23). However, the new national core curriculum 2014, to be implemented gradually starting in autumn 2016, acknowledges the needs of different learners more profoundly. It remains to be seen how the requirements will be met in the future.

Using literature in language teaching is not an unusual phenomenon in the world although from the Finnish point of view it is quite a marginal issue. One of the most important reasons for this is the fact that EFL course books used in teaching EFL in Finland usually provide more than enough resources, especially reading material, so teachers do not normally have a need for looking for more reading material, unless they have a special interest in that. Although Finnish EFL teaching is particularly

text based, Finnish EFL books primarily use materials modified or written for the teaching purpose especially in primary and secondary school. There is also a need for covering all the issues stipulated in the National Core Curriculum and in the curriculum of the school as well as topics, grammar and vocabulary in the books, so teachers feel that there is no time for literature in the syllabus. Moreover, facing the problems caused by mixed ability groups, using literature may seem quite challenging. If using literature in EFL teaching is considered, it is usually used at the upper secondary school level or more as extensive reading for the secondary school level, although it has been used at the primary school level elsewhere (Ghosn 2002, 2010).

In addition, the focus of language teaching and learning has lately been more on oral communication and exploiting ICT in language teaching lately. According to OECD report the heavy investment in computers in schools does not necessarily improve learning at school. More importantly, it is what is done with the computers and schools should invest time in teaching basic reading skills. That is what is needed in digital reading as well. (OECD 2015) Even fluent reading in L2 needs time invested in practice. However, computers and reading practice are not mutually exclusive. Good foreign language reading skills will even be expected when according to the NCC 2014, learners are encouraged to use foreign languages in searching for information. Furthermore, if the individual learning approach is more widely used in the future, that will set more requirements for learners' reading skills in general.

My interest in using literature stems from the idea of providing extension material for the more able, teaching important skills for the learners and providing motivational material if chosen correctly and the connecting tasks are motivating. The use of literature can also have additional benefits such as combining cross curricular issues with language teaching. Another interest stems from once being criticised at university for having only done few courses of English literature, since literature is so important for teachers. However, that was not the view of teachers in general. Thus, I decided it was time to figure out what to do with literature in language teaching. In this context, with literature is meant fictional and authentic children's stories and picture books which are not written or modified for the purpose of language teaching.

The aim of this master's thesis is to demonstrate how literature could be used in EFL teaching at the primary school level and what could be done with literature in a mixed ability EFL classroom, especially how to teach reading and listening skills and promote language awareness by using literature in EFL teaching. To some extent this also supports aims of multiliteracy stated in the NCC 2014: to provide authentic texts and a chance to enjoy different kinds of texts, to interpret texts and their view of the world, and the idea that multiliteracy is to be developed in all subjects and the co-operation between subjects. Another aim is to demonstrate how to combine literature with the special educational point of view by differentiation, motivating pupils, selecting suitable materials and methods. As stated in the NCC 2014 differentiation is the pedagogical basis of all instruction (NCC 2014: 30).

This master's thesis consists of two parts: the theoretical part and the teaching material package. The theoretical part draws on research and theories of psychology and education, and more specifically research and practices on language learning and teaching. In addition, it draws on the National Core Curricula and the law on basic education and the Constitution of Finland which stipulate the basis for education and instruction. The differentiated material package exploiting children's literature is aimed at fourth graders, 9-10-year-old pupils. The material is designed to accompany the children's books and it provides the teacher's instruction for the use of the children's books and the needed materials for the learners. The aims of the material package are to provide contextualized language learning and to practice reading and listening skills guided by the use of reading and listening strategies. Moreover, its aim is to provide enjoyable learning experiences for different learners.

The second chapter *Literature in language teaching* outlines the previous use of literature in language teaching in general and in Finland. The relationship between language proficiency, literature and the approach to literature is also discussed. Advantages of literature use as well as its challenges are discussed. In this chapter I will also define reading in L1 in general: what it is in terms of a text and as a cognitive process and what other factors have influence on reading. This serves as background information for the reading problems discussed in chapter three. In addition, the specific features of L2 reading and the factors that affect L2 reading are

discussed as well. Since children's literature is in question, it is natural for children to listen to the stories. Thus, I will also define listening, especially from L2 point view. In this master's thesis with L2 I understand both English as a second language and a foreign language unless it is only question about a foreign language.

The third chapter *Special education* outlines the legal basis for organising education and special education. Inclusion is also discussed, after all that is the background idea for the legislation and it is now even stated in the NCC 2014 that Finnish basic education is based on the inclusive principle. This chapter defines learning difficulties and special leaning difficulties in general. In addition, it introduces the common specific learning difficulties encountered by foreign language teachers more specifically: dyslexia, reading comprehension problems, specific language impairment (dysphasia) and foreign language problems which all have language as a common denominator. In addition, their implication for learning and teaching foreign languages is discussed and advice for teaching is given. ADHD, as an example of behavioural problem, is introduced as well as its implications for learning and teaching. Gifted and talented, who could also be seen as a challenge for learning and teaching, is also introduced. General implications for learning and teaching such as motivation, differentiation, skills and strategies, and learning styles are discussed.

Since the idea of this differentiated material package is to provide all learners chances to improve their reading, listening and other language skills at suitable level as far as possible, it is based on the idea of *the zone of proximal development* discussed in chapter four.

In Chapter five *The underlying principles of the material package* the target group is introduced and the challenges it poses for the material are discussed as well as the aims of the material package. In addition, I will discuss the criteria for the choice of the children's literature and explain the organization of the material package. The principles on which the material package is created are discussed as well as how they are executed in the choice of the activity types. The material package can be found in the appendix.

# 1. LITERATURE IN LANGUAGE TEACHING

This chapter sheds light on the previous use of literature in language teaching in general and in Finland as well as the approaches to it. Advantages and disadvantages of using literature in language teaching are discussed. Literature being in question, there is a need to define reading in general in terms of a text and as cognitive process and moreover, in this context from the L2 point of view as well. In addition, factors which have influence on reading are discussed. Regarding the natural way of enjoying children's literature through listening, listening is defined as well, especially from the L2 point of view.

## 2.1. Previous use of literature in language teaching

The role of literature in language teaching changed a lot in the 20th century. First being aesthetic education of few (Kramsch & Kramsch 2000), then during the time of the grammar-translation being dominant, literary texts were used as examples of good writing and grammatical rules of the language. It was neglected during the time of structural dominance because the use of literary texts was seen out-dated. It was also ignored by the functional-notional communicative movement. (Maley 1992: 3) At the end of the century literary texts were seen as authentic texts "whose meaning could be retrieved with appropriated skimming and scanning techniques, advance organizers, and information-processing strategies (Kramsch & Kramsch 2000:567)". Literature was seen as an opportunity for vocabulary acquisition, the development of reading strategies and the training of critical thinking. (Kramsch & Kramsch 2000:567) According to Hall (2005) cited in Paran (2008) there has been a move from the suspicious attitude to literature in the middle of 20th century to newer approaches such as reader response and stylistics when literature has been attempted to be integrated in communicative language teaching.

In his review on the role of literature in instructed foreign language learning and teaching Paran (2008) writes about research conducted in the field: the interaction and the type of language in the classroom when using literary texts and the views of

learners and teachers concerning the use of literary texts in language classroom. He also includes evidence from practitioners and the approaches and works used because he states that much more research is needed in the field and the teachers are a valuable source of information on what they have been doing successful not only with one class but repeatedly. Nevertheless, majority of the research on the use of the literature in foreign language settings Paran (2008) writes about has been carried out in the university setting. The reason for this is that the academics have easier access to university students and no parental consent is needed like in primary or secondary settings. (Paran 2008) Thus, the approaches used are more focused on the content and interpretation of the literary texts.

In contexts of using literature in language teaching the role of tasks and a teacher providing scaffolding are important (Paran 2008: 490). Learner-centred approaches which allowed interaction between students have been found to have positive impact on motivation and language learning (Yang 2002). To sum up the student experiences "research indicates that learners who have been exposed to positive experiences with literature, and who are given the opportunity to read literature and respond to it, both benefit linguistically and enjoy the experience" (Paran 2008: 480).

Paran (2008) also shows the traditional view of what is considered as literature when he points out that children literature and young adult literature are being used increasingly in foreign language teaching. This shows "the broadening of the concept of literature to include nursery rhymes and children's books; and the realisation that in a foreign language learners might react well to literature that had been written specifically for their own age group" (Paran 2008:488).

In contrast, Ghosn (2010) states that the successful use of children's literature in teaching English for children has been well documented over the last 30 years. She is more likely referring to studies on focusing on the use of literature to enhance language learning instead of learning to interpret or analyse literature. Thus, in this approach to literature emphasis is more on language but does not exclude the positive impact of literature on academic literacy in contrast to course books. (Ghosn 2010) Moreover, there seems to be continuing interest in using Children's literature,

from picture books to young adult literature, in second and foreign language learning context over the world, especially in Germany (CLELE JOURNAL). Over the last few years some conferences have been organized around the theme and new books and an on-line journal have been published.

Ghosn (2010) reports five-year outcomes from children's literature-based programs which used an American literature based reading anthology consisting of authentic fiction and non-fiction written by well-known children's authors. In the literature-based programs the children were also taught vocabulary, different vocabulary inferencing skills and reading strategies. Thinking skills and critical and creative responses to literature, predicting, inferencing and close examination of language were emphasized as well. According to the study, children in the literature-based programs outscored the control groups in the communicative ESL programs. The results were statistically significant in general reading comprehension (vocabulary, grammar, paragraph reading, sentence sequencing), mathematics vocabulary, science vocabulary and social studies vocabulary. The explanations for the results might be that "the literature-based programmes are rich in vocabulary, text genres, content and instructional strategies and thus can give abundantly to young learners. In contrast, the ESL course is […] unable to give what it does not 'have' "(Ghosn 2010: 33).

## 2.2. Previous use of literature in language teaching in Finland

In Finland, the use of literature in language teaching is quite a marginal issue, especially at comprehensive school level. According to a survey carried out by questionnaires on 1,720 9th graders and 324 foreign language teachers, school books govern very strongly foreign language teaching: 98 per cent of the teachers use them often. Literature was used often only by 3 per cent and sometimes by 16 per cent of the teachers and 28 per cent of the teachers never used literature. In addition, other authentic texts were used little more but still not significantly more than literature. According to the learners these text types were used even less than the teachers perceived it. (Luukka et al 2008: 35-36, 94-95) Short pieces of literature can be found in some course books but usually they are included in them as extra reading

material. However, if the aim is to invite learners to read them, the way they are usually introduced in course books leaves a lot to be desired.

The available research into the subject or papers dealing with the issue of using literature in foreign language teaching in Finland are carried out in Åbo Academi University and in Swedish speaking schools. (Sell 1994, Rönnqvist & Sell 1994, Danielson 2000, Häggblom 2006) This is probably explained by the university offering a course on using literature in foreign language teaching in the1990s as well as the donation of children's books by British Embassy and ChiLPA project of Åbo Academi University (Häggblom 2006:3, iii).

Danielson (2000) used young adult literature in her experiment with teaching German to upper secondary pupils in a Swedish speaking school who did not have any previous experience of reading literature in German. The aim was to read for overall comprehension and enjoyment. In addition to reading, learners did vocabulary lists, summaries of the chapters, used drama, predictions of how to continue the story and practising dialogues and exploiting cultural topics relating to the novel. Reading literature in German turned out to be a motivating way to learn language. Although reading was difficult from time to time, the learners were willing to pursue reading and work hard. The experience even encouraged some of the learners to read in German in their spare time. Another positive point was that the results of the course exam of both the control group, which was using course books, and the literature group were almost the same. However, she points out that their native language Swedish might be of help when reading in German. (Danielson 2000)

Perhaps the most interesting of these Finnish experiments in the context of my material package is Häggblom's study. Häggblom (2006) conducted a study for her dissertation using authentic multicultural children's literature when teaching young EFL learners in a Swedish speaking primary school in Finland. The participants of the study were a group of year 6 pupils (N=14), 11-12 years of age. The project was carried out in two phases during which the learners were divided into groups on grounds of the books they had chosen from the given options of three per phase. Each learner chose two books but worked with different peers during the two phases. The books were of different difficulty and the learners chose the books on the basis

they felt that they would be able to read them. Thus, the more proficient EFL readers had chosen the more difficult books and the weaker ones the less demanding books. The aim was to read for overall comprehension and enjoyment and learner-centred methods were used. In their discussion and writing learners were encouraged to use English but they could also opt for Swedish if wanted.

In her study she sought to find answers to the questions: "What issues arise when authentic reading material is introduced into the EFL classroom? What is the impact on children's understanding of cultural diversity, and what issues are involved when incorporating a multicultural dimension and using multicultural children's fiction in EFL-teaching?" (Häggblom 2006:3) During the project the learners kept reading diaries and personal glossaries of the words they had chosen from the books and wrote essays after finishing each of the books and a cultural topic essay. In addition, they had written and oral story re-tellings (in groups), group discussions and teacher-led reading conferences involving each group at a time where possible difficulties concerning linguistic or content issues were discussed. They were also interviewed for the study.

The study shed light on the following issues: For the sake of enjoyment, it is of great importance to find a book of a suitable difficulty. As difficulty were perceived a great amount of unknown vocabulary, the length of the text and description more than action. However, the learners were able to tolerate a certain amount of difficulty and despite the effort enjoy reading. But when their tolerance zone was exceeded they needed support. The provided support was different for different readers. Individualization was also seen important: Materials, tasks and activities, homework and book choices and vocabulary support were differentiated. Extra reading material was provided and weaker readers were provided support for example by reading together or listening to the story. The group discussion needed to be scaffolded by the teacher by modelling questions and ways of discussing texts. The learners were also provided discussion sheets to support their group discussions. The expression of their own thoughts was encouraged. The learners were also able to provide support for each other. It was also seen important to teach learners strategies to use when they struggled with their reading comprehension. The multicultural children's literature helped learners to become more aware of issues concerning culture and

diversity. They were also able to feel empathy for the characters of the stories. The project encouraged many learners to continue their reading in English. (Häggblom 2006)

All in all, the Finnish experience of using literature in language teaching seems to be positive, which is in line with the international experience. Learners perceive literature motivating and fresh alternative to regularly used course books. In comparison with course books, literature provides an authentic use of language. What is more, it provides a sense of accomplishment: having been able to read and finish a book in a foreign language and even enjoy it, which is usually not the case with doing exercises in course books (see also Danielsson 2000:142).

## 2.3. Language proficiency, literature and the approach to literature

According to Brumfit and Carter (1986:29, 31) before using literary syllabus a certain level of language and reading competence is required. This leads to the question what literature is, and what the required level of language to be needed is and which approach to literature is taken. If literature is taught as content and classical literature is used, and students are expected to respond and discuss it in a foreign language, it is quite assumable that a certain level of language is needed. Whereas if the aim is to teach language, and the literature is chosen on that criterion, and if the learners are allowed to respond in their native language, if their language skills are not advanced enough to express themselves, then it can be assumed that the required language does not have to be at that high level. Moreover, after 1986 literature has achieved higher status in second language acquisition influenced by the sociocultural approach, in which "literature has a place in fostering self-awareness and identity in interaction with a new language and culture" (Carter 2007: 10). Carter (2007) observes that in second language contexts there is no single correct way to analyse or interpret literature or any single correct approach. Each text should be treated on its own merit, learners' knowledge and their learning goals and learning contexts should be acknowledged and all possible tools employed both in terms of language knowledge and methodological approaches. (Carter 2007: 10)

When using literature in second language and foreign language contexts, another question is to what extent it is a question about literature and language class and to what extent it is a question about using literature merely as a source for a language lesson (Paran 2008: 484) In addition, the focus can vary from studying literature as content to using it as extensive reading having not necessary any focus on literary qualities or language learning (Paran 2008: 467). In this material package the focus is on language learning as well as reading and listening strategies but literary aspects are included to some extent taking into account that the target group is fourth graders.

If with literature is only meant authentic classical literature, using literature in teaching EFL in comprehensive school from the special educational point of view may seem controversial. The National Core Curriculum (2004) does not include literature in EFL teaching at comprehensive school level, neither does it state the use of any other teaching materials. This might not encourage teachers to use literature in language teaching. When faced with time constraints, teachers have to decide what is essential for language learning and teaching so that the aims of the NCC are met, and usually literature is not the first priority. In addition, this may also be due do the fact that they see pupils' level of language learned in comprehensive school is not high enough for them to be able to understand literature, or literature is seen trivial for the aims of language learning, which according to the NCC are: to give pupils strategies to communicate in different situations, and get them used to use their language skills and raise them to understand and value the way of life of other cultures (NCC 2004). Nevertheless, these goals do not have to be in conflict with using literature. Moreover, NCC (2004: 38) states that one of the aims of a cross-curricular topic, growth in human being, is to recognise the importance of aesthetic experiences to the quality of life. Thus, learners should be taught aesthetic observation and to interpret aesthetic phenomena. (NCC 2004: 38) Moreover, the new NCC 2014 emphasises multiliteracy which is to be developed in foreign language learning as well. Learners should be guided to work on a variety of different spoken and written texts of different proficiency level using comprehension strategies. (NCC 2014:218-220) Hence it could be said that there will be more room for literature in language teaching in the future.

Using literature does not have to mean only reading especially in the sense that many children's stories have been passed down from generations to generations orally. (Davidheiser 2007:215) This deals with the concept of story telling which is exploitable in foreign language setting as well (Wright 2008). However, taking into account the language level of the beginners, it might be necessary to start with literature meant for younger children than their actual age if authentic literature is used.

## 2.4. Reasons for using literature in language teaching

In real life different kinds of foreign language reading skills are needed depending on the purpose of reading (Nuttall 1982:3). Usually people are encountered with situations where they do not know all the words in the text but still it is possible to understand the main points. They are very likely encounter situations that the text contains words they do not know but it would be crucial to know them. What is to be done if there is no access to a dictionary? In real life, you do not only read for the purpose of learning the language but to get the message of the text. (Nuttall 1982:3) Texts in the school books do not prepare learners for that. The texts are usually written or modified for the teaching purpose and the language, which is used in them, is usually there to serve the aim of teaching some grammatical structures and certain vocabulary or learning to read aloud. (Nuttal 1982) The texts are usually supposed to be understood word by word. If there are texts for reading comprehension purpose, the meanings of the words supposedly new to learners are given them in word lists. Thus, the learners do not really need to work out the meaning of the words by themselves. Although Finnish EFL teaching can be seen particularly text-based, the lessons do not necessarily teach reading skills. However, the traditional approach of pre-teaching words and structures and giving too much information about text beforehand should be avoided in that it hinders the development of reading skills including coping with the unfamiliar language (Parkinson & Thomas 2004:5).

The same applies for the listening skills. People listen for different purposes and sometimes it is expected to understand exact detailed information and sometimes it

is enough to understand the main points. In addition, it is important to learn to use context, previous knowledge, extra linguistic information to decipher the meaning of the message. (Hedge 2011: 230-236, 243)

By using literature in EFL teaching learners can be taught to use different reading and listening strategies to develop their reading and listening skills. Considering other reasons for using literature in language teaching in addition to text books, there are several advantages to be considered which are addressed next.

### 2.4.1. Motivational material for language learning

Perhaps the most important reason of all is motivation. "Motivation is the key for learning and it is essential to be able to motivate oneself to achieve one's goals:" (Thomas & Killick 2007:18) Motivational reasons for using literature include pupils' real sense of achievement when being able to read literary texts. In addition, gripping stories and novels, which involve learners in the suspense of unravelling the plot or elicit strong emotional responses, make them feel that the materials and what they do in the classroom are relevant and meaningful to them, providing that the materials are carefully chosen. (Lazar 2011:15) Except involving us in suspense, stories arouse our curiosity which motivates us to learn (Thomas & Killick 2007:4) Children are naturally interested in stories (Ghoshn 2002:1, Wright 2008: 4) which could be exploited in teaching EFL as well. According to Collie & Slater (1987:5-6) the motivational reason of literature is personal involvement: The reader is drawn into the book, meanings of individual words becoming less relevant than pursuing the development of the story and the reader is feeling close to certain characters and sharing their feelings. Thus, interest, appeal and relevance are more important for learners than simple and straightforward language. (Collie & Slater 1987: 6)

### 2.4.2. Language learning and language awareness

Using literature can promote language learning in various ways. Instead of school books literature provides many examples of natural language of real situations with interesting characters (Ghosn 2002:174). Literature is seen valuable authentic material, which is not written for the language learning purpose, providing a context

for lexical and syntactic items, thus, making it easier to remember them. (Collie & Slater 1987:5) Except providing a memorable context, it is also meaningful (Lazar 2011:17), providing that pupils' age and interests are taken into consideration when choosing literature. It is hard to please everybody but still, it is possible to take into consideration the general interest of children and teenagers or ask them for their preferences for reading or let them choose from the given choices.

By reading students develop awareness of a variety of features of written language such as "the formation and functions of sentences, the variety of possible structures and different ways of connecting ideas" (Collie & Slater 1987:5). Literature can be used not only to promote learning of language structures but also to develop the use of language although it has been used this way much rarely. (McKay 1986:191) Literature provides an ideal context for language use because "literature presents language in discourse in which the parameters of the setting and role relationships are defined" (McKay 1986:191). With the help of literature language learning can be stretched further from the utilitarian level of basic dialogues in EFL books (Ghosn 2002: 175). In addition, literature has been seen difficult enough to stretch language learning at advanced levels (Parkinson & Thomas 2004:10) and it still provides one way to differentiate the learning of the more able. In contrast, many children's stories use predictable and repetitive language which can assist children's and beginner learners' language learning (Linse 2007) as do picture books (Hsiu-Chih 2008). Furthermore, by eliciting multiple interpretations (Duff & Maley 1992:6) and eliciting emotional reactions (Lazar 2011: 15) the use of literature can also promote language learning in that it provides a natural opinion gap (Duff & Maley 1992: 6) and a context for interaction (Collie & Slater 1987, Ghosn 2000, Duff & Maley 1992: 6).

### 2.4.3. Academic literacy and developing interpretative abilities

The use of literature can also have advantages when academic skills are concerned. Literature can be motivational incentive for reading more, which can result in better reading proficiency. (McKay 1986:192) In addition, literature can provide a natural medium to introduce and practice critical thinking skills: "looking for main points and supporting details; comparing and contrasting; looking for cause-effect

relationships; evaluating evidence, and becoming familiar with the language needed to express the thinking" (Ghosn 2002:176). Collin & Slater (1987:5) agree that the skills making inferences from linguistic clues and deducing meaning from context are transferable to other contexts of reading as well.

### 2.4.4. Educating the whole person

> More recent theorising has shifted away from a limited, isolating perspective in which the different areas of language learning are compartmentalised and teaching has a utilitarian, market-economy driven purpose, to more holistic perspectives which take different aspects of the learner and the context of learning into account, looking at the whole person and the whole culture, in which literature is part of developing the whole person and in which affective development and affective factors are taken into account (Paran 2008: 469).

This view integrates language learning with broader cross-curricular aims also found in the Finnish NCC (2004, 2014) such as personal, social and psychological development, recognising and handling of feelings, moral issues, justice and equality, the respect of life and human rights, intercultural and multicultural issues among other things (NCC 2004: 38-39, NCC 2014: 16-24). Children and young adult literature is educating by nature and dealing with the issues of personal growth, thus, enhancing language learning and whole person education at the same time. If only Finnish foreign language teachers were more aware of and interested in this issue in that it would greatly advance both language learning and greater educational goals.

Literature can be seen as a tool for teaching tolerance of diversity including disability and gender roles (Gibbings 2011) and changing attitudes, eradicating prejudices (Ghosn 2002), promoting intercultural competence (Schumm Fauster & Poelzleitner 2013) and multicultural issues (Häggblom 2006) as well as fostering empathy (Ghosn 2002). Stories can make teaching of these issues possible since with the help of stories children can learn to understand emotions and became aware of their own emotions and acquire relevant vocabulary to discuss them. With the help of stories this is done indirectly discussing the feeling of characters without making children vulnerable in front of the others. (Fox Eades 2006, Thomas & Killick 2007:11) In addition to helping children to understand their own emotions, stories also "give us insight into the minds of other people"(Thomas & Killick 2007: 11): their emotions, motives and desires as well as how to solve problems and how

their actions affect other people. Moreover, they can learn that other people can see things differently. (Thomas & Killick 2007:12, 32). In other words, stories can teach children and young people empathy and social skills, which are also important in the time and culture, in which individualism is emphasised. Not to mention that more and more children are said to be selfish and taking account of other people is difficult for some.

### 2.4.5. Cultural knowledge

In this context, culture can be seen a broader concept than just high literature including values, traditions and social practises of the target culture. (Lazar 2011: 16). It is important to bear in mind that in the real world language does not exists per se but it is always used in context in different socio-cultural environments and the language used is specific for each socio-cultural environment (Sell 1994: 21) Thus, in addition to broadening learners' knowledge of language use, literature can deepen learners' knowledge about the target culture. However, it must be remembered that in this context it is a question about fiction, not pure documentation of facts, unless we talk about that sort of literature. (Lazar 2011:16) In addition, literature in English language represents a variety of different cultures.

By reading books from different socio-cultural environments learners can improve their knowledge of range and variety cultural topics as well as improve their depth and quality of understanding of socio-cultural aspects of target cultures. (Rönnqvist & Sell 1994: 129). However, they might need their teacher's help to grasp the cultural aspects of a target culture in literature (Rönnqvist 2002). School books can teach learners cultural facts, many times national stereotypes about target cultures, but literature can allow learners to get more real feeling about the issues in that literature provides an individual aspect of the issues (Rönnqvist & Sell 1994: 130). However, when using literature with children, there may be dangers of literature giving a very limited view of a target culture if presented only by one work of fiction (Häggblom 2006:176). That is why learners should be given a chance to read "a wide range of books representing different aspects of target cultures" (Rönnqvist & Sell 1994: 130).

## 2.5. Challenges of using literature in language teaching

When considering using literature in language teaching, a few things should be borne in mind: the type of the course, who the learners are and factors relating the text itself (Lazar 2011: 48). Many factors which can be seen as an advantage of using literature in language teaching can also pose a challenge for it. In addition to learners' maturity and interests, other learner related things include learners' cultural background, their linguistic proficiency and their literary background (Lazar 2011: 52-54).

Learners' cultural background may help or hinder them to understand literary texts because their interpretation is guided by their own cultural experience and world-view (Lazar 2011: 53, 62). Thus, a text which is culturally too remote may pose a challenge for a learner. It may even be a turn-off. (Parkinson & Thomas 2004:11) On the other hand with appropriate support, for example with background knowledge provided by teacher, literature can be accessible to learners and a way of teaching cultural knowledge and multicultural issues (Lazar 2011: 16, 62, 69, Häggblom 2006). Even culturally remote literature can touch on themes which are universal and relevant for learners (Lazar 2011: 53).

What a learner perceives as a difficult literary text is to some extent dependent on learners' linguistic proficiency. 'Difficulty' can be seen as a subjective and relative matter, that is, some learners may find a text difficult and the others may find it easy (Duff & Maley 1992: 8) More likely, it is the weaker learners who find literary texts difficult and need more support to tackle them (Häggblom 2006). Teachers usually perceive vocabulary load as the difficulty of a literary text (Duff and Maley 1992: 8). So did the young EFL learners, according to whom a large number of new or difficult words accounted for the difficulty of the multicultural children's literature they were reading. Nevertheless, they enjoyed reading (Häggblom 2006: 58). Teachers may also question the suitability of authentic children's literature for EFL teaching in that in literature language does not progress linear as do (the) language learning syllabi in general (Ghosn 2013: 47). According to Ghosn (2013) that is not a problem in input if learners are not expected to read the stories alone and if learners are not expected to acquire more advanced language until later. She also suggests

that the teacher reads the stories and uses an interactive approach with children. (Ghosn 2013: 47) Moreover, according to Wright (2008: 3) the difficulty of a story is not only determined by the story itself but what the learners are actually asked to do with the text.

However, literature can use difficult, old and odd language which differs from the usual norms of language use, and thus, does not provide a very good model of the contemporary use of a language (Parkinson & Thomas 2004: 9, 11-12). In addition, it can use outdated language, dialect, metaphors, rhetorical devices or terminology of a special field, for example law, which may be problematic even for a learner of advanced level (Lazar 2011: 53).

If learners have studied literature in their own language, it may help them to understand literary texts even with rather limited linguistic proficiency. Conversely, the understanding of the literary meanings of a text can be difficult with little literary background even though learners would understand all the words of the text. Thus, in addition to linguistic difficulty of a text, specific literary qualities of a text should be taken into account when choosing literature. (Lazar 2011: 54) In this context I assume that fourth graders are familiar with fairy tales and children stories in their own language, so it will help them to make sense of them to some extent although their linguistic proficiency is limited.

In addition to the linguistic difficulty, literary text can be remote from learners in many other ways: "historically, geographically, socially and in terms of life experience" Parkinson & Thomas 2004:11). Usually the problems concerning the use of classical literature include old and odd language and remoteness in terms of life experience, which in this context of primary school level with addition to language level excludes the use of classical literature, unless for children adapted version are used. Another question is whether they can be seen the same as original versions.

In my experience if a teacher wants to encourage learners to read, not to kill their willingness to read, classical literature should be avoided at comprehensive school level, especially when there is no syllabus for using literature in teaching EFL. This

can be crucial to struggling readers. If the experience of reading, in addition to being time-consuming and difficult, is boring, it is assumable not likely to increase their interest in reading in any language. That is not to say that classics are boring but it is important to choose the books so that they are relevant for the age and life experience of the learners. Choosing the books just on the criterion of the simplicity of the language is not recommended either (Collin & Slater 1987). Although the language is easy but if the book is not interesting and the learners cannot relate with the characters, the reading experience is not going to enjoyable (Collin & Slater 1987). I do not mean that classics are totally unsuitable for language teaching, but for the given reasons perhaps not the best option at comprehensive school level. Furthermore, children's literature and literature for young adults naturally use language which is simpler than the language in the literature written for adults.

Although literature may pose challenges for learners and teachers using it in language classes, they are not insurmountable. Moreover, the advantages outweigh the challenges. Nevertheless, careful choice of literature and planning are needed so that the experience will be enjoyable for all.

## 2.6. Reading

Reading is a crucial skill in knowledge society. Fluent reading skills are needed to succeed at school and in working life. Even fluent reading skills in English, if not a native language, are needed to succeed in higher education and in many fields of working life. However, becoming a fluent reader requires a great amount of exposure to text, both in L1 and in L2 (Grabe & Stoller 2002, Koda 2005).

However, it is not easy to define reading in one sentence because reading is a complex process. In fact, it consists of many different cognitive processes. Reading comprises decoding and comprehension (Gough et al 1996: 2), decoding meaning the print information extraction and comprehension, in its turn, the meaning construction of a text (Koda & Zehler 2008:4). When it comes to reading, reading educators have stressed the comprehension but what is learned, when one learns to

read: “How one’s writing system encodes one’s language” (Perfetti & Dunlap 2008: 13).

The purpose of a text is to communicate the message intended by the author. Reading is a process of discerning that message of the text. (Koda 2005: 121) Thus, in that sense reading is also a social process. In addition, texts can be seen as cultural artefacts. Thus, each text can be interpreted differently in a different cultural context. (Bernhardt 1991: 9-10)

People read texts for different purposes such as searching for certain information, skimming the text to get the gist of it, to learn, reading for general comprehension either for information or for entertainment, or to integrate information in order to write or critique. The purpose of reading determines how people read and what strategies are used. (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 11-16)

It is also possible to distinguish between different levels of reading of a text: word level, sentence level and text level (Perfetti et al 2007: 228). Decoding and word recognition or word identification, which are presuppositions for reading, take place at the word level. At that level, information about orthography, phonology and semantics of a word are combined automatically, not even necessarily needing conscious awareness (Perfetti et al 2007, Koda 2005). Syntactic parsing meaning the integration process of lexical information take place at the sentence level in such a way that the meaning of a sentence is accomplished (Koda 2005:99). This “involves two major operations: creating phrases through lexical-information integration, and assessing case roles to the created phrases” (Koda 2005:99) At this level, the forming of semantic propositions starts automatically, that is, the basic clause level meaning units (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 23) which “logically can be falsified” (Koda 2005: 125), At the text level, the construction of the textbase takes place which means the integration of propositions, and text coherence building with the help of explicit and implicit cues in text and inferencing to fill the relational gaps in the text (Koda 2005:123-139, Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 214) “The textbase represents the meaning of the text, as it is actually expressed by the text” (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 211). It “consists of a macrostructure as well as the microstructure formed by establishing connections between propositions” (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 214). In

macrostructure larger units of a text are related into a topical structure by identifying the important themes in the text. (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 217).

However, the deeper understanding of a text requires the constructions of situation model of a text that is the "representation of the situation described by the text" (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 219) That is the reader's interpretation of the text formed by integrating prior knowledge into the information provided by the text (Koda 2005:126, Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 219), but is also guided by reader's goals, feelings, motivation and attitudes to the text, the difficulty of the text as well as by inferences (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 27). In addition, "text comprehension, beyond adequate language-processing skills, requires the ability to envision real-world situations inferred from the text statements" (Koda 2005: 127). In other words, a reader must read the lines, between the lines and beyond the lines (Koda 2005: 123).

Inferences are crucial to comprehension in that texts never express everything explicitly (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 219). There are two types of inferences: Bridging inferences are necessary for building local coherence and they occur automatically (Koda 2005:131-133), provided that the text concerns familiar domain to the reader (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 219). Whereas elaborative inferences are more controlled and needed for situation model building and they contribute the global semantic coherence of a text. (Koda 2005: 131-133) Inferences can be knowledge-based or text-based (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 219) Knowledge-based inferences require reader's knowledge about the subject, whereas text-based inferences require reader's employment of the information provided by the text (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 219). For example in case of reading literary texts the reader, in order to build the situation model of the text, might need to analyse the text at different levels and make inferences for example about the motivations of the characters (Kintsch & Rawson 2007: 219).

However, when it comes to reading it is not a question of "an all-or-nothing process or product [but] a matter of degree" (Koda 2005: 230). The degree of comprehension depends on the reader and the text and the context. (ibid.)

Reading is also a cognitive process consisting of different processes: lower level of processes and higher level of processes. With the lower level processes are meant: word recognition, syntactic parsing, semantic proposition formation and working memory activation. The higher level of processes comprises a text model of comprehension, a situation model of reader interpretation, background knowledge use and inferencing and executive control processes. (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 20) Higher-level of skills represent more what is understood reading comprehension (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 25). Both the processes are activated during reading. (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 20) However, depending on the reading purpose different processes are greater or lesser emphasized (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 29).

For fluent reading lower-level processes need to work rapidly and relatively automatically and information from different processes must be efficiently coordinated in working memory (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 24-25). The crucial skill is automatic word recognition. The working memory capacity is limited and poor word recognition consumes a great deal of working memory capacity leaving very little for comprehension of sentences, not to mention the whole text. (Pressley 1998: 61 cited in Grabe & Stoller 2002: 21) With executive control processes are meant the processes to monitor and evaluate comprehension, tackle the comprehension problems, use the needed strategies, reassess and re-establish goals (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 28).

There is strong evidence that reading in all languages consistently requires certain reading abilities such as phonological processing, understanding the grapheme-sound correspondences, using a range of reading strategies, working memory resources and using syntactic, morphological, lexical and discourse knowledge. (Grabe & Stoller 2009: 443) In addition, "research on the component cognitive abilities of readers has demonstrated that a number of component abilities (e.g., word recognition skills, vocabulary knowledge, text structure knowledge, background knowledge resources, working memory skills) contribute to reading comprehension, both in L1 and FL contexts" (Grabe & Stoller 2009: 440).

The following chapters concentrate more profoundly on second and foreign language reading and the factors which are seen relevant for reading in FL or L2.

### 2.6.1. L2 reading

In L2 context learners do not form a homogenous group but represent learners of different age groups from preschool children to adults literate or non-literate in their L1. Thus, in addition to their L1 literacy, their cognitive maturity and conceptual sophistication can very greatly. In addition, they represent various different L1 backgrounds, and L2 is learned in various different settings. Thus, to be able to define the differences between L1 reading and L2 reading, it is of great importance to define the group of L2 readers in question to be able to compare L1 and L2 reading (Koda 2005). If the L2 learners consist of literate adults, then three major distinctions can be made: First, beginner L2 readers have previous experience of reading in L1. Second, L2 learners usually start reading before they have acquired sufficient amount of linguistic knowledge whereas beginner L1 readers have already acquired basic knowledge of the language through oral communication. Thus, their reading instruction focuses more on decoding whereas concerning L2 learners the focus is on learning the language. (Koda 2005: 6-7) L2 readers usually develop more metalinguistic awareness through instruction which in turn assists comprehension whereas L1 readers' knowledge of their native language is more tacit by nature. In addition, L2 readers literate in L1 have more metacognitive awareness to assist them in reading. (Grabe & Stoller 2002).Third, L2 reading involves two languages while L1 reading only one. (Koda 2005: 6-7)

Mostly, the same distinctions apply to the fourth graders, the target group of this material package. They are literate in L1 although their reading fluency in L1 can vary. Moreover, most of them are still rather beginner readers even in their L1. However, owing to the opaque orthography of English their decoding can still be rather slow in L2. Furthermore, owing to their very limited L2 proficiency, they lack the needed language threshold concerning large variety of authentic L2 texts. Thus, the aim of their reading instruction in L2 is to learn language and develop language awareness. In addition, due to their young age, their cognitive maturity and conceptual knowledge sophistication are not as developed as those of adults. Thus, in that respect they are closer to beginner L1 readers than adults L2 readers.

### 2.6.2. Factors affecting L2 reading

There are several factors affecting L2 reading. However, the most crucial of them is obviously L2 knowledge (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 50), especially the vocabulary knowledge (Koda 2005). From 30 to 40 per cent of reading variance is explained by L2 knowledge (Koda 2005: 23). Sufficient amount of vocabulary is crucial for reading comprehension but vocabulary learning is also dependent on comprehension in that the context determines the meaning of a word. Thus, reading is also a source for contextualised vocabulary learning and incidental vocabulary learning (Koda 2005: 48, 53-55). Moreover, vocabulary and comprehension are linked indirectly through conceptual knowledge and information-manipulation capabilities such as inference and contextual information integration (Koda 2005: 256). Thus, vocabulary knowledge does not explain all reading variance (Koda 2005: 186).

However, there is more to L2 knowledge than just vocabulary. L2 knowledge needed to reading comprehension also include grammar and discourse knowledge. In order to exploit L1 reading comprehension abilities learners need to have sufficient amount of L2 knowledge also known as the *language threshold hypothesis*. (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 50-51, Koda 2005: 23) However, with the language threshold is not meant a fixed set of L2 knowledge which applies for all readers, all texts and all topics and tasks (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 51). “Readers usually cross the threshold whenever they encounter L2 texts in which they know almost all of the words and can process the text fluently” (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 51). This means that the threshold can vary depending on the text, topic, task and individuals (Alderson 1984: 19, Koda 2005, Grabe & Stoller 2002). Not all readers necessarily know all the same words or have the same knowledge of grammar and discourse. Different readers also have different purposes and preferences for reading. That is why they read different texts and texts concerning different topics, in cases of which differences in L2 knowledge are likely to be expected (Koda 2005: 24). With increasing task demand the significance of L2 knowledge increases as well. (Koda 2005: 24). The advantage of crossing the threshold is that when not having to struggle with vocabulary and grammar cognitive resources are freed up to more strategic reading and transfer of L1 reading strategies (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 99-100).

The language threshold hypothesis was discussed to some extent in section 2.3. regarding language proficiency and the use of literature. It also supports the idea that it is not needed to wait until the certain level of language knowledge is achieved to include literature in language teaching. What is needed is literature, which fits the level of the learners' language proficiency.

Background knowledge is equally important for L1 and L2 reading comprehension. Moreover, as far as highly specialized texts are concerned, domain knowledge relates more strongly to comprehension than L2 proficiency and it is more important factor when it comes to learning from academic texts. This can be explained by the fact that strong domain knowledge as a background knowledge can fill the gaps caused by inadequate L2 knowledge. (Koda 2005: 150-152) On the contrary, even with good command of L2 reading a highly specialized text of different domain can be difficult due to the lack of adequate domain knowledge. Texts from different domains often contain specialized vocabulary which is not familiar to all readers not even in their L1 due to the lack of the needed conceptual knowledge. Both the language knowledge and domain knowledge have influence on reading comprehension but at different processing levels: "Whereas local-level processing relied predominantly on linguistic knowledge, virtually every aspect of higher-level conceptual operations involved content knowledge" (Koda 2005: 151).

Most significantly, learners need to develop decoding skills in L2 as well, that is, they need to establish how phonological information corresponds with graphic symbols. The decoding efficiency is crucial for comprehension and its significance is also highlighted by the fact that it is one of the factors distinguishing good and weak L2 learners. In addition to reading experience, decoding efficiency is influenced by L1-L2 orthographic distance. (Koda 2005: 255-256) "L2 proficiency, for example, may be a better predictor of L2 decoding efficiency among learners with dissimilar L1 orthographic backgrounds. L1 decoding competence, in contrast, is likely to be a strong factor in discriminating high- and low-efficiency L2 decoders with similar L1 backgrounds." (Koda 2005: 25)

It should not be forgotten that fluent reading in any language is not achieved by learning rules. To become a fluent reader in L1, learners need a great amount of

exposure to text. Likewise, to become a fluent reader in L2, learners also need a great amount of reading practice to develop automatic word recognition and to develop the automaticity in using the grammar knowledge in reading L2. (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 21-23). This is often overlooked in L2 context when even developing large recognition vocabulary takes great amount of time and resources, and partly because the important role of automatic word recognition for fluent reading is not well understood. In addition, to achieve the automaticity, learners need to read texts which they able to comprehend successfully. However, good decoding skills are crucial for L2 reading as well. (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 21-23, Koda 2005: 25) "Good readers guess much less than poor readers precisely because they are efficient word recognisers and they know so many words" (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 72), whereas using the context to guess the meanings of the words when reading, "is a trait of a weak reader who is not yet able to read fluently" (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 74). That is also the case with beginner L2 readers. In the case of the beginner readers, however, it is more a question of a language problem than reading problem (Alderson 1984:24).

Fourth graders, the target group of this material, are still rather beginners and they need much practice in developing decoding skills in English partly due to the opaque orthography of English, although English and Finnish both are typologically similar languages and learners literate in their L1. That is why I think it is useful to start reading in English little by little as early as possible.

When it comes to beginner L2 readers, their greatest source of help is their L1 knowledge, their L1 reading skills and their knowledge of the world (Grabe & Stoller 2002:52). Moreover, "Considerable research makes it plain that L2 sentence processing is heavily constrained by L1 morphosyntactic properties" (Koda 2005: 120). Additional factors, including the L2 knowledge base, L1 and L2 typological distance and universal principles, for example the use of semantic cues, influence L2 syntactic behaviours as well (Koda 2005: 120). However, the distance of L1 and L2 has not only influence on decoding efficiency but also on other linguistic aspects as well for example structural properties (Koda 2005: 24). In the case of syntactic processing regarding the case-signaling cues learners, especially beginners, tend to rely on cues used in their L1 such as word order or case inflections (Koda 2005:113).

There is some evidence "that the L2 learner's procedural preference may [gradually] shift from L1-based to more native-like patterns" (Koda 2005: 120-121, 113) Moreover, despite the differences between L1 and L2 reading, reading comprehension processes are rather similar in the case of higher level of L2 proficiency (Grabe 2011: 449

If learners resort to L1 rules, transfer can be seen either positive or negative or neutral (Koda 2008: 70). Thus, if the relying on case-signaling cues used in L1 interferes the sentence processing, the transfer is seen negative. However, according to functionalist theories, "what is transferred, is not a set of rules […] but internalized form-function relationships and their mapping skills" (Koda 2008: 70). In second language literacy context, alternative conceptualizations of transfer has been suggested: Transfer is seen as previous acquired resources available to second language learners when learning the language and literacy skills in that language. (Koda 2008: 71). "Transfer can occur with phonological knowledge, topical knowledge, general background knowledge, problem-solving strategies and inferencing skills" (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 52).

"There is growing evidence […] that skills transfer is not uniformly automatic" (Grabe & Stoller 2002: 53) Sufficient L2 proficiency is needed for the easy transfer of higher level of L1 skills and strategies (Grabe 2011: 449). Older learners literate in L1 tend to have more transfer ready competences and their L2 reading development tends to be affected by L1 reading experience (Koda 2008: 230).

In addition to vocabulary knowledge, syntactic knowledge and discourse knowledge are of great importance to comprehension (Grabe 2011: 444). According to some studies syntactic knowledge predicted success in reading comprehension tests even more than vocabulary knowledge (Shiotsu & Weir 2007). Lack of adequate syntactic knowledge as well as syntactic features uncommon in L1 can result in slow and less accurate sentence processing. (Koda 2005: 258). It also means that the reader has to resort more to other information sources such as background knowledge when trying to construct the meaning of a text (Koda 2005: 258, Bernhardt 1991). There is ongoing debate whether the linguistic complexity causing comprehension difficulties is caused by quantitative factors for example long

sentences with many words and phrases, or structural variables such as structural ambiguity, complexity, opacity and violation of structural prototypicality, which strain the working memory capacity. Low-capacity readers are more affected by the aforementioned issues because of the working memory constraint. (Koda 2005: 108-110) "It is commonly held, moreover, that comprehension difficulty associated with syntactic complexity generally arises from a deficit in the decoding skills necessary for linking spoken language with its written forms rather than from a dearth of syntactic knowledge" (Koda 2005: 120). Linguistic elaboration is supposed to make the text easier to understand by giving extra information about the semantic relations but in the case of L2 readers it might not be the case if the readers lack the adequate L2 knowledge. (Koda 2005:109)

When it comes to a proficient reader, in addition to processing skills, a reader also needs to exploit suitable reading strategies. (Koda 2005: 205) Reading is usually purposeful and to succeed in reading tasks a reader needs to adjust the strategies to suit the purpose and to exploit suitable reading strategies to overcome comprehension obstacles (Koda 2005: 205-206). The distinction between skills and strategies lies in skills being used subconsciously and strategies are used consciously. However, the distinction is not always so clear in the case of L2 reading when even some automatic skills such as decoding might need deliberate activation (Koda 2005: 210-211). Skilled and less skilled readers differ in strategy use inasmuch as "more global strategies such as inferences, predictions, elaborations" are used by high-proficiency readers "whereas low-proficiency readers resorted to local strategies" (Koda 2005:219). Low-proficiency readers concentrate on decoding single words and they are unable to monitor and improve their understanding for example by rereading or looking ahead in the texts. Neither do they adjust their reading to suit the purpose of reading or the text (Carrell 1998). In the context of fourth graders, it should be borne in mind that "efficacious uses of reading strategies evolve in progressive stages, coinciding with children's growing awareness of the connections among reading, learning, and their own cognitive capabilities" (Koda 2005: 211). Spontaneous use of strategies usually materializes around the age of 10 although they acquire strategies even before that (Koda 2005: 211).

Strategies can be taught explicitly (Koda 2005: 219) Based on limited studies in second language context, the gain of the strategy teaching in terms of reading comprehension is low to moderate (Grabe 2011: 445) A key to the successful use of a reading strategy might be the metacognitive use of a strategy (Carrell 1998, Dabarera et al 2014). However, the sole aim of this material package is not to teach reading strategies or meatacognitive strategies explicitly. However, when the question is using authentic children's books there is a need to guide the learners what to do when they do not comprehend what they are reading, or to use some prereading strategies but they are used more implicitly as they come along using the material. Moreover, especially for the sake of weaker readers it is even necessary. Furthermore, this scaffolding in reading comprehension is needed to assist learners to cross their zone of proximal development.

The reading ability of fourth graders can vary very much, even in their L1. Some of them may have been fluent readers even before starting the school whereas some of them have learnt to read at school and for some, even then, it takes more time. Not to mention reading in L2, on which L2 knowledge has a great influence. Even the knowledge of L2 of fourth graders can vary very much, although fluent readers and speakers in L2 are rare in a regular class room. However, most of the fourth graders are rather beginners. That is why the reading variance of L2 among fourth graders can vary from word level to text level reading. This is something to take into consideration when providing reading and learning material for the pupils. In this material package the reading variance is taken into account by choosing stories of different levels of difficulty and providing them tasks of different ability levels.

## 2.7. L2 Listening

Despite being the least understood and researched skill of the four skills (Vandergrift 2007: 190), listening is a crucial way of acquiring a new language (Rost 2005). By this far listening research and testing has mostly been concentrating on the product, the right answer, leaving less attention to the process. However, the right answer is not helpful in explaining how the learner arrived at the answer or why s/he did not. (Vandergrift 2007: 192).

Listening is a comprehension skill as well as reading and shares many of the cognitive processes with reading. However, compared to reading the input is acoustic and real-time and often has visual support for example when listening face-to-face (Buck 2006: 4, Rost 2005: 504) or watching audiovisual material (Rost 2005: 504). In addition, spoken language is also linguistically different: For example it many times uses non-standard features such as dialect, slang and colloquialisms. Idea units are shorter and it is syntactically shorter. But it is also characterised by hesitation: pauses, fillers, repetitions, false starts, afterthoughts and corrections in vocabulary and grammar. (Buck 2006: 10-11)

Like reading listening is a complex process consisting of three basic processing phases: decoding, comprehension and interpretation. These processing phases are simultaneous and parallel. (Rost 2005:504) "*Decoding* involves attention, speech perception, word recognition, and grammatical parsing; *comprehension* includes activation of prior knowledge, representing *propositions* in short term memory, and logical inference; *interpretation* encompasses comparison of meanings with prior expectations, *activating participation frames*, and evaluation of discourse meanings" (Rost 2005: 504, italics in original).

In other words, like reading, listening is an interactive skill meaning that a listener uses top-down and bottom-up processes. Top-down process means that a listener uses prior knowledge such as the knowledge of the topic, listening context, text-type and culture as well as linguistic knowledge to interpret the message. (Vandergrift n.d.) Whether listeners use more top-down or bottom-up processes depends on the linguistic proficiency, the purpose, the context and the knowledge of the topic. (Vandergrift n.d.) The significance of the prior knowledge to L2 is that it frees up attentional resources for processing linguistic input, thus, usually having successful effect on listening performance (Vandergrift 2007: 198).

The characteristics of spoken language include phonological modification, accent, stress (word and sentence stress) and intonation (Buck 2006). Although a learner had learned the phonemes of English, s/he might encounter comprehension problems because the phonemes are affected by the surrounding phonemes. Native speakers' pronunciation outside the classroom differs from what learners are usually used to

hear. In different parts of English speaking world English is spoken with different accent and even within one country different accents are spoken. Strong and unfamiliar accents can be problematic for language learners, even making it almost impossible to comprehend. (Buck 2006: 32-35) Stress and intonation are important for comprehension in that communicative information can be expressed by them. They also carry lots of information which can support or contradict the literal meaning of the utterance. In English stress is very important. Even if a word is pronounced with correct sounds, but stressed incorrect, it is likely to be misunderstood. In addition to function of intonation making difference between questions and statements, it has other functions as well: emotional, grammatical, informational, textual, psychological and indexical. Thus, how it is used can make difference in meaning. (Buck 2006: 32-38)

Perceived the most difficult skill to learn, listening is often a source of anxiety (Vandergrift 2011: 398) which usually has negative effect on listening performance (Vandergrift 2011: 398, Zhang 2013). There are many problems faced by second language listeners: Phonemes different from their native language phonemes might be difficult to perceive or distinguish them from each other. The pronunciation of them can also be problematic. (Rost 2005: 505) This can lead to word recognition problems: learners cannot recognise word boundaries or they do not know the meaning of a word (Rost 2005: 507). In addition, L2 knowledge, general knowledge and sociocultural context have effect on comprehension (Buck 2006: 22, 38, 40-41) as well as L1 listening ability (Vandergrift 2007:194). Moreover, in the case of L2 learners, lack of automation makes comprehension difficult (Buck 2006: 38). Nevertheless, successful listening requires automatic processing of the language in real time (Buck 2006: 29). “Speed and breadth in word recognition [are as important as in reading or even more in real time listening and they] have been shown to be a consistent predictor of L2 listening ability.” (Rost 2005: 508) Speech rate is also said to cause comprehension problems but more likely it is due to the aforementioned factors as well as the knowledge of the topic or an unfamiliar accent. Beginner learners can have difficulties to process rapid speed and because they have to process grammatical and lexical information consciously, therefore, little time is left for overall interpretation. In case they find the speed too rapid, they cannot even process that information. (Buck 2006: 7) However, there is evidence that slowing down the

speech rate is not always the answer to comprehension problems (Vandergrift 2007:200, Rost 2005: 506), whereas additional pauses at natural boundaries can be helpful. Moreover, listeners tend to have preferred speech rate which does not necessarily have anything to do with proficiency. (Rost 2005: 506)

Additional sources of problems include lack of attention, motivation and information overload (Anckar 2011: 37). Long listening might also cause fatigue at the end of listening, explaining why understanding is better at the beginning (Ur 1984: 19). In the case of listening tasks, it should also be thought whether it is a question of a comprehension problem or a memory problem, if the tasks require a delayed response (Ur 1984: 4). It is also important to cope with not understood elements in the listening in that not understood elements might cause a psychological problem, if a learner has a compulsion to understand every word and is disturbed when not. (Ur 1984: 14-15) Moreover, beginning learners should learn to use top-down processing to help them to infer the meaning of the not understood words and not only rely on mental translation (Vandergrift 2007: 194).

To compensate the gaps in comprehension, L2 listeners can apply compensatory skills to succeed in listening. How well they are applied determines the success. When comprehension fails because of the linguistic skills, listener can use all the information available: It can be visual information, paralinguistic, general background knowledge, cultural information, context and common sense. (Vandergrift 2007: 193, Buck 2006: 50-51)

Traditionally, L2 listening instruction has overlooked the process of listening: teaching how to listen. The emphasis has been on the product, the right answer. (Vandergrift 2011: 398) The phonemes of the target language are the most important things to be taught for beginner learners. In addition, it is important to teach the basics of stress and intonation but to gain deeper knowledge of them, it is best to expose learners to a great variety of informal native speech. (Ur 1984: 12-13) Moreover, according to Vandergrift (n.d.) listening competence needs to be developed consciously. Learners should be taught how to listen by providing them scaffolded learning experiences without treat to be evaluated. (Vandergrift n.d.) He emphasizes the importance of learners' metacognitive knowledge of listening

process. Although pre-listening activities are used, they usually focus on the prior knowledge about the content without helping much with the listening process (Vandergrift 2011: 399). With the help of following pedagogical sequence students can be helped to become aware of the listening process and acquire the needed metacognitive knowledge to regulate their comprehension.

*Planning/prediction:* In this stage students activate their prior knowledge of the topic, text type and relevant cultural information. They know what they need to listen for and they make predictions what they might hear.
*Monitoring:* During the listening, students monitor their comprehension and decide which strategies to use. Students evaluate their comprehension whether it is consistent with their predictions and whether it is internally consistent.
*Evaluation:* In this stage students evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies used and the outcomes. Group or class discussions can be used. (Vandergrift n.d.)

To check the not understood elements learners can consult written text while listening. Gains of this are improvement of word recognition skills and form-meaning relationships. (Vandergrift 2007:198). However this should not happen before "listeners have engaged in the cognitive processes that reflect real-life listening" (Vandergrift 2007:198). Moreover, the aim of listening instruction should be to teach learners to use the knowledge sources available in real-life listening to interpret the meaning, not to develop on-line translation (Vandergrift 2007:198). Moreover, students need systematic and repeated practice and a variety of listening activities (Vandergrift 2007: 403). The scaffolding by teacher should be removed gradually (Vandergrift 2007:198). There is also evidence of benefit of this kind of guided listening practice for less skilled listeners (Vandergrift 2007: 403, Goh & Taib 2006).

As far as I know, I do not think that Finnish listening instruction much applies the metacognitive approach. Pre-listening tasks are widely exploited but still the concentration is rather on the product. In my experience, listening can be improved by systematic and consistent listening but with conscious metacognitive training improvements could probably be gained faster.

Nowadays young people are exposed to English from various sources. Thus, you could expect their English listening skills to be rather good. However, that is not necessarily the case I noticed while marking the open questions of a listening test of upper secondary students. Students are probably used to listening to music and watch films and television but listening texts and tasks of matriculation examination are quite demanding in terms of length and the type of listening text being many times read alouds. Thus, I think that one of the problems is fatigue at least at the end and another factor is motivation unless the real examination is in question. Even I have problems to concentrate throughout the listening. Many a time I have noticed that students perceive listening to be something when they can spend their time doing something else. The reason might be lack of motivation or they do not understand the importance of practice of listening or they do not find that listening can be improved just by listening.

Primary school listening tasks are more diverse and motivating. What is noticeable is probably the anxiety of the less skilled small learners who give up trying and try to copy the answers from the person sitting next to. Different abilities are also problematic in that some need more practice and others get bored and restless when they have to listen to the same text again. The solution might be to ask them to listen to more detailed information or let them do additional tasks.

However, especially in foreign language context, it should be remembered that listening practice is not only listening to recordings but all the classroom talk provides a chance to practise listening. Listening is also a crucial part of communication, not just speaking. Even young beginners can get used to listen to and understand English spoken by the teacher right from the beginning.

# 3. SPECIAL EDUCATION

This chapter sheds light on special educational factors which also concern subject teachers teaching mixed ability groups. First, the legal basis is dealt with. Second, the idea of inclusion is discussed which is very much the future aim of education. Third, different learning difficulties, especially those which affect most language learning, and are often encountered by language teachers in their classrooms, are discussed. Fourth, the more able, gifted and talented, which could also be seen as a challenge for learning and teaching, are discussed. In addition, how to acknowledge these learning difficulties and challenges in teaching are discussed in the sections of implications for teaching and learning and general implications for teaching and learning.

## 3.1. Legal basis

The highest guidelines concerning instruction at school are stipulated in the Constitution of Finland and Basic Education Act. According to the Constitution of Finland (1999:731/16§) the government has to ensure that everyone has equal rights to receive education that is in accordance with their abilities and special needs. According to the Basic Education Act (2003: 477/ 3§) education has to be arranged in accordance with pupils' age and abilities so that it promotes their healthy growth and development.

Since implementing of the changes in the sections of the basic education act concerning special education at the beginning of 2011, there is a tendency for children with special educational needs to attend the nearest mainstream school and the support needed is provided there, although this system does not exclude special schools if they are more suitable for the needs of an individual child. The possible support includes general support in form of remedial teaching and part-time special education, or intensified support or special support.

With *General support* is meant that a pupil needing temporary support in her/his studies is entitled to remedial teaching and a pupil who has difficulties in learning or

in schooling is entitled to part-time special education in addition to normal instruction (Basic Education Act 2010: 642/ §16). With *Intensified support* is meant that a pupil needing regular support in learning or in schooling, or various means of support must be given intensified support in accordance with the learning plan made for her/ him (Basic Education Act 2010: 642/ §16a). The individual learning plan is based on information produced in the pedagogical assessment. (AANCC 2010, NCC 2014)

*Special support* consists of special education and other means of support. Special education shall be arranged taking into account the welfare of a child and the prerequisite for the provision of instruction in a mainstream class or partly or totally in a special education class, or in another place suitable for the purpose (Basic Education Act 2010: 642/ §17). Provision of special support requires provision providers to make decision in writing, which will be revised at least after the second grade and prior to moving on to the seventh grade. (Basic Education Act 2010: 642/ §17a) If a pupil needs individualized syllabus in one or more subject, decision of provision of special support in writing is needed. The decision on special support is provided by the education provider after hearing the pupil and his/her parent or guardian. Pupils who are receiving special support are provided with individual education plan (IEP) where the details concerning arrangement of instruction and special support are stated. (AANCC 2010, NCC 2014**)**

The sections of the law are in accordance with the UN convention on the rights of persons with disabilities of 2006 and the UNESCO Salamanca Statement of 1994 concerning special education. It states that all children regardless of physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions should be able to attend a mainstream school, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties (The Salamanca Statement 1994:6).

Underlying these legal changes is Special education strategy of 2007. The main aim of the legal changes was to enforce the support of learning and schooling so that the needs of all pupils are taken into consideration more effectively as early as possible. When the needs of learning or schooling of a pupil are identified, meaningful support should be provided. (Sarlin & Koivula 2009) The presupposition of this

strategy is that the more effectively support can be provided at general level concerning all pupils the less there is need for special support. (Sarlin & Koivula 2009) If we are to provide support for learning difficulties and other learning hindrances early enough, it requires multidisciplinary co-operation between teachers and social work and healthcare professionals. (Pihkala 2009)

## 3.2. Inclusion

Underlying all these conventions and sections of law is the philosophy of inclusion. Difference is relative and a social constructed concept. (Väyrynen 2001:24) Inclusion strives for social and cognitive justice and equality. Inclusion is not an unambiguous phenomenon. Moreover, characteristic of it is flexibility and being multidimensional. It should always be viewed from the point of the time and place where people are living. (Lakkala 2008)

Inclusion means that all children are learning in the same school and the same class despite disabilities and the support needed is provided there. Different educational goals are not a hindrance for being taught in the same class. (Kochhar et al 2000: 8) Learning at school happens in natural circumstances when peers, school environment and the environment of spare time are the same (Lakkala 2008:23). Prerequisite for the success of inclusion is successful differentiation and continuing pupil assessment in basic education. That way it is possible to meet the individual challenges of pupils. (Naukkarinen & Ladonlahti 2001: 98) Inclusive school aims to develop teaching in a mainstream class in the way that the attitudes of the staff and material resources are able to meet the heterogeneous group of learners. Concentrating to develop basic education stresses the idea of inclusion improving all learners' possibilities of learning and increasing participation. (Naukkarinen & Ladonlahti 2001: 98-99)

Problems are defined from a learning environment, not from a pupil. The services received by a pupil are based on needs, not on location. The starting point is not that a group has difficulties, but how to get rid of learning hindrances. In inclusive school

there are not special education and general education, there is just basic education. (Lakkala 2008:23)

Inclusion is based on the pedagogy of difference. The starting point of inclusive teaching is a flexible curriculum. (Lakkala 2008) The aim is not just teach contents, learning skills and strategies are more important for the learning. The teaching goals, methods and pupils' products are different and teachers use different ways of grouping pupils. (Lakkala 2008:221) Teachers work cooperatively because one adult in a class is not able to teach a variety of different pupils and in an inclusive school there is a multidisciplinary staff (Lakkala 2008).

Inclusion does not mean that every one is treated similarly (Väyrynen 2001: 21), neither does it mean that every one should do the same things, "at the same time and in the same way" (Kochhart et al 2000: 8). The differences of pupils should be seen as a starting point for learning and teaching, not as an exception (Väyrynen 2001: 23). Teaching and learning methods which meet the needs of learners and exploit their knowledge and skills give teachers possibilities to support those who need more support. (Väyrynen 2001: 23) Pupils receive different instruction depending on whether they are working in their actual zone of knowledge or in their zone of proximal development. In teaching, progress is made according to the learning of children, not according to school books. (Lakkala 2008:217)

In Finland schools are still on the way towards inclusive school. Whether total inclusion is ever reached is another question. Total inclusion would require schools to be equipped with facilities and staff like hospitals or special institutes. (Lakkala 2008) The welfare of a child should not be forgotten. Whether the best place for a child with severe disabilities is in a regular classroom or not, and how true social inclusion is there, needs to be taken into account when deciding what is best for a child. Basic Education Act (2010: 642/ §17) states that special education shall be arranged taking into account the welfare of a child.

Inclusion should not be seen as a way to cut expenditure on special education (Lakkala 2008). Inclusion does not mean that children with special educational needs are placed in regular classrooms without the support they need. Neither does it

mean that regular teachers are asked to teach children with special educational needs in a regular classroom without the help they need to be able to teach all children effectively in the same classroom. (Kochhar et al 2000: 8) In fact, inclusion requires suitable physical facilities and classrooms, more teachers and other staff and the sizes of the teaching groups should not be too big. This will mean investment in basic education. Something new will not be created just by getting rid of something old. (Lakkala 2008) This is interesting in the economic situation where savings are needed everywhere. If children with special educational needs are just placed in regular classrooms without the support needed, it is very short sighted, and eventually results in increase in expenditure instead of decrease in expenditure (Lakkala 2008). However, the results of the questionnaire conducted by OAJ (2013) show that the number of pupils in teaching groups has not decreased despite the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs since the implementation of the new law. Thus, teachers report that much of their time is invested in teaching and guiding these pupils at the expense of other learners. Nearly two of three basic education teachers also report that resources of student welfare services are insufficient or highly insufficient and three of four basic education teachers report that pupils do not receive the support needed without delay. (OAJ 2013:12-17)

What teachers have been worried about (Opettaja 2011: 37), has turned out to be the reality in many cases (OAJ 2013). Teachers have been worried about the fact that they will be left alone in the class with children with special needs saying that they do not have time to cater for every different learner. (Opettaja 2011: 37). That is true: in a 45 minutes' lesson with 20 pupils, teachers have less than 2 minutes for individual attention. If a group of 20 or more pupils includes a few with learning difficulties and a few with challenging behaviour, it is quite obvious where most of the teacher's attention is needed. This leads to the fact that the more able and gifted children are many times left to very little attention during the lesson. Another question is whether a teacher is able to recognise underachievers in large groups. However, according to the new national core curriculum 2014 to be implemented gradually starting in autumn 2016, the needs of different learners should be acknowledged more profoundly. It remains to be seen how the requirements will be met in the future.

According to Lakkala (2008), setting conditions for inclusion does not tell about negative attitudes towards individual differences. Moreover, it shows that a teacher or a teaching assistant working daily with a variety of different pupils aims to safeguard the welfare of pupils and her/himself (Lakkala 2008). In addition, teachers, especially subject teachers, do not usually have enough knowledge of different learners and how to support them and teach them effectively. On the other hand, pedagogical documents affecting learners' future can be composed by even non-qualified teachers (OAJ 2013), let alone they can teach pupils with or without special needs. Even today, teacher training does not include enough studies of different learners, especially not at practical level, how to take them into account in subject teaching. Actually, placing learners with special educational needs in regular classrooms in mainstream schools sets requirements for teachers which definitely should be acknowledged more intensively at practical level of subject teaching in teacher training as well. In addition, there is a need for in-service training for teachers.

## 3.3. Problems with learning

There are many factors which can have influence, especially negative influence, on learning. The most significant factors to cause problems with learning are learning disabilities. In fact, learning disabilities is an umbrella term for a variety of difficulties in learning. However, in the case of some learners it is crowded under the umbrella (Numminen & Sokka 2009:18-19). In other words, a person can have difficulties only in one area of learning but it is possible to have more profound difficulties in various areas (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 19) for example in all of the areas presented in this thesis. In addition, learning difficulties can vary in terms of difficulty from mild to severe (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 19). Different learning difficulties can have effects on one or more stages of information processing: input, integration, memory or output (Pritchard 2010:59).

### 3.3.1. Learning disabilities

Defining learning disabilities is not an easy task. Fletcher et al (2009) note that no single problem of learning disabilities has caused as much trouble in research on learning disabilities as defining them. Even though a large number of attempts have been made to define this subject, no completely satisfying definition has been found yet. (Fletcher et al 2009: 41). The history of learning disabilities started in the 19th century concerning research on brain function, later brain-injured adults and later children with reading and language deficits and since then "more than 90 terms have been introduced to the literature to describe these individuals" (Smith 2012: 154). The reason for this problem is learning disabilities being a heterogeneous group. A pupil may have problems in one academic area or in addition problems in other areas as well, known as comorbidity. (Lyytinen ja Ahonen 2005) Thus, learning disabilities is not synonymous with reading and writing problems or dyslexia. (Lyon et al 2003 cited in Fletcher et al 2009: 22) According to Fletcher et al (2009: 15), there is evidence of five major categories of learning disabilities which are linked to word recognition, reading fluency and comprehension, mathematics and writing. These areas are prevailing in the present way of defining learning disabilities and underachievement, and unusual development in these areas have been found among most children and adults with learning disabilities (Fletcher et al 2009: 15).

According to Smith et al (2012), learning disabilities are primarily deficits in academic achievement, meaning reading, writing and mathematics either with or without language problems relating to listening and speaking. The cause of these deficits is presumable nervous system dysfunction. The pupils do not need to have problems in every area of academic achievement. Actually, these pupils have similar strengths in several areas as their peers or can achieve even higher than them in some areas but may have significant unexpected underachievement in other areas. The group of pupils with learning disabilities is heterogeneous. (Smith et al 2012: 162). In addition to deficits in academic achievement, they "may have significant problems in other areas, such as social interactions and emotional maturity, attention and hyperactivity, memory, cognition, metacognition, motor skills, and perceptual abilities" (Smith et al 2012: 162). Any of these areas can be potential strength or deficit for a pupil with learning disability. (Smith et al 2012: 162).

Moreover, some speak of learning disabilities (Smith et al 2012), the others specific learning disabilities to distinguish them from "general learning disabilities" (laaja-alaiset oppimisvaikeudet) by which is meant mental retardation or intellectual disabilities (Lyytinen & Ahonen 2005: 40). Närhi et al (2010) make a distinction between specific learning disabilities, mental retardation/ intellectual disabilities and general learning disabilities, although there is a variety of terminology concerning this group. In addition to general learning disabilities, borderline intellectual functioning, slow learners and garden variety of poor readers are used in English depending whether this subject is dealt in a medical or pedagogical context. (Närhi et al 2010)

In addition, learning disabilities can be divided into specific learning disabilities and general learning difficulties (Närhi et al 2010). Specific learning disabilities are primarily defined as limited unexpected academic and cognitive deficits excluding problems caused by lack of learning possibilities, psychiatric problems or intellectual disability. Traditionally, specific learning disabilities include problems with language, reading, mathematics as well as attention. (Lyytinen & Ahonen 2005: 40) The question is about specific learning disabilities when reading, writing or mathematical skills are significantly lower than IQ. (Kuikka et al 2010:29)

### 3.3.2. General learning disabilities

General learning disabilities is a heterogeneous group: reasons for learning problems are different concerning different individuals (Närhi et al 2010:7). Actually, there is no generally accepted definition for this group. Very little research has been carried out on this subject, not to mention almost non-existing Finnish research. (Närhi et al 2010:9) In research literature this group has been defined by three different ways: by poor school achievement, by IQ lower than average and by problems with reading, writing and mathematics linked to IQ lower than average (Närhi & Kuikka 2010:70). The IQ is an important factor making distinction between general learning disabilities, specific learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. When a person has problems with reading, writing and maths and IQ above the limit classified as

intellectual disability (at least 2 standard deviations below the average), but at least 1 standard deviations below the mean, then the problem is linked to general learning problems. (Kuikka et al 2010:29) However, it is good to bear in mind that this is not a diagnostic category and this phenomenon is still within the norm. (Närhi et al 2010:8)

A research project of Niilo Mäki Institute and the Finnish Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (FAIDD) on prevention of alienation related to general learning problems, studied eight graders with poor school achievement in comprehensive school. The data were gathered by psychological tests and questionnaires as well as by interviewing teachers and special education teachers. The interviews with teachers revealed a large number of various issues which were difficult for pupils with general learning disabilities. Most of the pupils had an individual education plan at least in two different subjects: Swedish, English or maths. Some of them had dyslexia which was sometimes described as a deep lying difficulty to understand, learn and work. Almost everyone had gaps in basic skills for example in reading, writing and basic arithmetic. They had been falling behind others in learning more and more during the whole secondary school time. Nearly every other of them had obvious problems with attention and executive functioning which may have caused difficulties in ability to organise their own school work. Every other of them had a diagnosis such as dysphasia, an executive function problem, dyslexia, difficulties in perception abilities and problems with fine motor skills. Many of the pupils had a passive and withdrawn attitude as well as lack of attempt and motivation as a hindrance. Almost everyone had social problems and some of them had already an obvious mental health problem such as depression or panic disorder. Many of them had challenging behaviour as well. The teachers felt that many of the pupils would have needed very practical guidance by hand in their schooling. (Seppälä 2010:19-20)

The list of the problems is long as can be seen. However, it illuminates the extent of the problems faced by these pupils. Even so, it is a question about a heterogeneous group. Although being a small group of pupils, they are the ones who cause a great amount of concern at school. During the time of basic education these individuals have problems with learning and after basic education they are individuals at risk of

getting alienated (Seppälä 2010). Lately, this issue has gained publicity in the media as well.

### 3.3.3. Reading and writing problems

Poor readers can be characterized by poor decoding ability, poor reading comprehension or both of the skills are poor. (Gough 1996: 8) Dyslexia and reading comprehension difficulties will be discussed in more detail next.

#### 3.3.3.1. Dyslexia

Dyslexia is a specific learning disability describing such problems in learning to read and write or in both which are unexpected because the achievement is significantly lower than could be expected on the basis of IQ, and these problems are not caused by lack of sufficient education (Korhonen 2005: 127). According to International Dyslexia Association (IDA) dyslexia is a language-based learning disability characterized by reading difficulty manifesting in problems of word recognition and reading fluency but also in difficulties with spelling, writing and pronunciation. (IDA)

Dyslexia can be divided into subgroups based on etiology or symptoms. Distinction can be made between developmental and acquired dyslexia. The former means that the problems exist from a very early age and are not caused by an external factor. (Korhonen 2005: 128) It is caused by neurological dysfunction and in many cases it is caused by genetic factors (Korhonen 2005). The latter describes dyslexia caused by external causes for example a brain damage (Ahvenainen & Holopainen 2005: 76, Korhonen 2005: 128). Dyslexia can be divided into subgroups in a variety of ways. One way is to categorize it according to decoding and reading comprehension. Dyslexia, a specific learning disability, refers to decoding difficulties while reading comprehension is normal. When reading comprehension is weak, the fluent decoding process notwithstanding, it is question about hyperlexia. Garden variety describes a version where all areas of reading skills are weak. (Ahvenainen & Holopainen 2005: 78) Paying attention to a variety of definitions of dyslexia the reading and writing

committee of Ministry of Education and Culture (Luki-työryhmä 1999) came to a conclusion that as a basic form of dyslexia could be seen slow and deficit reading of single words, but it often coexists with other learning problems such as reading comprehension.

The amount of reading and writing problems varies depending on whether it is a question of a specific reading and writing disability (dyslexia) or reading and writing problems in general (Ahvenainen & Holopainen 2005: 73). The Statistics Finland of 2009- 2010 show that the amount of children receiving part-time special education on the basis of reading and writing problems as a primary reason in primary school during the academic year 2009-2010 was significantly higher (47 843) than those receiving part-time special education on the same basis in secondary school (3 693). The tendency was the same in the earlier statistics. (Statistics Finland) In the first grades of primary school reading problems are quite common because language skills are not yet developed enough and perhaps the possibility of diagnosing the problems has not yet been accurate enough (Ikonen & Virtanen 2007: 62). It might explain the great amount of pupils receiving part-time special education on the basis of reading and writing problems in primary school and perhaps the pupils suffering from the slighter versions of dyslexia learn to cope with their disability and only the pupils with more difficult cases of dyslexia continue receiving special education on the basis of reading and writing problems in secondary school. However, dyslexia is affecting a person's life not only in childhood but also later in life (IDA), although reading skills improve with age and practise, and some people cope with their problems better than others (Frith 1999).

The key factor underlying dyslexia is usually difficulty in identifying speech sounds within a word and how they are represented in writing (IDA). However, this phonological processing deficit is not the only deficit to explain all reading difficulties, especially in the languages with transparent orthography such as Finnish (Korhonen 2005: 151). Wolf et al (2000) discuss about a double deficit hypothesis meaning that there are two core deficits in reading disability: phonological processing deficit and naming-speed deficit. Wolf et al (2000) distinguish between tree different subtypes of impaired readers: those with phonological deficit, those with naming-speed deficit and those with both. Children with double deficit suffer

from the most serious form of reading disability. (Wolf et al 2000) With naming-speed is meant that children have difficulty in naming familiar objects, colour, numbers or letters seen in rapid succession (Korhonen 2005: 152).

All in all, reading and writing problems seem to form a heterogeneous group of problems and there is no empirically proofed theory or model to explain all the underlying factors concerning reading and writing problems (Korhonen 2005: 149). "Pure dyslexia" is a relatively rare phenomenon causing problems in research on dyslexia, and comorbidity with ADHD and dyscalculia, behaviour problems and other problems has been found (Korhonen 2005: 159-160).

#### 3.3.3.2. Problems with reading comprehension

According to Lehto (2006) reading comprehension difficulty is a relatively unknown learning difficulty which is not necessarily linked to dyslexia (Lehto 2006:126). Approximately 20 percent of third and ninth graders have reading comprehension problems (Holopainen 2003:96), thus being a much more common learning difficulty than dyslexia and a much overlooked learning difficulty (Lehto 2006:130). Poor reading comprehension is usually associated with dyslexia although with dyslexia is usually understood decoding or writing problems, as discussed in previous section. However, decoding problems of dyslexia can lead to reading comprehension problems (IDA) in that slow and dysfluent reading puts much strain on working memory, which may result in a reader's forgetting the beginning of the sentence (Takala 2006:150). However, there is another view that reading comprehension and decoding skills are relative independent skills. Thus, reading comprehension problems can occur separately from dyslexia. (Lehto 2006:123) This phenomenon is also known as hyperlexia (Lehto 2006:130). Despite a great deal of research on reading comprehension, the information on the nature of the reading comprehension process has not reached professionals, teachers being not enough aware of it and how comprehension could be improved (Service & Lehto 2005: 257, Lehto 2006: 130).

Reading comprehension is a complex process, and there are a variety of possible reasons for poor comprehension skill (Lehto 2006: 134-135). Poor readers, having problems with comprehension despite decoding skills intact, are poor at making inferences (Oakhill & Yuill 1996: 71, Nation & Norbury 2005: 23). Especially such inferences are important "that are needed to make a text coherent" (Perfetti et al 2007: 231). Poor readers also tend to read superficially and engage less in constructive processes when reading (Nation & Norbury 2005: 23). Poor inference skills are due to inability to combine the message in the text with previous knowledge, which would be needed in profound understanding of a text. Alternatively, poor readers do not perhaps see themselves justified to make inferences. The capacity of working memory may also be a hindrance for making inferences. A poor reader might also have difficulties to understand text structures, thus making reading comprehension difficult and understanding the thread through a story can be difficult. (Lehto 2006:133) Poor readers are also unable to monitor and correct their own reading comprehension process (Oakhill & Yuill 1996: 76-80, Vauras 2007:143) whereas good readers are able to "use strategies to adjust their reading rate to the material and check to see if what they are reading makes sense. Poor readers don't even know that such strategies exist. They think that good readers were "born that way" "(Winebrenner 1996: 79). Poor readers might not even know whether they understood what they read or not (Oakhill & Yuill 1996:70, Vauras 2007:142). There also seems to be evidence that poor readers demonstrate not only problems with reading comprehension but listening comprehension as well (Nation 2007). Linguistic skills and vocabulary are also crucial for reading comprehension as well as listening comprehension. Previous knowledge of the subject of a text makes the reading also easier. (Lehto 2006:134)

In addition, reading comprehension problems are also explained by low non-verbal IQ. (Lehto 2006:134) Low literacy achievement is also explained by gender, boys being at a risk group of achieving low. Other explaining risk factors are "immigrant status, low socio-economic background, several siblings, low academic self-esteem, hard pressure to achieve, strong effort and perseverance, lack of engagement in reading and heavy use of computers". (Linnakylä et al 2004: 242-243)

According to Reading and writing committee of Ministry of Education (Lukityöryhmä 1999: 26) teaching of reading comprehension should not only be responsibility of Finnish teachers but reading comprehension skills should be taught as a part of other subjects as well. Reading is one of the four skills practiced in foreign languages. However, it should be understood that teaching reading comprehension does not only mean asking learners to read and assessing their comprehension by asking them to do multiple choice tasks, true or false statements or answering open questions. Reading strategies should be taught more explicitly. Nowadays there are attempts to activate readers' knowledge of the topic for example by pre-reading activities but learners are not necessarily taught enough reading and lexical inferencing strategies. They are not necessarily needed with a basic study book text provided with a list of vocabulary, and a glossary at the back of the book is always at hand. Therefore, it would be good to use texts outside study books and teach learners lexical inference skills as early as possible. However, foreign language reading problems being in question, it should be asked, whether it is a question of a reading problem or a language problem (Alderson 1984:1).

### 3.3.4. Specific language impairment

There are several terms to describe this disorder depending on the professional discourse (Korkman 2005: 96): developmental language disorder (DLD), specific language impairment (SLI) and (developmental) dysphasia. Developmental language disorder is in question when normal language acquisition is disturbed from a very early age, although it would not be expected on the basis of a child's normal development, and it is not caused by hearing impairment (Marttinen et al 2001: 21) or neurological, sensory or physical impairment which directly affects expressive and receptive speech and language, or by intellectual disability (WHO: ICD-10, F80-89). By using the term developmental language disorder distinction is made between it and acquired impairment caused for example by a brain damage (Korkman 2005: 110). The impairment can vary from mild to severe (Hyytiäinen-Ruokokoski 2001:6-7). Usually, a child's language development is delayed, but in the most severe cases a child does not understand speech at all and will not learn to speak at all (Marttinen et al 2001: 26-28, Hyytiäinen-Ruokokoski 2001: 6). The cause for specific language

impairment is some sort of neurological dysfunction, and there is evidence of it being hereditary (Korkman 2005: 100-104). Boys are more likely to suffer from this disorder than girls (Korkman 2005: 100).

In fact, speech and language disorders comprise a variety of different types of language problems (Korkman 2005: 95). There are several ways to categorize speech and language impairment. Rapin and Allen's categorisation (Rapin 1996, Rapin et al 2009) is widely used in Finland (Marttinen et al 2001: 25), and therefore it is a suitable categorization to describe here. Moreover, it illustrates the great heterogeneity of this group well. Rapin & Allen (Rapin 1996, Rapin et al 2009) divide the impairment into three subcategories: mixed expressive/ receptive disorders, expressive disorders, and higher order processing language disorders.

*Receptive and expressive disorders* include verbal auditory agnosia and phonologic-syntactic disorder. The first means that a child has difficulties in distinguishing words from speech because of deficit phonological decoding, thus making comprehension profoundly impaired, which also has an impact on language acquisition. These children are either nonverbal or speech is limited and phonology defective, grammar and vocabulary impoverished. This is the most severe form of DLD (developmental language disorder). The latter type (phonologic/ syntactic deficit disorder) is the most prevalent of the subtypes. According to this subcategory comprehension is better or equal to oral output. Output is affected manifesting itself in little amount of speech which is agrammatical and phonology is impaired. These children also have a limited vocabulary. (Rapin 1996: 643, 646-647, Rapin et al 2009:69)

*Expressive disorders* comprise of verbal dyspraxia and speech programming deficit disorder. In both subtypes comprehension is normal or almost normal. In verbal dyspraxia speech is extremely dysfluent with very poor phonology. These children often use only single words. In most severe cases children are nonverbal. Phonological programming disorder manifests itself in unclear and rather incomprehensible speech cause by problems with phonological production. (Rapin 1996: 643, 647, Rapin et al 2009:69)

*Higher linguistic processing disorders* comprise of lexical-syntactic disorder and semantic-pragmatic disorder. These disorders may be easier overlooked because children may use full and well-articulated sentences. However, a child with the first disorder has a very limited and loosely structured vocabulary thus resulting in problems with understanding. His/ her own speech is comprehensible but the child has difficulties in finding words. A child may use superordinate words such as "thing" when not finding a right word. The latter disorder means that although a child can speak rather fluently and grammatically correct sentences, the child does not necessarily understand the meanings of the words and might use atypical vocabulary. These children also have problems with using language as means of communication. They may also seem to speak no one in particular and answer questions beside the point. (Rapin 1996:643, 648-649, Rapin et al 2009) They also tend to interpret language literally and cannot use it appropriately in the situation (Ketonen et al 2001: 44). To complicate things more, a child's difficulties do not necessarily fit into one category, but can partly fit in several of these subcategories (Hyytiäinen-Ruokokoski 2001: 8).

A child or a teenager with SLI has problems with understanding long instructions, long narratives and discourse (Ketonen et al 2001: 39-40). This is explained by the difficulties in the lower levels of information processes overloading memory, thus preventing further processing of information and receiving new information (Ketonen et al 2001: 39).

In addition, learning to read and write is often difficult for children with specific language impairment and it often co-exists with dyslexia. Sometimes it is difficult to define where the limit lies. (Marttinen et al 2001: 23) In some cases of children with SLI, the difficulties gradually seem to change into difficulties in reading and writing (Ahonen & Rautakoski 2007: 26, Catts & Kamhi 2005: 115). Thus, it has been questioned whether they actually are separate disorders or whether they lie in a continuum of the same disorder (Kamhi & Catts 1986 cited in Bishop & Snowling 2004: 858) which manifests itself differently during development (Catts 1991: 164 cited in Bishop & Snowling 2004: 858). According to Bishop and Snowling (2004) SLI and Dyslexia should be seen as separate disorders, although they have some similarities such as the phonological impairment of dyslexic children and some

children with SLI. However, in the case of classic SLI it is not only a question of deficits in phonological language processes but also deficits in non-phonological language processes. Some children with SLI having problems with semantics, syntax and discourse may also suffer from reading problems and these problems may exist even without phonological deficits. In those cases comprehension is more affected. (Bishop & Snowling 2004) Instead, dyslexia is defined only as a difficulty with learning to read and write and it is not linked with significant language impairment in everyday speech (Marttinen et al 2001: 23). However, as discussed in the earlier section, dyslexia does not limit in learning to read and write but is a lifelong condition. Even so, language problems can also be seen as a consequence of reading problems (Catts & Kamhi 2005: 115). Children whose reading is limited fall behind their peers in language development, because reading is seen as an important source for new vocabulary and advanced grammatical and discourse knowledge. This is also known as Matthew effect (Stothard, Snowling & Bishop 1996 cited in Catts & Kamhi 2005: 97).

Comorbidity with many other problems and specific language impairment is common: dyslexia, underdeveloped social skills, emotional and behavioural problems, ADHD, dyscalculia and dyspraxia. Thus, although the disorder is called specific language impairment, it is very rare that a child or a teenager would not have other problems as well. The mixture of the problems s/he has will have a significant impact on a child's or teenager's learning and social life. (Ahonen & Rautakoski 2007: 23) Specific language impairment can also cause problems with thinking and problem solving (analogous thinking, sequential thinking and hypothetical thinking) and many cognitive functions (Nevalainen et al 2001: 122-149) as well as understanding and expressing emotions (Ahonen & Rautakoski 2007:31) and executive functioning (Aro et al 2001: 150, 162). This is explained by the function of language as means of thinking (Nevalainen et al 2001: 122) and expressing emotions (Ahonen & Rautakoski 2007: 31). They may also have problems with noticing and remembering relevant characteristics of their surroundings, perceiving time and regularities in activities (Aro et al 2007: 114).

It is surprising to realise the amount of difficulties in various sectors of life specific language impairment can cause and explain. Understanding it probably makes it

easier for teachers to understand these learners and their difficulties better and hopefully the knowledge will also be of help in creating supportive learning experiences and environment for these learners. Because of the great amount of difficulties in learning and comprehension, learning should be encouraged and assisted with motivating learning experiences, that is, a learner should feel that the things to be learned are interesting and relevant for her/his own life and that the challenge is appropriate and enough support is provided. That is what this material package is aiming at, although to provide enough support in the lesson is ultimately the responsibility of the teacher.

### 3.3.5. Problems with foreign language learning

There are various reasons for foreign language learning problems. They might be caused by lack of motivation, high levels of anxiety, learning style differences and inefficient learning strategies (Sparks & Ganschow 1993:289). However, these factors do not explain all the difficulties.

Although reading and writing problems decrease significantly in secondary school, Statistics Finland of 2009-2010 also show that foreign language learning problems increase in secondary school, being the second largest reason for receiving part-time special education. This phenomenon is explained by Sparks et al (Ganshow & Pohlman 1989 cited in Leons et al 2009: 43) who observe that foreign language learning problems lie along a continuum, meaning that some students are likely experience immediate difficulty at the beginning of studies, whereas others will not experience difficulty until the intermediate level (Sparks et al 1989 cited in Leons et al 2009: 43). Presumably, when the amount of things to be learned increases in secondary school as well as the difficulty of the contents, it accumulates more difficulties in learning if a learner has problems with memory and reading and language skills are limited (Haapasalo 2007: 49). Furthermore, problems are even more likely to accumulate if a learner has difficulties in learning even the basic foreign language skills in primary school.

However, Sparks et al (2006) point out that there is no evidence of existence of a specific learning disability for foreign language learning and IQ tests do not predict success in foreign language learning. So, are all those foreign language learning problems if not caused by lack of motivation, high levels of anxiety or inefficient learning strategies, due to dyslexia or dysphasia? Skills in L1 have influence on foreign language learning (Pitkänen et al 2001:82). If a child with language problems has problems in many parts of L1, it is expected that s/he will have problems with foreign language learning and will need support (Pitkänen et al 2001:82). Especially, problems with phonological processing in oral and written communications in L1 and also problems with reading and writing in L1 are likely to cause problems with foreign language (Sparks & Ganschow 1993:295).

According to Service and Lehto (2005: 260) foreign language learning problems are often linked to dyslexia but pupils not suffering from dyslexia might be affected as well. Reason for this is that English, which is usually the first foreign language, has an opaque orthography with difficult phonemes and rows of consonants for Finns, making the development of the phonological knowledge more difficult. (Service & Lehto 2005:260) In addition to the problems of learning the phonological system of a new language, a person might also have problems with learning grammar, both of them causing problems in word recognition and reading comprehension (Pitkänen et al 2001: 88).

Moreover, if a pupil has problems with foreign language learning, it is important to find out whether the pupil has problems with his/ her L1 as well. It is difficult to estimate and have interventions on a pupil's foreign language problems without paying attention to the same skills in L1 as well. (Pitkänen et al 2001: 88) According to Dufva (2004: 58-59) word level reading and reading and listening comprehension skills in the native language together with phonological awareness and phonological memory are significant predictors of learning literacy and communication of English language. Despite that similar cognitive skills (phonological processing, phonological working memory and rapid naming) have an impact on learning to read and write as well as problems with them in different languages, these skills can be differently significant in different languages depending on a language and its orthography. Thus, reasons behind dyslexia can be expressed differently in different

languages: one extreme can be that dyslexia is present in one language but not in another. (Arvonen et al 2009: 84) Hence, foreign language teachers can be a crucial link recognising unnoticed reading and writing problems (Luki-työryhmä 1999: 22). However, the reading and writing committee (Luki-työryhmä 1999:22, 28) admits that foreign language teachers' training does not include much compulsory studies of specific learning disabilities. Despite the important role of foreign language teachers, as far as I am informed, the situation has not changed much since 1999.

Moreover, language learning problems are linked to memory problems, especially the phonological loop of working memory and long term memory as well. Weak phonological knowledge is assumed to mean that whether the phonological long-term memory or phonological working memory functioning is weak. (Service & Lehto 2005: 251, 261) Weak phonological awareness puts a great amount of strain on the phonological loop of working memory, especially causing problems with input and output of spoken language (Service & Lehto 2005: 260). The ability to represent unfamiliar phonological material in working memory, which was demanded by asking pupils to repeat or copy English-sounding pseudowords, and the quality of it, seems to predict foreign language learning, especially vocabulary learning, in primary school (Service 1989, Service & Kohonen 1995). In addition, in order to read and spell a foreign language a learner needs to aware of the differences in sound-letter correspondence in a foreign language and the native language (Dufva 2004: 59). However, learning can be helped by developing phonological knowledge combined with learning the regularities of orthography (Service & Lehto 2005:261-262). Increasing vocabulary in the long-term memory helps phonological working memory explaining why familiar words are easier to remember compared to pseudowords or new words in a foreign language (Service & Lehto 2005: 263).

However, only stating that a pupil has problems with foreign language learning is too wide a concept. It should be stated more specifically which specific skills of language a pupil has problems with. (Dufva et al 2007:156) Dufva et al (2007) explain that a part of the language skills are independent of a language and the other skills are language specific. Language independent skills comprise listening comprehension, reading comprehension, speaking, writing, learning strategies and phonological working memory. Language specific skills include pronunciation,

vocabulary and grammar although language specific skills can have effect on the language independent skills. Decoding and spelling lie between the language independent and language specific skills. This categorization can be helpful when the aim is to support pupils with language learning problems. (Dufva et al 2007: 159) All in all, successful learning of "a foreign language requires both good skills in the language-independent, universal skills […] and good language-specific skills, such as syntax, grammar, vocabulary, and partly word recognition" (Dufva 2004: 59).

### 3.3.6. Implications for teaching and learning

The common denominator of the aforementioned learning difficulties is language, either with acquisition, comprehension, production or decoding or all of them causing difficulties in a native language, a foreign language or in both. However, it is of great significance to remember that the amount of difficulties and severity of them is very individual. Therefore, identifying learning difficulties in detail is important in order to support these pupils from the very early stage to prevent further problems and lack of motivation (Englund & Dufva 2010). Best results are received when a pupil's strengths and weaknesses can be identified and learning is built on strengths and weaknesses are supported in language learning as early as possible (Englund & Dufva 2010). Since these learners may face a great amount of difficulties in learning a foreign language, it is crucial to pay attention to the motivational factors both of interest and self-efficacy beliefs (Enlgund & Dufva 2010, Pitkänen et al 2001) as well as self-esteem (Kormos & Smith 2012: 117).

Since the language independent skills relating to native language skills have a great impact on foreign language learning as well, the best way to prevent foreign language learning difficulties is to ensure that pupils learn efficient native language word recognition and comprehension skills in the early years at school (Dufva 2004: 58, Sparks et al 2008). "The stronger the native language word-level reading and reading/listening comprehension skills are, the stronger foundation a pupil has for learning the first foreign language" (Dufva 2004: 58). However, not all the language learning problems can be explained by native language skills, but also by language specific features. That is why it is important to teach and practice new strategies for

decoding and spelling single words in a foreign language with opaque orthography, especially for at-risk pupils (Dufva 2004: 59). In other words, given the opaque orthography of English these learners would benefit from explicit teaching of phoneme grapheme correspondence (Dufva 2004:59) in that dyslexic and many learners with SLI have problems with phonological processing (Aro et al 2007:124).

Another common denominator is usually problems with memory, either with working memory or long-term memory, or both. A pupil can have problems with storing new information or recalling already learnt things if having problems with working memory (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 83). It is also significant how information is stored in long-term memory, so that it is possible to recall it, when needed (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 84-85). Long-term memory problems can manifest themselves in difficulties in remembering things they have already learnt being a sort of on-off recalling (Pitkänen et al 2001: 90). This all has implications for learning in general and learning foreign languages. Therefore, a great amount of repetition and review is crucial for learning especially for learners with SLI. (Pitkänen et al 2001: 90) as well as dyslexic language learners (Kormos & Smith 2012).

It is good to bear in mind that if a learner has difficulties to read and spell in his/her native language, reading and writing in a foreign language may be uncomfortable for him/ her. Thus, in order to prevent loss of motivation, too much relying on reading and writing in the foreign language should be avoided (Dufva 2004: 61). Instead, focusing on vocabulary, oral skills and listening comprehension promotes foreign language learning of these learners (Dufva 2004: 61, Dufva et al 2007: 162). Due to the language problems verbal learning may be difficult for learners with SLI, therefore it is natural that focusing on learning by doing and experimenting is vital for pupils with SLI (Aro et al 2007: 121). Hence, using multisensory learning (MSL) instruction in language learning promotes the learning of pupils with learning difficulties (Kormos & Smith 2012, Englund & Dufva 2010). In addition, connecting learning with learners' own life and experiences is recommend (Dufva et al 2007: 170, Pitkänen et al 2001: 94). However, the individual differences in foreign language learning of pupils with SLI can be rather enormous and many of them need an individual educational plan concerning foreign language learning, but not all, if

they can be supported with other interventions and methods (Dufva et al 2007: 176-177).

More detailed implications for learning and teaching of different language skills as well as vocabulary and grammar are addressed in the following sections. Reading and listening are discussed in the same section in that both of them being comprehension skills, they partially share the same underlying processes. In addition, they can be used as complementary or alternative skills to learn a foreign language if a learner has severe problems with either of them (Pitkänen et al 2001, Dufva et al 2007: 162). The same applies to production skills speaking and writing. In addition, the multisensory approach is discussed in more detail.

3.3.6.1. Comprehension – reading and listening

In both reading and listening it is a question about comprehension skills. For learners with specific learning difficulties it is of great importance that reading and listening texts are motivating (Kormos & Smith 2012: 135, 138). It is useful to create a need for reading by arousing learners' curiosity, so that they are willing to pursue reading or listening, for example by giving questions to which pupils should find an answer. For these learners the use of pre-reading and pre-listening activities is vital, especially the activation of previous knowledge setting expectations for reading or listening. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 136, 138, Dufva et al 2007: 165) Furthermore, these learners would greatly benefit from teaching of reading and listening strategies explicitly. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 137,139). Learners should be taught to use the information of headings and pictures (Dutva et al 2007: 166), but as well such as prediction, looking for key pieces of information and identifying the logic of the text and guessing the meaning of unfamiliar words and linguistic constructions for reading (Kormos & Smith 2012: 137). However, these learners might find the guessing of meaning challenging because "they tend to experience difficulties in establishing meaning using contextual and morphological clues". (Kormos & Smith 2012: 137). Listening strategies such as predicting, focussing on the main idea and making informed guesses can be taught (Kormos and Smith 2012: 139).

In both skills they would benefit from pre-teaching of key vocabulary and especially when listening is concerned, the emphasis should be on pronunciation (Kormos & Smith 2012: 136, 138). In addition, pre-teaching grammatical structures can be useful (Dufva et al 2007: 165). It is also important that both reading and listening activities are suitable for the proficiency of learners in terms of vocabulary and grammatical structures, which should not be far beyond their competence, in that too many unfamiliar words may be discouraging for them (Kormos & Smith 2012: 136, 138).

According to Kormos and Smith (2012: 135), if it is possible, these pupils should only be expected to read above sentence level preceding a long oral phase of teaching. This helps learners to gain confidence in language learning and can serve as a foundation before reading is introduced. "It is also recommended that an intensive development of L2 word reading skills precedes the teaching of text-level reading, and L2 word reading should also be practised regularly even after students start reading longer texts" (Kormos & Smith 2012: 135). They also recommend that reading should be started with short paragraphs and the length of text should be increased gradually. In addition, it would be useful to break longer texts into smaller sections. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 135) A reading activity should be short but focused, and it should be discussed what they have understood and learnt from it. Multiple-choice tasks can be confusing. If pupils have great difficulties in reading, the teacher can read the text for them first. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 137). If reading texts are too difficult for a pupil with SLI, the teacher can modify the texts to make them easier by shortening them and using simple sentence constructions and making modifications to vocabulary use and even highlight the crucial words for comprehension. (Pitkänen et al 2001: 85)

These pupils tend to find listening less challenging and anxiety provoking than reading. However, the texts and task-types need to be adapted to their needs. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 138) It should also be borne in mind that remembering long instructions, even in their native language, can be difficult for learners with SLI due to the memory weakness. Thus, long instructions should be given in shorter pieces, one information at a time and even by writing them on the board. (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 84) or modelling can be used (Aro et al 2007: 120). In addition,

listening should consist of short stretches of talk. It would be helpful to use listening input containing low number of words which can be confused with a similar sounding word in the same listening text. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 138) If learners with SLI have problems with listening comprehension, it would be useful to provide visual support as help (Pitkänen et al 2001:83), either pictures or written text (Dufva et al 2007: 166). In addition to providing support for understanding the content, visual support can also help learners to sustain their attention while listening (Kormos & Smith 2012: 138).

Recorded listening tasks can be problematic for some learners due to fast speaking tempo, long sentences and sound effects. Some learners can also have problems with listening comprehension without seeing the speaker. The solution to these problems could be that the teacher reads the listening text for the pupil before or after listening. (Pitkänen et al 2001: 84) It might be helpful for some of these beginners if the teacher speaks slower and simplifies his/her pronunciation (Pitkänen et al 2001: 83). Another question is how much simplifying is too much in order it to be proper English. However, Kormos and Smith (2012: 138) recommend that listening texts should gradually increase in speed, length and clarity of articulation. A learner should also have a possibility to listen to the text several times and in short pieces (Dufva et al 2007: 166). However, these pupils should not be asked to listen and write at the same time (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 84, Kormos & Smith 2012:138).

After all, reading and listening provide further opportunities for language learning and they can be exploited in speaking and writing tasks. Both reading and listening can also be exploited by multisensory tasks such as learners acting out, following instructions and providing illustration for reading or listening. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 137, 139)

#### 3.3.6.2. Production – speaking and writing

Speaking is usually the easier way of expressing themselves for learners with SLI (Dufva et al 2007: 167) and dyslexia (Kormos & Smith 2012: 139). Despite that some learners with SLI have problems with expressing themselves orally in their native language, it is recommended to support oral production although it is sparse

(Numminen & Sokka 2009: 88, Pitkänen et al 2001: 84). In order to build up confidence in speaking, oral activities are recommended to be used from the beginning of language learning starting with one or two word utterances (Kormos & Smith 2012: 140). However, a child can have difficulties with naming and retrieving even the familiar words (Pitkänen 2001: 84, Dufva et al 2007: 167). At the beginner level, instead of oral language, a pupil can be asked to use pointing to express his/her comprehension (Pitkänen et al 2001: 84). In addition, multisensory speaking tasks combining speech with movement provide help with memorizing phrases and expressions (Kormos & Smith 2012: 140).

Pronunciation can be challenging as well. Despite poor pronunciation a learner should be encouraged to speak. The teacher can accept the answer and say the correct pronunciation him/herself. Rhymes and songs can be used as a help to learn pronunciation (Pitkänen et al 2001: 84-85) as well as providing the material with phonetic alphabets (Dufva et al 2007: 168), providing that they are taught. Various games can also be used to support oral production (Pitkänen et al 2001: 85).

In communicative tasks a pupil can face challenge in dealing with the task content and linguistic form. Thus, it is advisable to review the vocabulary and structures needed for the completion of the task. (Kormos & Smith 2012) Both speaking and writing can also be helped with structured frames proving visual support, and which can be manipulated by a learner (Dufva et al 2007: 168, Kormos & Smith 2012: 140) for example with the help of cue cards (Dufva et al 2007: 168).

Writing and spelling are very challenging and common problems for dyslexic learners (Schneider 2009: 298) and for many learners with SLI, even with single words let alone whole sentences (Dufva et al 2007: 167). In addition, difficulties in fine motor skills can have an impact on handwriting (Pitkänen et al 2001: 87). Explicit teaching of phoneme- grapheme correspondence as well as teaching phonetic alphabets can be very useful (Dufva 2004, Dufva et al 2007: 167). In the case of each learner, it should be decided individually, how much writing is practiced and required, so that it is not done at the cost of time spent on learning other things (Dufva et al 2007: 167). Consequently, it is reasonable to consider

which of the written tasks are suitable for each learner and not to ask him/her to complete them all (Pitkänen et al 200l: 88).

As a help of writing, learners can be allowed to use glossaries (Pitkänen et al 2001:86). Moreover, writing tasks should be started gradually from sentence level writing or short pieces of writing providing a frame in which learners only need to fill some information. If even spelling of single words is difficult, learners should not be expected to write longer pieces without help and scaffolding. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 141) Since writing can be very arduous, it is crucial that writing tasks are interesting and motivating and they "should provide a feeling of success and accomplishment" (Kormos & Smith 2012: 141). Pre-writing activities assisting learners to review vocabulary and linguistic structures needed, and planning the content as well as preparing the outline of the text are strongly recommend. Without preparation these learners are not likely to be able to succeed in writing tasks. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 141) Modern technology can be exploited in writing tasks as well, not only because of a spell-checker but it can also provide help if handwriting is poor. In addition, it can provide motivational incentive for writing tasks. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 142) Furthermore, it is important that a learner can demonstrate his/her language skills in his/her best skill (Englund & Dufva 2010).

3.3.6.3. Vocabulary

Vocabulary is crucial to being able to express oneself and to be understood in a foreign language as well as to reading and listening comprehension. However, for many learners with specific learning difficulties, who have problems with processing phonological information, learning of vocabulary is often very arduous (Kormos & Smith 2012: 68) because of the capacity of working memory being able to process less information than the working memory of other learners (Jeffrie & Everatt 2004). This is also difficulties in first language vocabulary acquisition of children with SLI (Englund & Dufva 2010:10), and usually their vocabulary, even in native language, is limited (Ahonen & Rautakoski 2007:28). Learners with specific learning difficulties also tend to have difficulties in incidental learning which makes unintentional learning of vocabulary for example while reading and listening difficult, thus, they have to rely on intentional vocabulary learning (Schneider &

Crombie 2003 cited in Kormos & Smith 2012: 69). Thus, these learners need much more repetition and revision (Kormos & Smith 2012: 69).

They would also benefit from explicit teaching of L2 phonemes and their letter correspondence and spelling and pronunciation of words (Kormos & Smith 2012: 130). This can be done by multisensory learning providing a variety of ways to practice vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation (Kornos & Smith 2012: 132). Kinaesthetic-tactile ways of promoting vocabulary learning could be for example that a learner can trace letters in sand or air or use tactile materials to write words (Rief 2003 cited in Rief 2005: 175-176). In addition, using mimes, facial expressions and movement can be used when learning and practicing words (Dufva et al 2007: 170). The use of pictures when introducing words, or letting a learner illustrate problematic words, can help memorization and recall (Sarkadi 2008: 121). Colour-coding vowels and consonants can also be useful (Sarkadi 2008: 121). Using mnemonic devices such as keywords or writing stories or dialogues using the problematic words (Schneider & Crombie 2003 cited in Sarkadi 2008:122- 123) as well as drawing the picture of the story and naming the things in the picture can be helpful (Sarkadi 2008: 123). However, the amount of vocabulary to be learnt in one lesson should be limited (6-8 new words) and they must be practiced excessively (Kornos & Smith 2012: 132). It would also be advisable not to teach similar sounding words or words with similar meaning in the same lesson (Kornos & Smith 2012: 133). It would be best to learn vocabulary in context "because this aids to anchoring words to the mental image of the situation in which they were encountered" (Kornos & Smith 2012: 133). In addition, vocabulary acquisition can be supported by connecting words with a learner's own experiences (Dufva et al 2007: 171).

#### 3.3.6.4. Grammar

Without any understanding of grammar, reading and listening comprehension is likely to suffer. Even though it is possible to communicate verbally even with single words, in order to use language at a more sophisticated level, certain knowledge of grammar is necessary.

Learners with specific learning difficulties benefit from explicit teaching of grammar so that grammar would be taught preferably in context and the structures would be related to their communicative functions (Kormos & Smith 2012: 134). However, it is of great importance to note that these learners "often lack intuitive understanding of parts of speech. This makes explanations using grammatical terms difficult for them to understand, whether explained in the first (L1) or the second language (L2)" Leons et al 2009: 45). Thus, linguistic terminology should be avoided because learning the abstract terminology is difficult for these learners and just confuses them (Kormos & Smith 2012: 134). After all, language skills, the ability to use and understand a language, are more important than knowledge about the language for learners with specific learning difficulties (Dufva et al 2007: 170). If linguistic terminology is used, it should be explained shortly, what the used terminology means (Pitkänen et al 2001: 89). Learning of grammar can also be helped by personification and making up stories of grammar rules (Moilanen 2007: 167-175): For example that 'a/an' does never play with '–s' (plural). They hate each other.

Grammar teaching is recommended to "proceed in small steps from simple to complex structures, and should build on learners' existing knowledge" (Kormos & Smith 2012: 134). It is also important that grammatical structures are sufficiently automatized before new grammatical structures are introduced (Kormos & Smith 2012: 134). Building up a strong basis is important for further learning (Pitkänen et al 2001: 92). Concentrating on basic grammar and linking it with communication and a learner's own life is recommended (Dufva et al 2007: 170). Nevertheless, in the case of each learner with SLI it should be considered individually to what extent grammar structures are taught (Dufva et al 2007: 170), however, if syllabus is individualized, an individual education plan is needed (Pitkänen et al 2001:91).

When teaching grammar, it should be noted that pupils with SLI need much more repetition and revision than other learners (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 85). Multisensory techniques such as colour-coding the words or phrases of different grammatical functions enable to teach grammar without the need of using linguistic terminology, especially if the colour-coding is used consistently. The use of drills of a variety of formats can be very useful in learning sentence frames and in the automatization of linguistic structures. In controlled practice of structures it is

recommended to practise them first orally to avoid attention being divided. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 134-135) Comparing the structures to be learned with L1 structures is also recommended (Dufva et al 2007: 170). In communicative tasks it is useful to avoid complex content if the aim is to practise grammatical structures so that learners are able to pay attention to grammatical accuracy. Help can be provided by giving time to plan the task first or providing useful samples of utterances to be used in the task. (Kormos & Smith 2012: 135) In addition, it should be noted that multiple-choice tasks should be avoided since they might confuse learners and result in memorization of incorrect options (Schneider & Crombie 2003 cited in Kornos & Smith 2012: 135).

3.3.6.5. Multisensory structured learning approach

According to Schneider (2009: 301-302) multisensory learning instruction applies of eight principles in both native and foreign languages: it is multisensory, structured, meta-cognitive, repetitive, explicit, analytic-synthetic, diagnostic and prescriptive.

In the multisensory structured learning (MSL) approach visual, auditive, kinaesthetic and tactile pathways are activated in learning the sound and spelling system, vocabulary and grammar (Kormos & Smith 2012: 126-127, Sparks & Miller 2000:127). Originally the multisensory learning instruction was developed to teach direct and explicit phoneme-grapheme correspondence to dyslexic learners of English in their native language by activating different sensory channels simultaneously aiming to develop phonemic, morphological and syntactic awareness in order to help acquisition of reading and spelling skills (Kormos & Smith 2012: 126). There is evidence of effectiveness of the MSL approach in both native and foreign language teaching (Sparks & Ganschow 1993, Sparks & Miller 2000).

Learners having problems with phonological processing skills, have problems with encoding verbally presented information (Kormos & Smith 2012:127). Due to that and weak memory they would benefit from receiving information through multiple sensory pathways and multiple formats (Leons et al 2009: 51). Advantages of multisensory approach are that learners can use their strongest channel and not only rely on their weak learning channels (Schneider 2009: 301) but it also allows to

develop their weaker ones (Kormos & Smith 2012:112). Due to the weak phonological short-term memory, the memorization of many different language elements can be very challenging for these learners (Kormos & Smith 2012: 127). Thus, the things they need to learn have to be learned in small steps and the tasks should also be sequenced from easy to more complex and only to progress to the next step if the previous ones are learned (Schneider 2009: 301, Nijakowska 2010: 126). These learners also need a great amount of practice in different settings (Kormos & Smith 2012: 127). Characterized by repetition and overlearning MSL method facilitates it without being boring, for example with the use of drills (Kormos & Smith 2012: 127, 129).

By explicit instruction language concepts are made transparent for learners (Schneider 2009: 301): phonology-orthography, grammar and morphology (Sparks & Miller 2000: 137) but also the demonstration of a variety of self-correction, study and test-taking strategies are included (Schneider 2009: 301). Learners are also taught meta-cognitive strategies by teacher modelling how and why certain procedures and rules are important for success in reading, listening, writing and spelling and pronunciation (Schneider 2009: 301). With analytic-synthetic principle is meant that by explicit teaching learners are taught to break apart words, syllables, sentences and paragraphs to analyze and understand them, but also to synthesise these parts to form meaningful whole units (Schneider 2009: 302, Nijakowska 2010: 126).

Diagnostic and prescriptive principles mean that the teacher informally assesses learning and understanding through dynamic assessment procedures and adapts the instruction accordingly (Schneider 2009: 302). Characteristics of dynamic assessment are the role of a teacher as a mediator and facilitator of learning, and integration and intertwining assessment and teaching, and "its focus is on process rather than products (correct/ incorrect responses to tasks) of behaviour" (Schneider & Ganschow 2000: 73). A great amount of repetition and practice is needed in learning and "self-dependence is achieved in a step-by-step fashion, beginning with guided practice, through supported practice to independent practice" (Nijakowska 2010: 126).

To some extent this material package is based on the principles of the MSL approach. The material provides multisensory activities allowing learners to use visual, auditory and tactile-kinaesthetic channels in learning. Tactile and kinaesthetic channels are included in the same category partly because it is not always easy to distinguish where the limit is: whether the distinction lies in when you use a hand or when you use an arm? Secondly, in many activities both tactile and kinaesthetic elements are included: moving is required and something tactile to do as well.

3.3.6.6. Implications for this material package

In this material package the needs of dyslexic learners and learners with reading comprehension difficulties and SLI as well as foreign language learning difficulties are acknowledged in many ways. However, it must be pointed out that this material package is not only meant for these learners but for a variety of learners in a regular language classroom. First of all, this material is a refreshing and wished-for supplement to school books, using real children's books with stories to teach language and thus providing motivational material for language teaching. The stories also provide a memorable context for language learning.

One of the aims of this material package is to improve reading and listening skills by teaching reading and listening strategies. However, the focus in the first part of this material is more on listening comprehension even for practical reasons. It is not very likely for a school to provide many series of children's books per each learner to be used in foreign language classes. Thus, these lessons promote language learning also for those who have problems with reading. The reading is introduced gradually. Moreover, it is vital to tell learners in advance that it is completely normal that they do not understand everything and they are not even expected to understand all the words when listening or reading, and it is not even necessary. That is the case in real life even with advanced level of English learners, but however, learners should be taught to cope with that. Taking into account the fact that these learners need much repetition and review and would benefit from strategy teaching, I see it would be profitable to start it as early as possible. There is evidence that learners suffering from reading comprehension difficulties profit from strategy instruction carried out side by side in both L1 and L2 (Fung et al 2003 cited in Dufva et al 2007: 161). An

attempt has been made to link the stories with the lives of learners so that they could put the language to use.

These stories introduce a large amount of vocabulary. The stories of the first part, which are suitable for regular year four pupils, are usually divided into two parts to be taught in two lessons and two of the stories have a sequel as well. In general, some of the vocabulary is repeated many times in a story and some of the vocabulary is repeated from story to story. In addition, the stories and materials also recycle some vocabulary learners are supposed to already know. Thus, in that way the vocabulary will be repeated and revised. Some of the stories use much alliteration. There is some evidence that it can function as a mnemonic device (Boers et al 2012). Since the stories and combined material introduce a large amount of vocabulary, it would be suitable to limit the amount of words to be learned for learners with specific learning difficulties, for example by letting a learner to choose 6-8 words s/he wants to learn per lesson. Vocabulary is not pre-taught before reading or listening. Instead, the aim is more to teach learners to use pictures**,** extra linguistic means and the context for lexical inferencing. Moreover, the teacher is always instructed to set the context before staring a story to activate learners' previous knowledge, which is crucial for beginners and learners with learning difficulties. To some extent, it is not necessary easy to predict in advance which words are new to learners, because it also depends on the school books they have been using. However, from experience I can assume that certain words are usually taught in year three and four.

The materials use a great amount of pictures to support understanding and vocabulary learning as well as learners can draw pictures themselves. On the basis of my little experiment on using authentic children stories, I learned that instead of giving vocabulary in advance to support listening comprehension, it would be better to show the pictures. The pictures also had an advantage of keeping learners' attention focused on listening.

The material is also differentiated by which is meant that there are stories and activities of different levels of difficulty. The material package starts with stories which are suitable for regular fourth graders and with differentiated activities they

are also suitable for learners with specific learning difficulties. The other end of the material package provides stories for learners who need more challenge. The easier versions of the activities provide more help or the content is limited. Open-ended activities allow a learner to use the language at the level s/he masters. The easiest option is to draw pictures and label the things in them. This material package also uses multisensory activities supporting language learning via auditory, visual and kinaesthetic-tactile channels. Multisensory activities also cater for different perceptual learning styles. To foster motivation and enjoyable learning experiences some games are also included.

Fourth graders in general are still quite beginners, so they still need a lot of support when producing language either orally or written. Thus, there are frames for oral tasks and support for writing task. Explicit grammar instruction is beyond the scope of this material package, however, it can provide a context for explicit grammar teaching later on. To some extent it demonstrates implicitly how certain structures are used.

The aim was to create material which is clear and usually has only one task per a sheet. The attempt was to make the work sheets so clear that they would not necessary need explanations what to do. The aim was to avoid the need to write long instructions in Finnish or in English. Even so, it is recommended that the teacher demonstrates what needs to be done in the activities or provides an example of the outcome, so that learners know what they should be aiming at.

Explicit teaching of phoneme-grapheme correspondence is beyond the scope of this material package as well. Since this material is not only meant to cater for learners with learning difficulties, moreover, this material package is not even meant to be the sole teaching material for fourth graders, it does not include all the recommended aspects of teaching learners with specific learning difficulties. Furthermore, it is not even possible to include everything in this material package.

## 3.4. Emotional and behavioural problems

Behind emotional and behavioural problems there are various reasons. Many learning difficulties have commorbidity with different behavioural problems but according to the scientific studies their causal relationship is not clear. Behind them could also be a third factor which may cause them both. Depending on a child either of the possibilities could be the case. (Ahonen & Korhonen 2005: 295-296)

As mentioned earlier, SLI has commorbidity with emotional and behavioural problems. This link between SLI and behavioural problems can be explained with Vygotsky's theory of the role of an adult's and child's linguistic communication as means of developing a child's self-regulation resulting finally in a child's own inner speech. That is why problems with language learning have impact on a child's development. Another explanation could be the role of language in social situations and naming emotions. Weaker language skills in social situations may cause errors in interpreting social situations which may result in aggressive behaviour. (Ahonen & Korhonen 2005: 305)

However, more detailed discussion on different emotional and behavioural problems is beyond the scope of this thesis. Only ADHD, being quite common, is discussed here at length.

### 3.4.1. ADHD

In addition to dyslexia, ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) is another rather common cause for problems at school (Lyytinen 2005: 43). The term ADHD defines rather a heterogeneous group of problems characteristics of which are predominantly inattention, hyperactivity, impulsivity, restlessness and disruptive behaviour (Lyytinen 2005: 45). With heterogeneous is meant that although children with ADHD can share similar characteristics they are not alike (Nigg 2006: 175). For example "some have high IQs and find schoolwork easy to understand, while others have learning disabilities and below-average language skills" (Nigg 2006: 175). In addition, the disorder can be divided into subtypes: combined (problems

with attention and hyperactivity-impulsivity), predominantly attention deficit (ADD) and predominantly hyperactive-impulsive type (Lyytinen 2005:47).

The causes of ADHD are not known very well (Lyytinen 2005: 43). However, there is evidence of some kind of neurobiological dysfunction, which can be caused by genetic factors (Lyytinen 2005: 44) or prenatal or birth-induced complications (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 100). However, there is strong hereditary evidence. (Lyytinen 2005: 44) Although there are clues for the causes, they can be applied for the group level, but in the case of an individual child it is not always clear what the causes for the impairment might be (Nigg 2006: 4).

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Symptoms, according to the DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorder of American Psychiatric Association), include attention deficit, hyperactivity and impulsivity. Manifestations of *attention deficit* may include the following symptoms: a child is easily disrupted by external stimuli, often unable to follow instructions or finish school or home work, hates or is reluctant to do tasks which require long-term pursuit, forgets things while doing daily activities, has recurrent difficulties in concentrating on work or play. *Hyperactivity* and *impulsivity*: A child has difficulties in sitting or standing still for a long time, or a child rather runs around or climbs excessively in the situations in which it is not appropriate. While sitting, a child often fidgets and squirms. A hyperactive child often seems to be in move like driven by motor, talks excessively and often answers before the question was even completed. S/he can often disrupt others. The impulsivity also manifests itself in child's difficulty in waiting for his/ her turn. (DSM-IV cited in Lyytinen 2005: 45-47) A child can also have difficulties in regulating feelings (ADHD Association in Finland, Barkley 2008: 82). However, it should be pointed out that symptoms vary from child to child (ADHD Association in Finland).

ADHD is more likely to occur among boys (Sourander & Aronen 2007: 562). However, many girls with ADHD are not diagnosed because they do not necessarily have the typical hyperactive symptoms (Rief 2005: 9-10) and the symptoms usually appear later than at the age of seven, which is the age limit of the onset of symptoms of the diagnostic criteria (Nadeau, Littman &Quinn 1999 cited in Rief 2005: 10).

There is a tendency for ADHD to co-exist with other learning difficulties. Approximately 60-70 % of people with ADHD also have another disorder. (Michelsson et al 2003: 59) The most common of them is dyslexia (Lyytinen 2005: 75-76). In addition, ADHD is often linked with other learning problems caused by attention deficit, memory problems, difficulties in perception, special learning difficulties and behaviour problems (Michelsson et al 2003: 60). Other possible additional disorders include specific language impairment, dyspraxia, dyscalculia, asperger's syndrome as well as psychiatric disorders such as conduct disorder, depression, anxiety and compulsory disorders (Michelsson et al 2003).

There are three approaches to understanding ADHD. The first approach is to see ADHD as a problem of behaviour control and a difficulty in taking the feedback of environment. It can be evaluated how a child's behaviour is deviant from the behaviour of the other children of the same age. In addition, it can be evaluated what environmental factors have an influence on a child's behaviour, and what his own motives and needs are. The second approach sees it as an action connected with information processing: as a child's ability to stay aroused, focus his/her attention long enough and his/her ability to choose relevant stimulus and ability to keep pursuing actively. The third approach is to understand it as a dysfunction of executive functioning and self-talk, and the aim is to help a child to develop this self-talk. (Aro et al 2001: 150-151). The rationale behind this approach is that language has a significant impact on the regulation of feelings and behaviour. A child's ability to understand language and express himself/herself with language is a prerequisite for the ability to understand and comply with the rules which are needed for behaviour control and the regulation of feelings. (Aro et al 2001: 152)

### 3.4.2. Implications for teaching and learning

Attention is a prerequisite for learning. It is important to be able to select relevant stimuli and stay focused as long as necessary for a task to be finished. (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 120-121) Thus, it is clear that an ADHD child's inability to concentrate on his /her learning and tasks and the fact that s/he is easily distracted by external stimuli can endanger his/her learning. If his/her behaviour and requirements for learning environment, learning styles and methods are not taken into account at

school, it is not only his/ her learning that is in danger but the learning of the whole group. A child with ADHD can talk excessively, wander around and easily disturb others in the class (DSM-IV cited in Lyytinen 2005). Moreover, it is also important for the sake of a teacher's own coping with the work that the teacher crosses his/her own comfort zone, which usually means relying heavily on her/his own learning style or school books, which still not today take into account enough different learners.

When teaching ADHD children, one of the crucial issues to bear in mind is the importance of motivation. When tasks or topics are novel, exciting or interesting an ADHD child does not usually have problems to concentrate (Smith et al 2012: 271, Numminen & Sokka 2009: 123) but in boring situations and in situations in which a child does not have any options s/he has difficulties to pay attention (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 123, Aro et al 2001: 157). Since children with ADHD are easily distracted by external stimuli, distracting things should be kept to a minimum in learning situations (Aro et al 2001: 157, Michelsson et al 2003: 93) and materials should be kept clear and only one type of a task on the same page (Aro et al 2001: 157). However, there is some evidence that some stimulus which would be thought to be distracting for ADHD learners such as listening to music while doing tasks, would actually help them to achieve better because the stimulus helps them to concentrate better (Barkley 2008: 58-59). Thus, the question is how much of limiting details in materials is suitable enough without making them boring for learners with ADHD, who need stimulus in order to be motivated. However, it needs to be taken into consideration that motivational materials and tasks should not be too difficult or too easy, that is, materials should be tiered to suit the needs of an individual learner. In addition, these learners have a need to move (Rief 2005: 186) and they benefit from curriculum which enables doing and not requires them to sit and listen long periods of time (Smith et al 2012: 274). They also benefit from a combination of methods involving multisensory strategies and student choices (Rief 2005: 53). However, too many choices should be avoided (Aro et al 2001: 157). "Instruction that enables students to be highly engaged, involved, and interacting with their peer is critical in the classroom - especially for students with ADHD" (Rief 2005: 30)

The requirement for learning experiences to be novel, exiting and interesting and involving as well as integrating kinaesthetic-tactile elements explain why school books do not cater for ADHD learners very well. Most of the school books are too predictable, sometimes following very strict repeating format from lesson to lesson and most of them do not take account of the needs of kinaesthetic-tactile learners enough (see also Pänkäläinen 2012). It is good to remember that we do not always learn what we try to learn, but what we do (Kristiansen 2002: 121). Moreover, children with ADHD need more kinaesthetic-tactile type of doing as well, not only elaboration of sentences.

This material package caters for learners with ADHD by providing them with motivational material which teaches language through stories. Stories usually interest all children. The material also provides multisensory activities allowing learners to use visual, auditory and tactile-kinaesthetic channels. The use of a variety of tactile materials connected to the stories but also activities which allow moving in the classroom caters for the needs of learners with ADHD. In my experience pupils with attention deficit may show inability to follow the text in their book or complete exercises in them but using activities which enable some sort of movement draws their attention to the task. In addition, some attempt has been made to involve children in pronunciation tasks or tactile activities while listening to the stories, which hopefully helps to keep them activated during listening and not to get easily bored. The books have pictures to support listening. The material is also differentiated. Thus, there is a choice of an optimal level of difficulty. However, a teacher should know her/ his pupils to know which level of challenge a learner needs and even modify the level further if needed. An attempt has been made to make the handouts to look clear and usually provide only one task on a sheet. In addition, the stories are linked to learners own life as far as possible and choices are given to them for example in open-ended activities. In addition, there is no need for everyone to finish all the activities.

Since learners with ADHD also have problems with executive functioning, which can manifest itself in problems with starting and fishing work, in difficulty finding relevant information in texts and lacking suitable learning strategies (Numminen & Sokka 2009: 111, 121), this need for strategies has been acknowledged in this

material. This material package attempts to teach strategies for listening and reading comprehension. In addition, these learners would benefit from additional behaviour modification interventions (Barkley 2008) but they are beyond the scope of this material package.

### 3.5. The more able, gifted and talented
- a challenge to learning and teaching?

There have been many attempts to define the more able, gifted and talented as well. At the beginning of 20th century giftedness was understood as the same as intelligence, and Binet & Simon published the first intelligence test in 1905. Until the present day many other theories have been introduced to define giftedness and talent in aim to broaden the concept to include other aspects than just IQ. (Uusikylä 2000)

The intelligence tests were seen to have advantages such as they predicted well success at school, and were seen as a helpful tool, which they still are, to find gifted children. That was the purpose they were originally designed for. However, they were criticized for not identifying every gift and talent, and although being able to predict success at school, they will not predict success later in life. Nevertheless, they are seen as an objective method to measure the academic ability compared to other methods, but bearing in mind their limitations, they should not be used as an only method to find gifted and talented children. (Uusikylä 2000:40-43)

As a response to the traditional intelligence tests, which have usually measured logical-mathematical and linguistic abilities, other theories have been introduced (Uusikylä 2000: 36-37). In Gardner's theory (2004) the intelligence is a broader concept which includes intelligences that are not taken into account in the traditional tests. His theory of multiple intelligences comprises eight different intelligences: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinaesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalistic. According to Gardner the intelligences are relatively independent but they correlate with each others. The intelligence profiles of different people differ from each others. (Gardner 1983) The implication of Gardner's theory

for teaching is that people have one or more preferred learning styles and people would benefit if these learning styles were integrated into teaching and learning (Tunnicliffe 2010: 20-21). Instead of paying attention only to whether a child is gifted or talented, that theory draws attention to how the child is gifted or talented. (Tunnicliffe 2010).

Some other theories include in the concept of giftedness creativity, motivation or task commitment and the importance of environment (Renzulli 1981, Gagne 2004). Other theories explain that giftedness is also defined in a cultural and historical context and to be gifted in adult life does not mean the same as being gifted as a child. As an adult you need to specialize in something but you also need a great amount of creativity, hard work and stamina. (Uusikylä 2000) Giftedness in children and young people is usually measured by school achievement and in comparison with their age group (Gagne 2004) whereas adult giftedness is measured by products for example scientific innovations. (Tolan n.d.)

In Renzulli's model (1981) he identifies three interdependent factors which have influence on the optimum performance of a gifted person: above average ability, creativity and task commitment. Lack of the task commitment may explain why some gifted pupils result in underachievement. In some cases the reason might be that the gifted learn things so easily that they do not learn to work hard and thus are not ready to face the challenges met in life after formal education. (Tunnicliffe 2010: 21-22) That is why it is important to teach the gifted and talented the importance of effort if you want to accomplish something. Thus, they need opportunities to learn how to learn and how to think through and even around obstacles rather than achieve success without effort. (Bates & Munday 2005.42)

According to Sternberg (Sternberg 2003) there are three types of giftedness: *analytic, synthetic* and *practical giftedness*. All people show combinations of these abilities but the gifted show high amount of giftedness in one or more area of these abilities. Analytic giftedness means the capability of dissecting a problem and understanding of the meaning of its parts. This type of giftedness is usually measured by traditional intelligence tests. People with synthetic giftedness are intuitive and creative and have insight. Having the ability to see more problems in

the tasks of traditional intelligence tests than there are supposed to be, they do not usually succeed in them. With practical giftedness is meant that a person can apply his or her analytic or synthetic giftedness in every day situations. Analytic giftedness is valued in education but later in life, especially in working life, own ideas are appreciated as well but it is also important to be able to realize them in practice usually presupposing the ability to work with other people. (Sternberg 2003: 89-90) Unfortunately, creative and intuitive thinking seldom thrives at school at the level of their potential (Uusikylä 2000: 59). However, to succeed in life, it is important to be able to coordinate these abilities and to know when to apply each of them. The contribution of this theory to education is that when teaching is done according the successful intelligence condition (analytic, synthetic or practical), the students do better than when not taught so. (Sternberg 2003:97)

Are they called gifted, talented or both or does it matter? According to the definition of English government gifted and talented pupils are "pupils who achieve or have the ability to achieve, at a level significantly in advance of the average for their year group" (DfEE cited in Bates & Munday 2005:4) There is some variation between the definition of the gifted and talented. In England with gifted children are meant the pupils who exhibit high ability in one or more academic subject area whereas talented children are defined as the ones who excel in applied subjects such as arts, design and technology and sport or leadership (Bates & Munday 2005:4). With the gifted and talented are meant the pupils who show all around ability in various subjects (Bates & Munday 2005:4).

According to Gagne (2004) gifts are innate, and through developmental process in formal and informal learning, through maturation or practice, influenced by intrapersonal catalysts such as motivation, personality, physical characteristics, volition and self-management and environmental catalysts such as surroundings, people, provision and events, produce talents. Talents are understood as outstanding and systematically developed skills characteristic of a particular field of human activity. The environmental factors can either have positive or negative influence on talent development and finally chance has influence on all the environmental factors. Gagne identifies four main groups of natural abilities or gifts: intellectual, creative,

socio-affective and sensorimotor. Being classified as gifted or talented a person needs to be among the top 10% of the age group. (Gagne 2004)

In their new model of giftedness and talent Hong and Milgram (2008) distinguish between two talents, *expert talent* and *creative talent*, the major components of their model. With expert talent they mean "highly specialized in-depth knowledge, techniques, and skills in a particular domain" (Hong & Milgam 2008:151). Expert talent can be demonstrated in an academic or intellectual domain as well in applied skills such as music, sport etc. Creative talent has similar characteristics as expert talent but the major difference "is evidenced in the production of original, unique, and valuable products or performances in a particular domain" (Hong & Milgram 2008: 152). These talents are developed based on three contextual components: cognitive abilities, personal-psychological attributes and environmental-social factors, which also function as foundations for realizing potential talent. Their theory of giftedness differs from other conzeptualizations of giftedness by including the concept of level or continuum of talent development. There are levels from minimal to profound in the continuum of talent development, which is a continuous process meaning that the degree of talent manifestation changes when an individual works hard to reach his or her potential. An important implication of this for education is that all students should be given opportunities to develop their talent to reach their potential and achieve as high as possible for them. Not everybody will be able to reach the profound level, which is reached by few, but everybody can progress within their potential limits. (Hong and Milgram 2008)

Despite the differences in definitions for gifts and talents the importance of distinction between them can be summarized as follows: " Whether these abilities are termed gifts, talents or even aptitudes is less important than their being described and valued equally" (Tunnicliffe 2010:23)

Tunnicliffe (2010: 19) suggests that among gifted pupils could be distinguished between able (IQ 120+), gifted (IQ 135+) and exceptionally gifted (IQ 150+) pupils. He also questions if they should be distinguished on the basis of IQ because the exceptionally gifted would need different provision from the gifted as well as the able need different provision from the pupils scoring 90. (Tunnicliffe 2010)

According to Clark (2002) (cited in Smith et al 2012: 411) there are different ability levels among the gifted: moderately gifted, highly gifted and exceptionally gifted students. The characteristics of highly gifted include faster thinking and tendency to be more focussed on their interests and have more energy. The exceptionally gifted tend to have different value structure and to be interested in subjects of meta-nature. They also prefer to spend more time alone. (Clark 2002: 63 cited in Smith et al 2012: 411)

The US federal definition (1993) of giftedness is quite similar to the English definition: "Children and youth with outstanding talent perform, or show the potential for performing, at remarkably high levels of accomplishment when compared with others of their age, experience, or environment. These children and youth exhibit high-performance capability in intellectual, creative, and/ or artistic areas, possess an unusual leadership capability, or excel in specific academic fields. They require services or activities not ordinarily provided by the schools" (cited in Kirk et al 2006: 329). In both definitions the giftedness is not only seen as a high achievement but also as a potential to achieve higher than the average of their year group. Hong & Milgram (2008) point out that the fact how giftedness is defined has impact on how the gifted are identified, and what kind of special educational opportunities they are provided.

In Finland there is no explicit mention of giftedness in legislation (Basic Education Act 2012: 422 § 4). Moreover, it states that education should be organised so that every pupil receives instruction and support according to his/ her developmental level and needs, so that it promotes his/her healthy growth and development. The AANCC (2010), although describing differentiation as a means of taking into account different abilities in teaching and learning, does not explicitly mention giftedness. However, in the new National Core Curriculum (2014) giftedness is mentioned at the point where it describes ways of organizing teaching for example studying independent of year groups as a way of supporting giftedness or preventing dropping out (NCC 2014: 38), and using distance learning for example as a way of providing support for the development of a special gift (NCC 2014: 39). In addition, the NCC 2014 states that differentiation is based on a pupil's needs and his/her own possibilities to plan his/her own studying and to choose working methods and to

progress individually. When choosing the working methods pupils' individual and developmental differences are taken into account. In the foreign language section of the NCC 2014 it is stated that teaching is arranged so that the learners who progress faster than others or those who already know the language can advance. (NCC 2014: 219, 348)

Traditionally, the ethos of Finnish basic education has been a common and equal education for all. However, the current legislation provides the basis for taking into account different abilities in education and the latest amendments and additions to the NCC (2010) emphasise the importance of differentiation as a means to provide suitable learning experiences for all. The new NCC 2014 stresses differentiation even more by stating that differentiation is the pedagogical basis of all education. As a matter of fact, it should not be a matter of choice anymore taking into account the gifted and talented at school if you interpret the law correctly. In Finland, teaching groups are mixed ability groups, so all teachers should be aware of how to provide suitable learning opportunities for the gifted and talented as well. Although fixed settings are not a part of Finnish school system, according to the AANCC (2010) flexible grouping of pupils is allowed. However, not necessarily enough attention is paid to the able, gifted and talented pupils at school yet, and more precisely certain areas of giftedness and talent such as music and sport have probably attained more attention. In basic education there is a variety of schools which emphasise certain areas of giftedness and talent and more optional courses are provided in those areas. However, these opportunities are not equally spread across the country, schools in bigger cities providing more opportunities.

Hong and Milgram (2008: 4) claim that the importance of paying attention to the education of the gifted and talented is to prevent talent loss because "societies that do not make every effort to assure that the potential talents of young people are utilized are losing their most valuable natural resource – human capital" (Hong & Milgram 2008: 4). Therefore, the identification and enhancement of potential talents should not be considered as a luxury item, and if we do not see talent loss as a problem, we do not give enough attention to prevent it (Hong and Milgram 2008: 6). In the new NCC 2014 the gifted and talented are acknowledged better than before

but only time will tell how it will be implemented in practice. Individual learning, which is already in use in some schools, is one option.

Despite the importance of the utility point of view, the children's and students' point of view should not be forgotten. One of the basic aims of the education is to create a positive self-perception and self-belief which places a priority to emotional, moral and social development (Uusikylä 2000: 152). A sound personality is a requisite for the best development of gifts and talents (Uusikylä 2000: 152). Moreover, all children and young people have rights for the joy of learning and not having to spend years at school which does not offer any joy in learning for them.

### 3.5.1. Implications for teaching and learning

The gifted usually have high IQ and it is shown in research to be the best predictor of academic achievement (Jensen 1980, 1998 cited in Gagne 2004: 137). However, in Finland pupils are not required to do any type of intelligence test, thus other means of identifying the gifted and talented are needed. Identification methods may include the use of class work, test and assignment results, observation to identify the gifted and talented as well as teachers using their own judgement to identify the gifted and talented (Bates & Munday 2005: 9). Valuable information is also received from parents and carers, peers and from pupils themselves (Bates & Munday 2005: 10). In addition, there are certain characteristics of the gifted and talented pupils which might help to identify them at school: a wide vocabulary and excellent reading skills, curiosity and questioning attitude, intensive concentration on issues which interest them, preference for complex thought, ability for abstract thought and often using higher order thinking skills, excellent memory, possessing wide general knowledge, impatience with schoolwork lacking real purpose, preferring individual work instead of group work and preference for company of older pupils and adults (Bates & Munday 2005). In addition, they may be creative and have many unusual ideas and vivid imagination (Gargiulo 2012: 553). Tunnicliffe (2010: 37) lists characteristics of gifted learners in the classroom:

> *Memory and knowledge*: they know more, they know what they know better and they can use it more efficiently.
> *Self-regulation*: they guide and monitor their own thinking on task.

> *Speed of thought processes*: they spend longer on planning but arrive at answers more quickly. Their solutions are often shorter and/or more abstract, like those of experts.
> *Problem presentation and categorisation*: they extend working beyond the information given, identifying missing information, excluding irrelevance and grasping the essentials of the task more quickly.
> *Procedural knowledge*: they organise their approaches to problem-solving and are flexible in switching approaches where necessary.
> *Flexibility*: they are able to draw inferences, see alternative configurations and adopt alternative strategies.
> *Curiosity*: they ask questions, play with ideas, initiate projects, invent approaches.
> *Preference for complexity*: they increase the complexity and elaborate on tasks to increase interest. (Tunnicliffe 2010: 37)

However, it is good to remember that these checklists of characteristics show characteristics that the gifted and talented may show or may not (Tunnicliffe 2010: 35). It may be easy to identify the gifted and talented who demonstrate high achievement, but teachers should not forget that giftedness might be hidden by underachievement. The potential might be disguised by disruptive behaviour, lack of motivation resulting in poor written work and doing just the minimum to get by and being bored at school, restlessness and inattention and escaping into a private world (Bates & Munday 2005: 13-14). Motivation, self-regulation and goal valuation are crucial factors which differentiate gifted underachievers from the gifted achievers (McCoach & Siegle 2003). According them teachers "should assess whether these students value the goals of school and whether they are motivated to attain those goals. Students must either value the work they have been given or value the outcome (extrinsic rewards) of that work" (McCoach & Siegle 2003: 1). Bates and Munday (2005: 12) remind us about school's responsibility to identify and overcome learning barriers of individual children.

Traditionally, the more able and gifted children have been left without much attention at school because they were believed to be able to naturally reach their potential. Thus, the more able and gifted is probably the group failing to reach their potential at school. (Bates & Munday 2005: 1) Artificial learning ceilings should be removed so that all children can make continuous progress in learning (Roberts & Robersts cited in Gargiulo 2012: 55), and that all pupils can demonstrate what they can, and that everybody is given a chance to demonstrate their potential (Bates &

Munday 2005: 3). Thus, differentiation should not only be seen as differentiating within a grade but also as differentiating above a grade. According to Bates and Munday (2005: 3) schools which have focussed on the needs of the gifted and talented in the regular classrooms by raising teachers' expectations of pupils' potential have had positive impact on achievement and self-esteem of all pupils. It is important for all children to learn to tackle challenging learning tasks (Garguilo 2012: 555).

The more able, gifted and talented should not be asked to do more the same, for example writing more pages or completing extra handouts just because of their capability of doing so. Many of them get bored at school caused by lack of real challenge and they learn to be lazy and are not willing to make effort, unless the topic is interesting. (Bates & Munday 2005: 63-64) The gifted and talented should be given possibility to use higher order thinking skills, which should be seen beneficial to all pupils, not just for the gifted and talented (Bates & Munday 2005: 67). According to Robinson et al (2007: 101 cited in Smith et al 2012: 428) "in teaching for thinking, the concern is not how many answers students know, but what they do when they do not know; the goal is not merely to reproduce knowledge, but to create knowledge and grow in cognitive abilities". The gifted and talented should be given a possibility to practice their potential leadership skills as well. A mixed ability group provides a possibility for that but if they are placed with older pupils there is not such a possibility. (Uusikylä 2000:172)

An important factor that have an influence on children's and adults motivation and effort is whether they see intelligence as a fixed trait or malleable. Despite that people differ in abilities, malleable intelligence means that intelligence can be increased and developed through effort. (Robinson 2002 cited in Kirk et al 2006: 338) Individuals that see intelligence as malleable are better able to accept that effort and hard work is needed for success. (Dweck 2000 cited in Kirk et al 2006:338)

In this material package the terms the more able is used to refer to the group which needs extensive tasks. The most important issue in practice is not whether these pupils called more able, gifted or talented but how they are taken into account in teaching and learning. Catering for all different levels of giftedness within this

material package is not possible, because in practice individualization would be needed to cater for every pupil of different levels of giftedness to reach their potential. However, this material package also aims to provide extensive tasks which require above average language skills of fourth graders as well as higher order thinking. If there is a need for more individualization for highly or exceptionally gifted pupils, literature provides a variety of possibilities for that purpose. This material package is just a start in that direction. However, when talking about above average skills in languages, especially in English, the reason for above average skills is not necessarily a highly gifted pupil but a pupil and the family might have been living abroad. Nevertheless, it needs to be taken into account in teaching and learning and suitable tasks and materials need to be provided for those pupils as well.

## 3.6. General implications for teaching and learning

When it comes to different learners, there are general implications for teaching and learning such as motivation, differentiation, skills and strategies and learning styles which can have huge impact on learning. In the following sections they are discussed in more detail.

### 3.6.1. Motivation

The importance of motivation for learners with specific learning difficulties as well as for the more able and gifted has been stated in previous sections, especially the importance of maintaining motivation when learning is arduous. This material package attempts to add motivational aspects in language lessons in the form of content, method and materials. However, there is more to motivation than just the aforementioned issues of which teachers should be aware of.

According to Dörnyei (1994), L2 motivation can be conceptualized in three levels: language level, learner level and learning situation level (cited in Dörnyei 2008). As far as the language level is concerned, learners usually understand the importance of learning English, after all, they are surrounded by it, at least to some extent, in their

spare time. However, the learning of it in school settings might not prove to be so motivating for all.

Learner related aspects can be explained by expectance-value theory but also by attribution theory and self-efficacy beliefs (Aunola 2002: 106). Expectations of success in a task have an impact on motivation, whereas expectations of success are influenced by learners self-efficacy beliefs concerning the task, that is, his/her understanding of his/her own abilities needed for the task as well as his/her opinion of the difficulty of the task. Strong or weak self-efficacy beliefs of a learner and to what s/he attributes success or failure explain why some learners try hard despite failure and some give up easily. A learner who has strong self-efficacy beliefs tries hard and faced with difficulties tries even harder attributing failure to not trying enough. (Aunola 2002: 106) A learner with specific learning difficulties needs a great amount of support for strengthening his/her self-efficacy beliefs by aiding him/her to succeed in learning. This can be taken into account in the form of differentiation but still by making sure that a learner feels a sense of achievement because of trying hard, not just because the task was easy. (Pollari & Koppinen 2010: 128) Underlying this notion is the idea that individual's beliefs have an impact on his/her motivation and achievement: whether they believe that intelligence is fixed or malleable, or whether they believe they are doing tasks to learn or to show their smartness. Individuals that see intelligence as malleable accept that effort and hard work is needed for success. They value learning, enjoy effort and challenges and try hard when faced with difficulties, whereas students with a fixed view of intelligence believe that working hard is evidence of not being smart and in case of not doing well effort cannot compensate intelligence. In addition, they usually choose easier tasks to show their smartness over learning. (Dweck 2002: 37, 43). According to Dweck (2002), it is possible to change these believes but teachers and parents should pay attention to the way of praising children. Praising them for effort instead of being smart or intelligent helps them to value effort and learning and understand that success in a task does not tell about their intelligence. (Dweck 2002)

The learning situation level can be divided further into teacher specific, course specific and group specific motivational components (Dörnyei 1994, cited in Dörnyei 2008: 18). Teachers' general beliefs about learning and their expectations

for learners guide teachers' actions and thus have an impact on learners' motivation and achievement. A teacher's way of giving support for a learner is influenced by his/her beliefs of possibilities of instruction and positive expectations of a learner's own possibilities. A teacher's expectations for learners predict changes in their achievement and motivation. (Aunola 2002: 117) Thus, it is important to have "sufficiently high expectations for what the students can achieve" (Dörnyei 2008: 35). Moreover, it is important for teachers not give up trying to teach and support learners with specific learning difficulties on the pretext of not having enough time to care about tens of learners unwilling or incapable of learning. As Pollari and Koppinen (2010: 51) point out that for an insightful teacher there are no hopeless cases of learners and usually around as hopeless stigmatised learners there are rather adults surrendered to hopelessness. However, "cultivating the latent ability of every student is the central task of all education" (Gunn et al 2007:10). Requisites for that are a good relationship with learners and a teacher showing that s/he cares about learners, which are crucial aspects of teacher related motivational components as well (Dornyei 2008: 36-38), let alone a teacher's own enthusiasm for the subject and dedication to teaching it (Dörnyei 2008: 32). According to Gunn et al (2007: 13), life-altering teachers build on their students' strengths by positive and encouraging feedback and not so much concentrating on errors or needed improvements. At least those things have to be done with care. (Gunn et al 2007: 13)

As far as unwilling learners are concerned, Pollari and Koppinen (2010: 45) point out that all children want to learn but not every one is provided with motivating learning tasks. The human brain has a natural ability to learn. Despite this many learners fail to learn many things at school since the brains of learners are not invited to learn only by asking learners to listen and being passive recipients of information. (Gunn et al 2007: 7, 19) The reason for this is that human beings are, from very early on, innately motivated to be active and problem-solving learners (Gunn et al 2007: 48). According to Gunn et al (2007), the needed magical words used either explicitly or implicitly, to invite learners to learn are: "See if you can figure out this?" (Gunn et al 2007: 48, 50-51). "When students are invited by their teacher to be involved in inventive, expansive, self-directed activities, learning becomes play. Learners become motivated, absorbed, and even enthralled. When there is a sense of mystery or intrigue, the absorption is even better, and serious learning results". (Gunn et al

2007: 16) In other words, what learners need is challenge and enjoyable learning experiences (Dörnyei 2008: 76, 72) and less teacher-centered lessons (Aunola 2002).

In addition to keep learners motivated, it is important to avoid monotony in learning process by varying tasks, learning materials, presentation style and learners' involvement (Dörnyei 2008: 74). The importance of the content of learning tasks to be interesting should not be overlooked. The value of a task for a learner and how interesting a task is, have influence on a learner's commitment, especially on long-term commitment. Although a child has high self-efficacy beliefs, s/he will not be committed to a task, unless it is interesting. (Aunola 2002: 108) The dangers of not being interested are that the aims of learning are not achieved, at least in the long-run and it may result in disruptive behaviour (Dörnyei 2008: 75). Moreover, the Additions and Amendments to National Core Curriculum of 2010 state that attention should be paid to pupils' interests by linking the contents and skills to be learned to for pupils meaningful experiences and working methods (AANCC 2010).

Many teachers feel that their aim is to cover all the things in school books. However, many school books almost ignore different learners (see also Pänkäläinen 2012), even the differentiated English books (see also Erkintalo 2008). Another problem is that learners do not perceive school books motivating enough to be used as sole learning material (see also Pihko 2007, Jalkanen & Ruuska 2007). However, it is possible to cover most of the things to be learned in school books by using other materials and learning tasks as well, although it might result in that all the texts will not be covered. But does it matter in the long-run? The world is full of texts to be exploited. In addition to the aforementioned challenge, intrigue and enjoyable learning experiences, other means to make learning interesting and motivating are: connecting topics with things that learners value and are interested in, adding some novelty, exotic or fantasy elements in the content or personalizing tasks by connecting them to learners' own life (Dornyei 2008: 77). In addition games allowing competition are usually motivating but also asking learners to produce some kind of tangible outcomes such as posters or information brochure (Dornyei 2008: 78), especially if they can use their creativity to decorate their outcome.

Supporting learning environment is important for all learners, but especially for learners with learning difficulties in which their needs are acknowledged (Kormos & Smith 2012: 79). It is especially important that every one is allowed to participate in a class despite his/her ability, and that the others are not laughing at mistakes in that they are natural part of learning. However, in my experience, this needs to be taught to primary school children very firmly right from the beginning of language studies.

According to Deci & Ryan (cited in Aunola 2002: 118), in class rooms where teachers were aiming to support and develop learner autonomy by their teaching, learners were more motivated and had higher self-efficacy beliefs than in teacher-centered class rooms. Negative factors affecting motivation, self-efficacy beliefs and values are the competiveness of a learning group, treating learners differently according to their abilities, rewards and public assessment or criticism, whereas positive factors affecting motivation are teachers' supporting attitude towards learner autonomy and self-efficacy beliefs as well as the avoidance of emphasizing performance. (Aunola 2002: 118) Thus, teachers need to be careful what to reward and how. If the best performance is always rewarded, what chance do the weaker ones have? Positive and encouraging feedback can be given for every one for their effort and strengths.

The aim of this material package is to provide teachers and learners variety in language teaching and learning adding novelty, fantasy and somewhat exotic and intriguing elements to language classes. In addition, it aims to provide enjoyable learning experiences for all. Using authentic children's literature also provides challenge and invites learners to learn, especially if the vocabulary is not taught beforehand but requires learners to struggle to the meaning. However, in order it not to turn out to be an insurmountable difficulty, learners are guided in listening and reading processes and they are taught to use reading and listening strategies. It also exploits children's natural interest in stories. An attempt has also been made to link the learning tasks to the life of learners. In addition to listening and reading, there is variation in learner involvement in the form of individual, pair and group work. The material also acknowledges different learners providing learning experiences through different sensory pathways and the material is differentiated so that it provides successful learning experiences for different learners.

### 3.6.2. Differentiation

According to the Amendments and Additions to National Core Curriculum of 2010 differentiation is the primary means of taking into account the needs of a teaching group and diversity of pupils. Furthermore, according the NCC 2014 differentiation is the pedagogical basis of all education. Attention should be paid to different learning styles and differences in pace of learning and different abilities and interests as well as affective needs linked to emotions and motivation. By means of differentiation it is possible to provide enough challenge and successful learning experiences for everybody as well as possibilities for pupils to develop and learn by using their strengths. (AANCC 2010) The aim of differentiation is to support learners' motivation and self-esteem (NCC 2014: 30). As Lyytinen & Ahonen (2005:41) point out the question is not just about learning itself but child's experience of her/himself as a learner. It has a great impact on his or her school motivation or motivation for educating himself or herself. That is why it is crucial to attempt to support a child's own trust for his own possibilities. (Lyytinen & Ahonen 2005: 41)

According to Fletcher et al (2009) the first step of intervention is to increase the time spent on a task (Fletcher et al 2009: 344). However, quite often teachers feel the pressure of the curriculum, which in many cases equals school books, to progress at such speed that the requirements are met. The curriculum is designed according to the abilities of the majority of pupils (Kuikka et al 2010:31). For some it is too challenging and for some it does not provide challenge enough (Kuikka et al 2010: 30). This means that differentiation is needed at both ends of the continuum (Kuikka et al 2010: 30, Smith et al 2012).

There are three dimensions of differentiation: width, depth and pace of leaning. The targets of differentiation can focus on content, teaching materials and methods, working methods and the amount and difficulty of tasks at school and home. Other ways of differentiation include giving options, regulating the use of space, flexible ways of grouping pupils, exploiting informal learning environments. Some pupils might need alternative ways to show their skills and knowledge. (AANCC 2010**)** For example instead of a written exam a pupil can show what s/he has learnt orally and

extra time might be needed as well. (Huhtanen 2011: 113) According to the NCC 2014 differentiation is based on learners' needs and his/her possibilities to plan his/her own studies, choose different working methods and progress individually. In choosing working methods individual and developmental differences are taken into account. (NCC 2014: 30)

The differentiation can be used at all levels of support: general, intensified and special levels of support (Huhtanen 2011: 113). However, it is important to note that in order to individualize the syllabus, decision of special education is needed in writing provided by the education provider (ANCC 2010, NCC 2014).

Differentiated instructions might be needed as well. According to Smith et al (2012) learners' problems to understand directions and difficulties to process verbal information fast enough as well as to remember all the information are more likely the reasons for a failure, not necessarily because they could not do it (Smith et al 2012: 179). That is why it is important that teachers "consider the level of language used and their rate of presentation; they may need to add a demonstration to directions or check for understanding of directions and possibly repeat them individually" (Smith et al 2012: 179). In language teaching if instructions are given in the target language, demonstrations or other visual support might be needed as well.

Moreover, differentiation can have a positive effect on motivation and behaviour. Too difficult tasks can result in frustration, loss of motivation and disruptive behaviour, whereas too easy tasks might cause boredom, lost motivation and behaviour problems as well. (Flick 2011) According to the NCC 2014 the purposes of differentiation also include safeguarding peaceful learning environment and preventing a need for more support (NCC 2014:30).

A useful tool for differentiation is pre-assessment to see who already knows the content and can demonstrate the skill needed (Gargiulo 2012: 564). Moreover, pre-assessment is a useful tool when a teacher has a new group to teach and does not know his/her learners. More importantly, good knowledge of learners is the basis for differentiation (NCC 2014).

When differentiating the instruction and work for the more able, the level of challenge should be remembered. Challenge does not simply equal more work of the same kind (Heacox 2002: 67). A useful help for differentiation is Bloom's taxonomy including six levels of thinking: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, evaluation and synthesis. The use of Blooms taxonomy also facilitates higher order thinking skills in that it enables the categorization of activities according to their level of challenge and complexity. (Heacox 2002: 68).

In this material package differentiation is taken into account by providing different versions of the same tasks in terms of difficulty. In the easy versions more support is given or the content is limited or both. Another means of differentiation concerning the activities is an open-ended activity type where the outcome defines the level of difficulty. Since the pace of working and learning takes more time for some and differences in abilities can vary greatly, there is a variety of different tasks. Thus, the aim is not that everybody should complete them all. Moreover, it gives a possibility to differentiate level of learning. In addition, the difficulty of the stories increases along the material, part II including stories and activities suitable for those needing differentiation above a year group. In addition, different learning styles are taken into account by including visual, auditory, tactile and kinaesthetic elements in the material.

### 3.6.3. Skills and strategies

According to the Additions and Amendments to the National Core Curriculum (2010:7, NCC 2014) teachers should choose working methods that promote building of structured networks of knowledge, learning of skills and practicing them as well as developing pupils learning strategies and their competence in applying them in new situations.

Although learning difficulties are usually seen stable, according to the new approaches difficulties are primarily seen to be based on inadequate comprehension and learning strategies as well as self-regulation skills of thinking. According to this approach, a person with learning difficulties does not have adequate task specific or

general strategic skills or s/he cannot adapt the skills which s/he already possesses flexible, effectively and independently in learning situations at school. This applies that in addition to knowledge, students should be taught thinking and learning strategies. (Huisman & Nissinen 2005: 43) "Teaching a strategy provides a specific set of steps for thinking strategically, including how to approach difficult and new tasks, guide actions and thoughts, and finish tasks successfully and in a timely manner" (Smith et al 2012: 172). In addition they might need direct instruction how to apply the strategy step by step. (Smith et al 2012: 172)

This insight is acknowledged in this material package by teaching strategies for listening and reading comprehension as well as giving scaffolding instructions for the process. The underlying idea is to promote pupils foreign language listening and reading comprehension skills which are very useful skills in real life.

### 3.6.4. Learning styles

Learning styles can be defined various ways for example as "a particular way in which a person learns" or "an individual's preferred means of acquiring knowledge and skills" (Pritchard 2010: 42). A cognitive style is a related term that can be defined as "a certain approach to problem-solving, based on intellectual schemes of thought" or as "a person's typical approach to learning activities and problem-solving" (Pritchard 2010: 42). However, Mortimore (2008: 6) points out that these two terms have been used mostly as synonyms in literature but states that a learning style is only one part of the cognitive style, the way how a person applies his preferred cognitive style to a learning situation. Instead, a cognitive style "is our relatively consistent way of processing incoming information of all types from the environment" (Mortimore 2008: 97).

There are numerous of different learning style models. Give and Reid (1999 cited in Reid 2005: 52) list factors which are believed to have an impact on learning and on which inventories based on those models usually focus: modality preferences (visual, auditory, tactual or kinaesthetic), personality types, social variables, cognitive processes, movement and laterality (left or right hemisphere activities) and

emotional factors. Some, at least Dunn & Dunn (1978 cited in Dunn et al 1994) and Reid (2005), include environmental factors to these factors influencing learning as well.

According to Dunn (1990:18) ”when students cannot learn the way we teach them, we have to teach them the way they learn”. Acknowledging of different learning styles is seen as a crucial way to facilitate learning in inclusive classrooms. Instead of speaking of learning difficulties, which can actually imply that difficulties are learners' fault, which is not necessarily the case, learners can be said to have learning differences, which need to be taken care of to facilitate learning for all learners despite their learning differences (Reid 2005). Learning difficulties and underachievement are seen to be caused by the fact that traditional teaching, concentrating heavily on auditory and visual input especially after primary school, does not suit to strongly kinaesthetic-tactile learners who in order to learn and remember need more hands-on activities and movement (Prashing 2000: 141-145, 157). The younger the learners are the more important is the kinaesthetic-tactile knowledge in learning experience. The same applies for underachievers such as pupils with learning difficulties, who usually are tactile-kinaesthetic learners or tactile-auditory learners. (Dunn et al 1994)

Teachers should understand that there is not just one way of learning, and relying heaving on text books does not cater for everybody. In fact, tactile learning materials are not easy to include in school books. The need for acknowledgment of different learning styles is also stated in the Additions and Amendments of National Core Curriculum (2010) instructing teachers to guide learners to use suitable learning styles for them. In the NCC 2014 does not exactly mention learning styles, but according to it various working approaches provide enjoyable and motivating learning experiences as well as experimental and active learning approaches and the use of different senses and movement (NCC 2014:30).

To some extent this material package concentrates on modality preferences as a means of multisensory teaching and learning. The multisensory teaching approach was chosen because of many recommendations in the literature it to be used with students with learning difficulties. However, these can be seen just as a one way of

acknowledging learning styles, environmental factors being outside the scope of this material. From experience I know that taking care of learners' differences in preferred sensory modalities makes learning enjoyable and thus takes into account motivational and affective aspects of learning as well. In addition, the social aspect of learning is also acknowledged in this material, but needs for individual working are not forgotten either.

# 4. THE ZONE OF PROXIMAL DEVELOPMENT

The notion of the zone of proximal development (ZPD) originates from Vygotsky, although thereafter there have been several interpretations of it (Lantolf & Thorne 2009: 264). According to Vygotsky (1978), the Zone of proximal development means *"the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers"* (Vygotsky 1978: 86, italics in original). However, the limit to what a child can do in collaboration is set by his/her developmental stage and cognitive abilities (Vygotsky 1982: 185). Originally ZPD referred to children's development but it has been extended to adult learning as well (Tharp & Gallimore 1988: 31). According to Tharp & Gallimore (1988), ZPD can be created for any domain of skill (Tharp & Gallimore 1988: 31) whereas Chaiklin (2003:3) points out that originally according to Vygotsky, ZPD is related to a child's development, not any technical skill or any particular task. In the context of a child's development "Zone of proximal development is a way to refer to both the functions that are developing ontogenetically for a given age period (objective), and a child's current state of development in relation to the functions that ideally need to be realized (subjective)" (Chaiklin 2003:8). In the context of this master's thesis, with development in relation to ZPD, I understand the development of learners' EFL proficiency and the development of their strategy use.

In the context of learning and development related to ZPD, it is the provided assistance to learners and collaboration what matters (Chaiklin 2003:4). According to Vygotsky (1982:186), teaching is good only if it precedes development and facilitates it; that is why optimal teaching happens within learners' ZPD. According to Tharp & Gallimore (1988: 34-38), ZPD can be divided into two stages. The difference being in assistance provided: at stage one by more capable ones and at stage two by the self. At third stage the child has crossed the ZDP and the performance has developed and automatized. "The lifelong learning by any individual is made up of these same regulated, ZPD sequences – from other assistance to self-assistance - recurring over and over again for the development of new capacities" (Tharp and Gallimore 1988: 38). A teacher can provide assistance or scaffolding for example by giving information or feedback, by using reminders, modelling or regulating the difficulty of tasks and by asking questions to guide a learner. The scaffolding has to be done in the right time and in the right amounts and gradually removed. (Woolfolk 2005: 57)

It is important to acknowledge that not all the learners in the same class have the same zone of proximal development. In the context of learning difficulties or learning differences, the ZPD has a special significance in that in order to support the learning of different learners it is of great importance to assess their ZPD in order to provide the support within it. By assessing the ZPD of the learners, it is easier to provide them differentiated learning materials and the support, in that way the learning and motivation of all learners can be promoted. Moreover, in this way, teachers can create conditions for potential development of specific forms in the future (Lantolf & Thorne 2009: 267). The ZPD of the more able should also be acknowledged and promote their learning, who are many times left without challenge and unattended, after all they do not struggle with learning. Another point to consider is that the width of ZPD is not the same for every learner. For example with assistance some children are capable of solving tasks which are meant for much older children and others tasks that are meant only one year older (Vygotsky 1982:184).

This material package aims to provide material for different learners taking into account that the more able can manage more without assistance than regular fourth

graders as well as in order to reach the other end of their ZPD, they need more challenge than regular fourth graders. That is why the material package contains stories of linguistically higher level without many supporting pictures and activites which require more inferring abilities. In addition, they can profit from the other, linguistically more sophisticated picture books with differentiated tasks. With assistance children with wider ZPD will probably profit more from these stories and tasks than children with narrower ZPD. However, I am convinced that all fourth graders can profit from these stories, at least to some extent, within their ZPD, the other end of the stories notwithstanding.

Assessing learners' ZPD, which is not constant, requires good knowledge of the learners and their skills. However, the large number of learners in the class poses a challenge for a teacher to assess every one's ZPD (Tharp & Gallimore 1988: 42). By differentiating, for example by giving different levels of difficulty of the same activity or open-ended activity, it is easier to provide challenge for all.

In the context of this material package, I, as a creator of this material package, cannot assess all potential learners' ZPD. Even so, as a qualified teacher having taught fourth graders, I have gained insight into language skills of fourth graders: what is expected from them and what you can expect from them. Based on that experience and knowledge I can say that most of the language of these stories is above the proficiency of regular fourth graders to manage them without assistance. Since there are stories of different levels and differentiated activites and with the help of the teacher's instructions, however, it can be said that they serve different ZPDs. However, it should be noted that the other end of the stories is out of regular fourth graders' ZPD, even with the help of the teacher. The ultimate responsibility is left for the teacher to assess which activities are suitable for each learner or whether they still need modification, and how much each learner needs support.

# 5. THE UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF THE MATERIAL PACKAGE

## 5.1. Target group

The target group of this material package is fourth graders, 9-10-year-old learners in comprehensive school. Nevertheless, this material package could be used for teaching pupils learning English as A2 a year later. This material package is designed bearing in mind a mixed ability group and the need for differentiation. This material package contains extensive tasks for the more able, so in that sense these stories, at least the stories of the second part with the extensive tasks could be used with older pupils at primary school level as well. The goal is to cater for different learners although it is not possible to say that this material package would cater every single learner, because in real life every group is different and every learner individual with or without a diagnosis. This material package cannot take into consideration the fact that in real life there may be pupils who have individual education plans and individualized syllabus in English. In those cases more consideration for the amount and extent of learning might be needed.

The fourth graders are still very beginners having studied English only one year and their ability to understand English and express themselves in English is very limited. This sets limitations to the material and the task types. However, with the help of pictures, the teacher and extra linguistic means they can be guided to understand the stories.

The needs of young learners are taken into account in the material package. First, an attempt is made to choose literature suitable for young beginners. Authentic material being in question, compromises were needed, concerning the level of the age books were aimed at, due to the proficiency level of the learners. Second, the activities are chosen in an attempt to integrate different learning styles especially taking account of children's style of learning: possibility of moving, not having to sit still the whole lesson, although listening and reading stories usually means sitting still. Third, creative elements such as drawing pictures are integrated into the written exercises. Taking into account children's limited ability to express themselves linguistically, it gives them additional means of expressing themselves. It also functions as a way to

personalise their material and learning and hopefully makes the language more memorable.

## 5.2. The aims of the material package

The first aim of this material package is to teach pupils skills how to cope in the situations, when they are not given or pre-taught words in advance, in other words, how to cope with unfamiliar language elements using context, previous knowledge and extra linguistic elements to arrive at the meaning. As Parkinson & Thomas (2004:5) point out that pre-teaching words and structures and giving too much information about text beforehand should be avoided in that it hinders the development of reading skills including coping with the unfamiliar language. In addition, the goal is to teach them to learn to cope with the fact that you do not need to know every single word to understand the meaning of a piece of reading or listening. In other words, the aim is to guide the process with reading and listening strategies. Authentic children's literature and beginner learners being in question, that is necessary. The goal of teaching these skills is that it will hopefully teach learners and especially struggling learners how to cope in those situations. The amount of the language they will learn is probably smaller but if they learn skills, they will be able to build on them in the future. The reason for choosing to introduce authentic stories at the primary school level is the evidence of the benefits of using real books in language learning (see chapter 2). I also hope that learning to listen and read authentic children literature as early as possible will help to motivate pupils to continue reading in English later on their own.

The second aim is to teach language. In this context, it means teaching of words and language awareness and to express themselves in English with their limited skills. The vocabulary and language exploited at the practice level are chosen on the grounds of them being crucial for the story and/or the vocabulary is usually taught in the fourth grade or the language is related to learners' life. Grammar is not taught explicitly, although the stories might show grammatical structures learned in the fourth grade or later in context. Instead of teaching grammar explicitly the aim of this material is to let pupils enjoy the stories and see the different structures they have learnt in context. It is important to note here that authentic narratives naturally

use the past tense. The past tense is used implicitly as chunks of language: it is like it is. The reason for this is that learning of the past tense is not usually in the curriculum of fourth graders. This way in the context of stories they hopefully became aware of it earlier as they need to be able to master it explicitly (Wright 2008:5). If they are used to hear stories in their native language, they probably expect the narrative to be in the past tense. In addition, the beginning of the "once upon a time" or "long time ago" is a cue for them to understand the way how stories are usually told.

Basically, by providing motivational context for language learning and providing them help is likely to support transfer of language learning skills from L1 to L2. For example children use a variety of sources such as body language, intonation, gesture, facial expressions and social context to figure out the meaning of used language in learning L1. They are also used to hypothesize and test the use of grammar when learning L1. (Brewster et al 2004:40) Compared to L1 acquisition, L2 is much learned in artificial contexts and the language is many times decontextualized such as learning grammatical rules when focus is on form. (Brewster et al 2004:20) However, "Context is all-important as learners have been shown to differ in their ability to cope with contextualized and decontextualized language" (Brewster et al 2004:20).

The third aim is to use motivational material and activities. The study of Pihko (2007) shows that it should not be taken for granted that everybody is interested in learning English at school, although it has such an important role in the global world. Although the pupils in the study were secondary school pupils, and in primary school settings pupils still have the joy of learning, it should not be taken for granted that there would not be any motivational problems to learn English at primary school. In real life, I have met a pupil at the primary school level who came to his first English lesson ever with the attitude "I hate English and I will never need it".

The studies of Pihko (2007: 100-103) and Jalkanen & Ruuska (2007) also show that the motivation or demotivation is also linked with the teacher, used materials and methods. The studies demonstrate that pupils would appreciate if teachers used other materials and methods than just the course books. The secondary school pupils also

hoped that language would be learnt in context for example in the context of films or literature (Pihko 2007: 101). My impressions received while teaching pupils of different age are in line with the results of the study. In practice, I have learnt what was meant with the saying "the unpredictable has power" said by teacher training teachers in England: If teachers only use school books and progress them page by page, task by task in a given order, pupils see in advance what will be done the next time. In that sense it makes the lesson boring. Some of the pupils even complete the activities in advance. Thus, in a way it is very predictable and completing the activities in books does not necessarily make the language of their own: it is impersonal. Whereas if teachers use interesting materials, which are not in pupils books, and suitable methods for the learning goals, and different learning styles are taken into account, and if teachers vary the methods and materials, pupils come to the lesson more expectantly because they do not know what they are going to do and if they have learnt that usually it is not anything horrible.

I have also learnt that if you let pupils do their own materials, either alone or with a pair, let them integrate something creative with them, ask them to make the materials personal looking for example with visuals of choice and if their own materials have audience, they usually put some effort in them willingly.

Learning difficulties or unchallenging tasks can cause motivational problems as well. Thus, the fourth aim is to take into account different learners. With different learners are not only meant struggling learners but also those who need more challenge than usual. What is more, the aim is that as many learners as possible would be able to work in their zone of proximal development and with the assistance of the teacher or more capable peers they would be able to learn new things and skills and hopefully, be able to use them without help in the future. Different learners are acknowledged in many ways: The stories are arranged from easier to more difficult. Part II consists of more demanding stories for those whose language proficiency is far above the regular fourth graders' and thus, need more challenge. The activities are differentiated: There are different versions of the same activity. The easier versions provide more support; the content is limited or both. In open ended activities the learner determines the level of difficulty. The comprehension activities are also differentiated. There are questions or activities which require understanding of the

surface level of the story but also questions which require inferential thinking. In addition, questions requiring different kind of thinking are provided. In addition, writing tasks provide more challenge for those who need it. To some extent, this material is based on multisensory approach. Thus, different perceptual learning styles are taken into account in this material in the form of activities which in addition to visual and aural learners also acknowledge the kinaesthetic-tactile learners. Each story with its activities has some kind of link to learners' life. In that way, hopefully, the activities make the language more personal and motivating to learn.

The goal was not to make standard school book lessons. The nature of the input material takes more time in reading and listening in the lessons compared to traditional text book texts or listening tasks. The aim is more to show how stories and fairy tales can be exploited in language teaching to promote linguistic awareness and language learning. The types of activities and vocabulary or language items to be practiced and learned depend on the story or fairy tale, in other words, how much the stories or fairytales are exploitable with young learners and with their language proficiency. Although the nature of input is via listening and reading and thus, more time and emphasis is invested there, in the output phase speaking and writing activities are integrated.

To sum up the aims, the purpose is to provide enjoyable learning experiences for different learners. In addition, the aim is to provide a chance to practice reading and listening skills with the use of provided strategies and to provide contextualized language learning. What is more, hopefully this material will motivate learners to read more in English or in any other language.

## 5.3. The children's literature

The first criterion for choosing the stories is that they are not translated into Finnish, at least not yet, or stories that are not the famous ones. If the aim is to get pupils used to the unfamiliar aspect in reading and listening and how to arrive at the meaning, then it is more reasonable to use stories that are not even translated into Finnish or

stories that are not the most famous ones. I have come across teachers' or students' opinions that if literature is used, it should be something familiar to pupils, so that it is easier for them to understand it. I do not see that point relevant unless the aim is purely to teach some grammatical points for example the past tense, when the meaning of the whole text is untouched or if very small children are concerned, who enjoy listening the same stories many times anyway.

The other criteria for choosing the stories are: they would interest boys and girls and they need to be picture books or have pictures to assist understanding. The language used in the stories varies from story to story but it is above the level of the pupils to understand it by reading themselves. That is why the authentic stories are introduced through listening and their understanding is guided by pictures, extra linguistic means, the context and activating their previous knowledge. Reading short passages is introduced little by little. Pupils are not even supposed to learn all the vocabulary or linguistic structures in the stories.

The difficulty of the stories varies greatly although they are aimed at approximately the same age group. Moreover, it is not always easy to define the difficulty of the story. Is it just the language of the story or the complexity of the story itself, its ideas which define the difficulty of the story, or how well the ideas can be interpreted through pictures and extra linguistic means, especially if abstract ideas are concerned. Or is the question about "what we expect pupils to do which determines the proficiency level required, not so much the story itself" (Wright 2008: 3). If the story is linguistically simpler, it allows the use of the language constructions and sentences more directly. If the language is more complicated and the variety of vocabulary is very rich, the choice of vocabulary and language to be taken in practice level needs more careful thinking and more simplification is needed at the practice level. When speaking of the difficulty of the story, the last point to consider is the amount of help provided by the teacher. I would not expect regular fourth graders to be able to tackle an authentic story unknown to them alone but with teacher's guidance I believe it is possible. All in all, the difficulty of the story is defined by all those issues, but how to place the stories in exact order of difficulty is another question.

Children literature is an excellent way to include cross curricular issues, especially the issue of growth as a person. According to the National Core Curriculum 2004, 2014, it includes teaching moral issues, recognition of handling of feelings, factors influencing creativity, the importance of aesthetic experience to the quality of life, among other things. Children literature is naturally educating by nature.

## 5.4. The organisation of the material package

This material package consists of two parts: I and II. The first part is comprised of six stories suitable for regular fourth graders with the help of the teacher and differentiated activities. The four pirate stories constitute the second part of the material package which is suitable for fourth graders needing challenge above the fourth grade and who are capable of independent reading. However, those stories can be use with learners of higher grades as well. Therefore I have provided them with teacher's instructions as a guide to use the stories with the whole class.

The stories are organised from easier to more difficult on the grounds of the language, the provided pictures of the story and especially how well they express the meaning of the story. In addition, to some extent they are organised by the difficulty level of the content which is somewhat in line with the difficulty of the language. Moreover, the order of the stories and the activities also supports the building up the vocabulary by revising and recycling the vocabulary but also supports the learning of reading and listening skills. That is why it is recommended to progress this material in this given order.

Every story is provided with teacher's instructions and photocopiable work sheets for learners. The time allocation for the stories in part I is two lessons except the last story of the first part which is rather short. The time allocation for the stories of the second part is from one to two lessons depending on the language proficiency of the learners and whether the work is done independently or more or less with the whole group.

## 5.5. The activity types

The purpose of the activities is to support learners' listening and reading comprehension and build up language awareness and provide contextualized language learning.

In addition to the stories, this material package is based on three principles: The use of reading and listening strategies to help comprehension and developing reading and listening skills and to provide differentiated material which also acknowledges different perceptual learning styles by applying the multisensory principle to some extent.

First, an important part of reading and listening material is setting the context meaning of which is to activate learners' previous knowledge. This is done by the teacher asking learners questions related to the topic of the story in order to make them think as well as asking them to think about the words related the topic or revise the previously learnt words as well as recapitulating the events of the first part of the story or the previous book if a sequel. In this context, it also means introducing the book and asking learners to come up with questions based on the cover pictures or the pictures of the story they want to be answered when reading or listening. Visual reading, prediction making and word inferencing skills are practiced as well. Learners are also encouraged to use extra linguistic means to decipher the meaning which demand little acting skills from the teacher. In addition, learners are guided to use word inferencing skills. However, the strategies are not taught explicitly rather they are used to guide the process.

Second, this material is differentiated to cater for different learners. First of all, it consists of two parts. The first part is based on picture books and with help they are suitable for regular fourth graders. The second part consists of stories which require more proficient language skills, very seldom met among regular fourth grades but might be of use in case there is some one who has been living abroad or otherwise has exceptional language skills. They can also be used with older learners. The differentiation is made by giving different versions of the same activity. In the easier versions more help is given or the content is limited or both. In open ended activities

the difficulty is determined by the learner. In reading comprehension activities the choice of difficulty is provided by giving Finnish and English version of the activity or comprehension questions. Different difficulty levels are also provided by the challenge of the comprehension activities. There are activities or questions in which surface understanding is enough but also questions which demand more inferential thinking and understanding the lesson of the story. I have also attempted to include questions which require different types of thinking. I have attempted to link some aspects of every story with learners' life. What is more, it is not necessary that everyone will manage to complete all the activities.

Third, to some extent this material is based on the multisensory principle, thus catering for different perceptual learning styles as well. When using children's literature visual and auditory senses are emphasized, but kinaesthetic and tactile learning styles are taken into account in the follow-up activities. There are games, group work which allow moving in the class room or acting out, tactile activities which allow manipulating of the material or artistic skills.

When using literature time is heavily invested in reading and listening. In the first part more time is invested in listening and little by little more on reading. In the second part time is meant to be invested in reading because in practice the material is meant for individual use by rare fourth graders. However, the stories of the second part are also available on CD, in the case of which learners can choose whether they want listen to them, provided that the teacher has the CD as well. Speaking and writing activities are included in the follow-up activities. Given the limited language skills to express themselves in the target language, speaking and writing activities are provided with support. The vocabulary is practiced in traditional matching and cloze activities as well as in different crosswords and in some other forms of vocabulary activities but also in the form of different games: memory, domino and board games. In addition, different pair and group activities allow the use of the new vocabulary and recycle the language learners have leant before. There are some vocabulary activities in which based on the story learners are supposed to infer the meaning of the words.

On purpose, I have avoided creating a material following a certain format very strictly and I have attempted to include a variety of diverse activities to provide different levels of challenge as many learners as possible. I have noticed that many learners find strict format rather boring, probably because it is too predictable and may lack real challenge. After all, the aim is to provide enjoyable learning experiences. However, to build up reading and listening skills certain activities for example setting the context and using predictions are repeated throughout the material package.

# 6. DISCUSSION

It is widely acknowledged that foreign language teacher training does not include enough obligatory studies on different learners especially at practical level and how to take them into account in foreign language teaching. Thus, this thesis seeks to fill this gap to some extent. In this thesis by integrating my knowledge of different subjects I have studied (English, psychology and special education), I have gained deeper knowledge of them and especially their significance for language teaching.

The first aim of this thesis was to exploit how to use authentic children's literature in language teaching and design a differentiated teaching material package, thus, giving examples of how to differentiate in language teaching at practical level. In addition, the aim is to advocate the positive effects of literature use on different learners in addition to language learning by promoting cross-curricular topics. By introducing children's literature, although in English, I hope learners would become interested in books and reading more, even in their native language, in the time when reading and books face strong competition of learners' spare time by computer games and social media. Moreover, the aim is also to encourage learners to read more in English and thus, improve their language skills. The second aim of this thesis was to create a synthesis of useful information on most common learning challenges encountered in foreign language classes for future foreign language teachers and in-service teachers: especially highlighting their impact on learning and especially on foreign language learning.

The material is created bearing in mind that in a regular class room there are learners with different abilities. Thus, just creating a single material to cater for every one is not seen good enough anymore. Too difficult material just frustrates some and too easy material is boring for others. Yet, the teachers do not always have time to create their own material and especially newly qualified teachers many times lack the knowledge how to differentiate the material for different learners. Therefore, the attempt was to make material that would cater for different abilities but also provide challenge for different learners so that their zone of proximal development would be met. However, in order to cross their zone of proximal development the help of the teacher or a more able peer is usually needed.

I have attempted to take into account the different learners in as many ways as possible. There is variance in difficulty of the stories. Activities have been differentiated: many times there are different versions of the same activity or open-ended activities are suitable for many levels. Comprehension tasks are provided with differentiation. There are comprehension tasks or questions which require that you understand the surface language and there are tasks that require inferential thinking. For example to understand the message of the story you have to read between the lines or even beyond the lines. In activities I have tried to take into account different perceptual learning styles. I have found ways of integrating some of the content of the stories with learners' life. Listening and reading processes are guided with strategy use. That is important because the stories are above the language proficiency of regular fourth graders. Moreover, it is important for the sake of the weaker learners. However, to integrate all the recommended ways to support different learners into this material to is not possible. For example instead of teaching vocabulary in advance, teaching learners' to guess the meaning of words from context and activate their thinking is important. Moreover, the stories meant to be used with regular fourth graders are picture books and the pictures convey the meanings rather well. The stories are also put in order so that the vocabulary is to some extent revised and recycled. Some of the stories have a sequel which is a very good opportunity to revise and recycle the vocabulary. Moreover, this material is not meant to be the sole teaching material.

To some extent the material is based on the multisensory approach which according to the studies is helpful for learners with learning problems. My experience of this approach with primary school pupils is very supportive. It also appeals learners who have difficulties to concentrate on text or listening. However, to integrate a variety of different multisensory activities was a little challenging. Languages do not naturally lend themselves for multisensory doing in such a way like some other school subjects. However, it was possible to create games or activities which are tactile or let the learners move in the classroom. However, these stories lend themselves for integrating with other subjects for example pupils can do puppets of the characters in arts or crafts lessons and they can be used in English lessons to do dialogues. In addition, one of the stories includes a pumpkin soup recipe in English which learners can use to prepare the soup.

The material package as well as this thesis was created and written while designing plenty of other teaching materials for other courses teaching English and German for special purposes. Thus, the ideas date back from some years, years before the new National Core Curriculum (2014) was even at the idea level. Moreover, when familiarizing myself with the new NCC 2014, I realized that this material acknowledges the new National Core Curriculum in many respects. It introduces literary texts into language teaching and exploits listening and reading strategies, promotes visual reading skills and although not explicitly teaching grammar, it presents grammatical structures in context. In addition, it introduces a wide variety of vocabulary and language in a natural context. Thus, this material presents ways to promote learners' language awareness. It also introduces one way to create knowledge combining language with numeracy. In addition to reading and listening, it provides activities to practise other language skills as well and provides activities to work with others in the form of games, pair work or group work as well. It also provides chances to use different senses and express themselves with art in learning. Moreover, it provides differentiated material: extension material for the more able but also acknowledges those with learning difficulties. Accordingly, I consider this material package to be successful in that respect.

However, the material package is not tested in practice in such composition but from the experience, I have gained knowledge of teaching primary school pupils several

years, what is usually taught in year four and what you can expect from year four pupils. Many of the activities work as such in different contexts well. Neither are theses stories tested on learners. Thus, it is not possible to say exactly how long it takes to read them to learners or how long it takes for learners to read the given extracts of the stories. However, based on my little experiment, I really recommend showing the pictures while reading if possible and even point the right things in the pictures. It is more helpful than giving many words in advance. Another very useful piece of advice is to deal with the long stories in two parts, as suggested, to prevent the loss of interest caused by the overload of new language and the requirement to sit quiet. The next step would be to test the material how it works with pupils in general. However, it should also be borne in mind that no material, albeit tested to work, do not necessarily work as such with every single group without modifications or accommodations. Each group is different, consisting of learners with different abilities and interest. Moreover, no matter how much time is invested to make the material interesting and differentiated to suit different needs, there is always some one prone to be dissatisfied.

The question whether teachers would be interested in this kind of material might be the availability of the story books, but also whether the school is able to assist with the expenses of the books. I found some of the books in the city library but of course it depends on how good stocks libraries carry of English children's books, but surely they can purchase them if there is a demand for them. In case that they are not available in the local library, at least they are available in online bookstores. Another thing is whether teachers are willing to use materials outside the course books or willing to accept that there are alternative ways to teach languages. However, the NCC 2014 supports the use of this kind of material as well. After all, according to the NCC 2014, the aims are to provide authentic texts and a chance to enjoy different kinds of texts, to interpret texts and their view of the world, and the aim that multiliteracy is to be developed in all subjects and the co-operation between subjects. Although the foreign language section of NCC 2014 for primary school does not exactly state that the texts for foreign language teaching should be authentic, instead, it states that a learner should be guided to work on written and spoken texts of different difficulty levels by using different comprehension strategies (NCC

20014:223). Thus, in that respect this material provides challenge and certainly guides to use comprehension strategies.

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