Towards a Shared Vision of Language, Language Learning, and a School Project in Emergence

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Technology development allows new ways of communication, learning and collaboration. This is reflected in the professional scenarios of language teaching. Modern curricula value participants' interest and meaningful (inter)action as a basis for learning. Sensitivity is important in anticipating participants' changing needs in modern learning environments, characterised by linguistic and technological hybridity, as well as novel pedagogical approaches. Language students, more familiar with teaching in the traditional classroom, need to appropriate new practices to orchestrate learning in settings requiring multiple activities simultaneously. This study explores how language students learn to manage complex pedagogical situations during a university course in which they create an online project for school children. During online chat sessions administered for the school pupils, the university lecturer's office was an important site for negotiating and acting on pedagogical issues as well as practical matters arising from the work at hand. Nexus analysis was used as a research approach. Primary research materials include video recordings from the university lecturer's office, chatlogs and reflection papers from students. The study is relevant for reconceptualising the changing roles of (language) teachers and provides new perspectives for language teacher education in a technology-rich world.

Keywords: language teacher education; sense making; complexity; change; nexus analysis

1 Introduction

This study takes as its starting point an elective master's-level university course that aimed to prepare students for the complex work of the language teachers of the future. It involved the participating students designing and conducting a four-week online learning project for young learners of English in Finland (fifth-graders, 11–12 years of age). This demanded the critical consideration and transformation of existing understandings and practices related to language teaching.

Language curricula have already followed modern sociocultural and ecological views of language learning for decades, emphasising learners' engagement in meaningful interaction through a range of multimodal resources including language, embodied action and diverse available cultural tools (e.g., van Lier 2000, 2004; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008). In the process of meaning making, people shape their environment on multiple scales of time and space (van Lier 2004; Scollon and Scollon 2004). Learning languages is not only situated in institutional settings, such as classrooms or in free-time environments beyond school (Koivistoinen 2015, 2016). Instead, learning sites and practices are not only more complex but constantly in flux. They are characterised by the diversity and hybridity of people, places, practices and technologies, among others (see Ryberg, Davidsen and Hodgson 2016; Stickler and Hampel 2015). However, despite the arrival of new technologies with their potentials to dissolve the classroom walls, the tradition of language teaching has largely been confined to classrooms. Students and teachers may be familiar with using different technologies for their personal purposes, but pedagogical use is at an embryonic stage (see e.g., Jalkanen 2015). Furthermore, literacy practices in the language classroom have typically revolved around the textbook and accompanying workbook, in which activities are thematically aligned with the curriculum (Taalas et al. 2008). Students in language teacher education have also been subjected to this approach, the emphasis thus being on the guidance of learning in the classroom (see Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate 2016). To trigger change in the prevailing practice, the authorities have expressed critical voices demanding more emphasis on preparing people for citizenship in twenty-first-century society (Finnish National Board of Education 2014; Council of the European Union 2018; European Union 2019). This requires teachers to broaden their

repertoire of pedagogical practices to orchestrate learning in hybrid sites of engagement within and beyond institutional boundaries.

The current study aims to discover how language students learn to manage complex pedagogical situations during a university course to create an online project for schoolchildren. The research approach draws on nexus analysis paying special attention to multimodal aspects of sense making and collaboration evolving across multiple timescales and places (Norris 2004; Scollon and Scollon 2004). The research materials include video recordings from administering online sessions with the schoolchildren and reflection papers from the language students written after the learning project. Various other types of data are used as background materials with the researchers' participatory observations throughout the course and project. The findings provide an understanding of how university students, intending to become language teachers, make sense of being teachers in the changing field of language education, and how they concretely engage in new kinds of professional practice while implementing the learning project with schools. The study also provides new perspectives for research on and practice in language teacher education in a technology-rich world and to understand the nature of change in this respect.

2 Challenges in Pedagogical Change

Recent research suggests that changes in language pedagogy are called for, but the tradition takes new paths slowly (Pöntinen, Dillon and Väisänen 2017; Taalas et al. 2008; Tarnanen et al. 2010). In the following, some challenges in pedagogical change are discussed in the light of earlier research.

2.1 New Understandings and Practices

For professional growth, reflection is essential before, in, on and beyond action (Schön

1987; Edwards 2017). However, taking new directions in language pedagogy is seen as arising essentially from the actual hands-on practice of guiding learners *in situ* in new circumstances (Moodie 2016; Riordan and Murray 2010). Such concrete opportunities for taking charge of activities allow novice teachers to experience changes in their roles as they move from being subject specialists to community builders more broadly (Moate and Ruohotie-Lyhty 2014; Ruohotie-Lyhty and Moate 2016).

Teachers lacking experience of reforms may even base their pedagogical decisions on what learners find fun to do rather than on a disciplinary knowledge of language pedagogy (Moodie 2016). For their part, pupils may be more comfortable with the text-book-driven teaching with which they have become familiar rather than experimenting with something new (Koivisto 2013). Language teachers' solutions may also be affected by pressure from homes foregrounded in parents' variable understandings of what is considered proper language education (Koivistoinen 2015, 2016).

From the practical perspective, teachers may also direct their attention to how they perform their own teaching instead of to how these actions support learning (Blin and Jalkanen 2014, 148). It must also be observed that perspectives on language itself, as well as language learning have changed over time, ranging from narrow cognitive perceptions to broader sociocognitively and socioculturally inspired views (van Lier 2000; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008). To engage in a genuine transformation of their pedagogical practices, pre-service and in-service teachers need to reconceptualise not only their approach to language learning and teaching but their approach to language (Blin and Jalkanen 2014, 149; Huth, Betz and Taleghani-Nikazm 2019).

The relationship between understandings and actual practices of language pedagogy is not straightforward, and the actual moments for change are difficult to trace

(Li and Walsh 2011; Pennycook 2004). In moving from one way of teaching to another, teachers need to renegotiate their personal and professional beliefs, and engage in even wider societal discourses (Palviainen and Mård-Miettinen 2015; Dressler 2018). This is done in material environments and linguistic landscapes that have their own impact on the actions and interactions unfolding *in situ* (Scollon and Scollon 2004; Dressler 2015; Leijon 2016; Tapio 2018; Christensson 2018).

What influences language teachers' understandings and visions about learning and teaching a language is the kind of educational discourses they have experienced and participated in as learners in their own past (Norris 2014; Murphy 2015; Moodie 2016, 38; Kuure et al. 2016). Pedagogical transformation emerges from a complex interplay of institutional, professional, and informal discourses that may function as hindrances but also as bridges for new practices (Ensor, Kleban and Rodrigues 2017). Thus, the appropriation of new understandings and practices through an interplay of theoretical consideration and hands-on work is a complex process that evolves multimodally (Koivistoinen, Kuure and Tapio 2016).

2.2 Orchestrating Activities

University students putting learner-centred projects into practice are not only making sense of being teachers in a new kind of setting but trying to grasp how to engage in socio-culturally rooted language education with schoolchildren (Kuure 2018, 123). Students seldom gain an experience of designing, leading, and guiding project-based, technology-mediated, and locally distributed language learning during their pedagogical studies. This is where both university students and language teachers working in the field need education and practice to explore and develop new ways of being teachers. Orchestration has been used as a metaphor for teaching in new learning environments. As a broad term, it may be seen to refer to the teacher's actions and interactions in

leading activities in a multimodally complex site of engagement, also triggered by a multiplicity of frequently occurring unexpected events (Dillenbourg 2008; Littleton, Scanlon and Sharples 2012; Pirini 2014; Prieto et al. 2014).

In a learner-centred event, all the participants may collaboratively and multimodally contribute to turning topics into 'teachables', i.e. objects of explicit teaching (Eskildsen and Majlesi 2018; Stoewer and Musk 2019). However, in a foreign-language classroom, participants sometimes struggle to identify the direction of interaction, i.e., there may be differing understandings about what is happening, despite the teacher's attempts to establish a focus (Seedhouse 2019, 26). Norms can be flouted for particular effects, and inexperienced teachers especially may find it challenging to manage such complexity (Seedhouse 2019, 26). In circumstances of overlapping and intertwining activities, people seem to be able to remain aware of what others are doing, either through surreptitious monitoring or rendering their reasoning and actions accessible for others to observe, shape, and coordinate (Heath and Luff 1992, 72–75). Social action appears to be multilayered because participants productively draw on a variety of resources to build action in concert with each other (Goodwin 2013, 12).

University language students orienting to become language teachers need to develop their readiness to adapt to the changing configurations of learning in environments merged by technologies. This has been a challenge, because students skilful in drawing on various technologies in their everyday lives do not necessarily transfer such expertise into their professional practice (Taalas et al. 2008; Tarnanen et al. 2010; Kuure et al. 2016; Pöntinen, Dillon and Väisänen 2017). This study aims to shed light on aspects of change in the context of language teacher education.

3 Research Approach

In the following sections, the nature of the research approach and methodological

choices will be described in more detail.

3.1 Nexus Analysis as a Research Strategy

The study draws on nexus analysis as a research strategy, which is suitable for exploring complex phenomena – emerging *in situ* but yet bound with their wider, even societal dimensions (Scollon 2001; Scollon and Scollon 2004). The analysis is directed to a nexus of practice, which is conceived as the linkage of repeatable mediated actions recognised by a social group (Scollon 2001: 150). Nexus analysis is ethnographically driven and keeps the focus on social action (Scollon and Scollon 2004). Social action is seen as an intersection of *interaction order*, *historical body,* and *discourses in place* (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 13–14). Interaction order (applied from Goffman 1971) refers to relationships between participants with their historical bodies (personal habits and experiences; term coined from Nishida 1958). Discourses in place are situationally foregrounded discourses echoing the past and projecting the future. Nexus analysis advances through three activities, first by *engaging* the nexus of practice, then by *navigating* it more thoroughly. *Changing* the nexus of practice may be advanced in the form of social activism, but it is also an inevitable effect of the researcher's participation in research activities. A recurring research question is, 'What is going on here?', and it guides the researcher to view the phenomenon under study from different angles (Scollon and Scollon 2004).

Nexus analysis draws on four different types of data (Scollon and Scollon 2004, 158). First, the ethnographic stance requires an ongoing (neutral) observation of social action. Second, it is important to explore how the participants make sense of what is happening (members' generalisations). Third, the participants' personal experiences are also explored. Fourth, data also emerge from interactions with members. The analysis

proceeds in cyclically, zooming in and out, combining ethnographic observation and researchers' experience on a long-term basis, using different methodologies, depending on the needs of the research process and theoretical insight (Scollon and Scollon 2004).

3.2 A Project-Based University Course as a Nexus of Practice

The nexus of practice under scrutiny in this study is a thirteen-week elective master's-level university course in English studies at a Finnish university. The course aims to challenge students' understandings of how and where language learning can take place, what language teaching can be in the modern world, and what this means for their professional prospects. Through theoretical insight and hands-on work in designing a learning project for children, students are expected to explore language teaching in a new way.

In this study, there were fifteen university students on the course, of whom ten were studying to become language teachers, and five had a more general professional orientation towards technology and language pedagogy. Some students had already completed their pedagogical studies to become subject teachers (60 ECTS of teaching practice and theoretical studies). None had previous experience of designing online study modules and implementing them with real participants. The schoolchildren participating in the project came from two elementary schools (25 fifth-graders, 11–12 years of age) and were guided by their English teachers at their schools' locations. The university lecturer acted as a project coordinator and also participated in the activities.

The course participants decided to design the online project workspace for the schoolchildren to follow a narrative of spending a day in an imagined 'city' inhabited by animal residents. During the four-week school project, which was launched on the ninth week of the course, the students acted as online tutors engaging in the discussion forums and chat sessions. Content production continued during the school project, and

the online environment for the pupils was adjusted according to the accumulating experiences from ongoing work and the schoolteachers' wishes, echoing their interpretations of the pupils' engagement in the activities. The work on the learning project was advanced in weekly meetings (face-to-face and/or online), as well as by documenting and sharing work in the online environment established for the course. Finally, the course convened for evaluation and wrap-up, and the university students wrote their reflection papers.

3.3 Research Materials

A range of research material was accumulated and gathered from encounters involving the learning project's planning, design, organising, production, tutoring, and evaluation (see Table 1). Research ethics guidelines and requirements were observed in the study, e.g., informed consent was asked from the participants, and the data were anonymised (Finnish National Board on Research Integrity 2019).

Table 1. Description of research material

SOURCES FOR RESEARCH MATERIAL	TYPE OF DATA			
	(Neutral) obser-vations	Members' generali-sations	Individual experi-ence	Inter-actions with members
DESIGN WORK DURING THE COURSE AND PROJECT				
Fieldnotes	X			
Online discussion entries by course participants	X	X		X
Design products created by the university students (the school workspace, activities)		X		X
SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE INTERACTIONS ON DESIGN WORK				
Chatlogs of interactions among the course participants		X		X
SYNCHRONOUS ONLINE INTERACTIONS DURING SCHOOL PROJECT				
Video recordings of (inter)actions in the university lecturer's office	**X**	**X**		
Video recordings of (inter)actions in a school classroom	X	X		
Chatlogs of interactions with pupils				**X**
ASYNCHRONOUS ONLINE INTERACTIONS DURING SCHOOL PROJECT				

Online discussion entries by pupils and course participants		X		X
Video clips created by pupils				X
EVALUATION AND REFLECTION OF THE WORK				
Email interviews of teachers at schools			X	
Questionnaire answers from pupils			X	
Reflection papers by the university students		**X**	**X**	
Bold typeface: primary material for this study				

As the special interest of this study was on university students learning to orchestrate complex pedagogical situations involving online language learning, the online tutoring sessions for schoolchildren's chat meetings administered from the university lecturer's office were chosen as core encounters for closer examination. They offered a window on the participants' engagement in concrete hands-on work around the chat activities, thus experimenting with the theory-informed pedagogical designs they had produced on the course. These situations were documented by video recordings from the office (12 hours from 10 sessions) and the chatlogs on interactions with the pupils (4 logs for 40-minute sessions). The primary material also included reflection papers written by ten university students aspiring to a teaching career at the end of the course. The rest of the material listed in Table 1 served as a background resource, with which we were familiar as participants in the course and the project (a university lecturer, and a university student specialising in research and data management). Thus, our analysis of the primary material was also guided by our personal experiences and understandings arising from participation in the nexus of practice in focus. The research question concerned how language students learned to manage complex pedagogical situations during a university course, in creating an online project for schoolchildren.

3.4 Process of Analysis

The concepts of interaction order, historical body and discourses in place were drawn on in the analysis of material. The work started with an examination of the video recordings from the tutoring sessions in the university lecturer's small office. Tapelogs with basic information on the interaction during the sessions were created for each video. The chat and discussion logs generated during the sessions in the desktop conferencing system and the online workspace for the children were also studied. The researchers viewed the recorded videos first alone and then together, discussing their interpretations in light of their ethnographic observations of the course and the project. The material accumulated in the online environment was used as a cross-reference to identify how plans for future actions discussed during the recorded chat sessions took shape in the online environment.

The initial analysis foregrounded intersecting discourses during the recorded sessions, circulating topics such as pedagogy, technology, project work and (teacher) identities (see Tumelius and Kuure 2017). The current study builds on that work, deepening the understanding of the nexus of practice of university language students learning to manage complex pedagogic settings during the project they have created during their university course. The analysis of video recordings was complemented by the participants' perspective in examining how the students make sense of the complex pedagogical settings related to the project in their reflection papers.

4 Analysis

In the following, the first two sections present an analysis of the tutoring sessions in the course teacher's office by characterising examples drawn from the research material,

including chatlogs. To gain a broader view of the activities, the reflection papers are analysed in the third section to shed light on how the students make sense of designing language learning in the modern context and managing the complex activities related to the children's participation in the online project.

4.1 Emergence of Multiple Interactional Spaces

The focus of the work during the tutoring session was on managing the online chat discussion in collaboration with others, which involved coordinating multiple, overlapping tasks in the process. The participants distributed tasks among themselves and engaged in sense making, problem solving and discussion around a range of topics with varying degrees of intensity. The analysis of the video materials revealed the emergence of a range of interactional spaces through the interactions and actions among the participants in the university lecturer's office. Figure 1 illustrates the basic setting of the office during encounters between the university lecturer and the university students engaged in administering a chat session during the school pupils' English class (40 minutes).
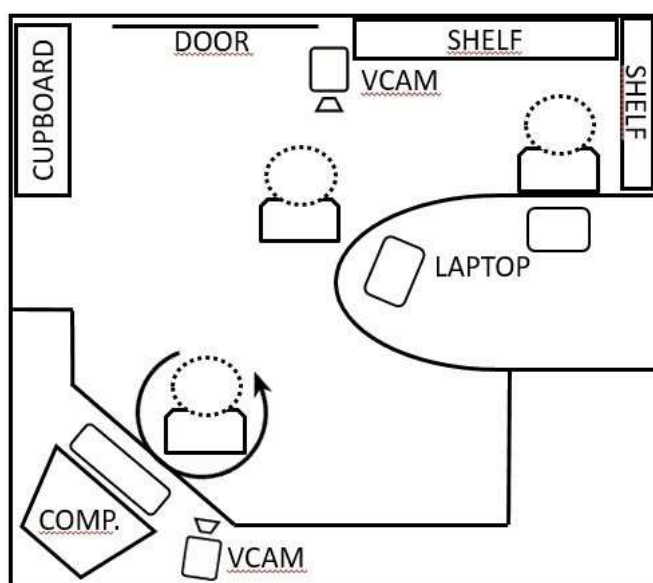

Figure 1. In the university lecturer's office

Liisa is working with a laptop at the table, with her back to the door and Katri/ul (the university lecturer) next to her with another laptop. Maija is sitting at Katri/ul's desk computer. Maija and Liisa are involved in a guessing game in a chat session with the pupils. Liisa is acting as mystery animals, one at a time, and the pupils are asking questions to work out the correct answer. Maija is participating in the chat as a tutor to stimulate discussion when necessary. Maija and Liisa orient their attention to the chat exchange with several children active simultaneously in the guessing game. In their schools' localities, the children are gathered in their classrooms, with their teachers facilitating their participation in the chat as is also seen in the videos from the classroom.

The pupils are presenting questions to the mystery animal at a rapid pace, i.e., Liisa needs to keep focus more tightly on the online chat. Katri/ul does not yet have access to what is going on in the online chat room because she has just taken out another laptop and is waiting for the operating system to start up. The chatlog shows the evolution of the following exchange:

(1) *Are you a crane (chatlog)*

01		Mystery Animal:	I like for example frogs, they are really tasty!
02		Tommi:	How tall are you
03		Mystery Animal:	I'm dark coloured
04	[0:00:48]	Tiina:	Are you nske
05		Sofia:	Are you a snake?
06		Tiina:	sorry snake
07		Mystery Animal:	No, I'm not a snake!

08		Mystery Animal:	They are really tasty too!
09	[0:02:06]	Mystery Animal:	I am really big! Bigger than you!
10		Tommi:	Are you crane
11		Anne:	are you a crane?
12		Hanna:	are you crane?
13	[0:02:46]	Mystery Animal:	No, I am not a crane!
14	[0:04:36]	Eeva:	can you fly?

The extract shows that the pupils are suggesting answers approximating to the correct forms (lines 04 *Are you nske* and 05 *sorry snake*). Towards the end of the extract, there is a sequence of suggestions for 'crane' from three pupils (lines 10-12), which prompts a lively negotiation in the office drawing the tutors' (Liisa and Maija) attention away from the online space to each other and Katri/ul (see Example 2). The transcript is relatively rough, but it serves, the needs of the analysis. Notation conventions (see Appendix) have been applied from Jefferson (2004).

(2) *What's 'crane' (office video)*

```
01        ((Liisa looks closely at pupil x's entry in the chat and
           raises her torso back to an upright position))
```

02 LIISA: mikä   [oli 'crane'

what's ['crane'

Gloss: What is the meaning of 'crane' in Finnish?

```
03              [((Maija turns towards Katri))
```

04 MAIJA: [mikä oli 'crane'

[what's 'crane'

```
05 KATRI/ul: mitä (.) 'crane' (.) eikseo kurki

            what (.) 'crane' (.) isn't it a crane


06          ((Liisa shifts her gaze to Maija smiling a little))


07 MAIJA:   ta-taitaa se ol

            I su-suppose it is


08          ((Maija nodds her head))


09          ((Liisa returns her gaze to the laptop and starts typing))


10 KATRI/ul: 'crane'

            'crane'


11 MAIJA:   niin muute voi olla

            yes (you're right) it could be


12          ((Maija turns towards the PC screen))
```

As the turns on lines 02 and 04 (example 2) show, Maija and Liisa notice the pupils'
questions at the same time. Having been looking at the laptop screen from a very close
distance, Liisa starts to raise herself back to an upright position at the same time as she
asks, *what is crane*. In their initiations, they both use a similar question format *mikä oli
'crane'* (transl. *what's 'crane'*). Katri/ul immediately joins in suggesting a tentative
meaning (*eikseo kurki*; *isn't it a crane*, line 05). Maija accepts the translation with a
reservation (*I su-suppose it is*, line 07). Liisa does not say anything but keeps her gaze on

the laptop screen (line 09). Quietly accepting the translation, she types her response in the online chat forty-seconds after the initial question, *No, I am not a crane!* (Example 2, line 13).

The students' turns in the first example (lines 07 and 11) suggest that they treat Katri/ul as a team member with equal access to knowledge as the others rather than as an authority. In contrast, a typical teacher-student exchange in the panopticon language classroom often follows the IRF pattern: an initiation by the teacher in question format, a response by the student and a follow-up from the teacher (Rampton 2002; Scollon and Scollon 2004). Despite Katri/ul's institutional role as a teacher, Maija and Liisa do not stress her power position in this respect in the interaction in any way. They take turns spontaneously and engage in joint problem-solving and talk. From this perspective, the interaction order (Scollon and Scollon 2004) between Katri/ul, Maija and Liisa seems quite balanced, which produces a productive atmosphere for the students to introduce their perspectives as well.

The example shows how various interactional spaces are created during the session. In Goffman's (1966) terms, involvement and copresence between the participants in the room, as well as online, are established multimodally. Katri/ul, Maija, and Liisa are all monitoring the activities overall, redirecting their orientations from time to time. Working on their computers, Maija and Liisa are directing their attention primarily at the guessing game chat, in which their interactional partners are the pupils online. As Goodwin (2013) suggests, the participants productively draw on a variety of resources to build action in concert with each other.

4.2 Negotiating Language, Learning, and Being a Teacher

Example 3 below, continuation from the previous sequence, illustrates how (inter)actions *in situ* echo discourses from different timescales. More specifically, it

shows how the participants jointly construct the teacher's role now and in the past in their discussions. Such work has been done through a range of mediational means throughout the course. For example, the teacher provides instructions and guidelines for the students in the meetings and in the online workspace. The course's overall pedagogical design is promoted in different situations. The theoretical basis of the course is mediated by the course readings. Furthermore, the university lecturer's clarifications and participants' joint evaluative and progressive discussions are essential for sense making and advancing the emerging project. These resources contribute not only to the transformation of the project design and the pedagogical approach developed for the actual interactions with the pupils, but to the overall understanding of what language learning and being a teacher might be for the participating university students – the teachers to be.

This extract shows how Liisa continues to work online as a mystery animal. Maija and Katri/ul shift their orientation from the computers to the discussion at hand, because they do not need to focus on the online chat discussion.

(3) *Teachers in a tough position too (office video)*

```
01 KATRI/ul: tässä joutuu opettajatki tiukille    [heh-heh
            puts teachers in a tough position too


02 MAIJA:                                          [heh-heh


03          (.)joo ja tuo niinku eläinkunnan sanasto ()
            (.)yeah and that vocabulary of Animalia  ()


04          ei o  [suomeksikaa
            don't [even have any in Finnish
```

```
05 KATRI/ul       [joo hehhe
                  [yeah


06 LIISA:          [nii hehhe
                  [yeah


07 MAIJA:    ei oo suomeksikaa oikein mitään
             don't really have anything in Finnish either


08           ((all return their gaze to their computers. then Katri
             looks at Maija))


09 KATRI_ul: meillä pitäis olla joku hätä hätäsanakirja
             we should have an emergency dictionary


10           here tässä näin hehhehhe
             here here


11           ((Katri looks up towards the bookshelf – tone of voice
             turns more serious))


12           itse asiassa mulla on englanti suomi
             as a matter of fact, I have an English Finnish


13           sanakirja tossa jos tarvitaan
             dictionary right there if we need it


14           (6.0) ((participants working quietly on their computers))


15 KATRI/ul: mä aikanaan auskultoin niin yhen toisen harjoittelijan
```

I was doing my training long ago so in another trainee's

16 **tunnilla oppilas kysy että mikä on pajatson takaressu**

  lesson, a pupil asked what's the back reserve of a payazzo

  <a gambling arcade game>

17 **[heh-heh**

18 LIISA: **[heh-heh**

19 MAIJA: **[heh-heh] joo-okei**

   yeah o-okay

20 KATRI/ul: **ja SIIhe aikaa niiku sillä opettajalla PITI olla niitä**

   and in THOse times like the teacher HAD TO have those

21 **vas [tauksia tai aateltiin että se pitäis olla ()**

  answ[ers or people thought that one should have ()

22 MAIJA: **[niin nii (.) niin nii (.) voi ei**

   [yeah yeah (.) yeah yeah (.) oh no

23 KATRI/ul: **ja kyllähän se jotain [selitti**

  and she did [explain something

24 MAIJA: **[nii**

     [yeah

25 KATRI/ul: **mutta eihä sillä tietenkään sitä [termiä ollu**

  but of course, she didn't have that [term

```
26 MAIJA:                                              [niin (.) voi ei
                                                       [yeah (.) oh no


27 MAIJA:    nykyään kyllä hyvä ku pääsee äkkiä vaikka
             today it's so good 'cos ((you)) get quickly


28          nettiin [tai muuta ku () tulee jotain kiperiä ()
            online  [or else when () it becomes tricky ()


29 KATRI/ul:        [nii justii eikä sitä ees aatellakaan että
                    [yeah right and people don't even think that


30          opettajan  pitäis  TIEtää kaikkea
            the teacher should KNOW   everything


31 MAIJA:   niinnii niinpä niinpä (.)
            yea-yeah right right  (.)


32          voi ei
            oh no
```

In line with the course goals, Katri/ul is introducing her agenda of developing the students' understanding of teacherhood and learning. She invites the students to accept the vision of the language teacher as something other than 'a walking dictionary' who has to know everything. First, she makes a note implying that teachers are expected to have the correct answers to the questions posed by pupils (*puts teachers in a tough position too, line* 01) but indicates her evaluative stance to the proposal by laughing. Maija joins in the laughter, making a comment about her lack of animal vocabulary even in her mother tongue (lines 03, 04, and 07). Katri/ul playfully adds a suggestion about making

an 'emergency dictionary' available but switches to serious mode (change of intonation), looking at the bookshelf and saying that a dictionary is in fact available if required (line 09).

There is a six-second silence (line 14), and the participants return their attention to their computers, with Liisa and Maija tutoring the online chat, and Katri/ul waiting for the programs to start up on her laptop. Katri/ul breaks the silence (line 15), continuing the theme of paradigm breaking in the teacher's profession as she starts to tell an anecdote from her student years. When a fellow trainee teacher had been giving a demonstration lesson, a pupil had asked her the English equivalent for a term that she did not recognise (*the back reserve of payazzo*, line 16). Katri/ul's comment combines the concept of 'knowing' with a strong obligation and a trajectory of the past, thus suggesting that thinking about the teacher's professionalism may differ today (*and in THOse times the teacher HAD TO have those answers, or people thought that she should have*, lines 20 and 21). However, Maija does not build on this perspective, , but strengthens the traditional idea of the teacher providing knowledge, only drawing on modern resources (*oh no today it's so good 'cos you get quickly online*, lines 27 and 28). Katri/ul concludes the exchange, implying her agenda about getting the modern view of learning and teacher professionalism through to the students (*and people don't even think that the teacher should KNOW everything*, lines 29 and 30). The situation thus provides the participants with an opportunity to explore expectations of language teachers in the past and today. The example also highlights ways in which the teacher provides scaffoldings for the participants in making sense of how learning is seen today, and what the teachers' profession entails in today's world. The conversation also builds on a basis of equal interaction between the students and the teacher. Katri/ul shares a personal memory from her own teacher training, thus bridging her current status as a

university lecturer and her past as a teacher-to-be, i.e. the anecdote works as a mediational means for foregrounding Katri/ul's trajectories from her past as a trainee teacher to her present as a professional. The tutoring sessions thus provide opportunities for the participants to explore their understandings and accustomed practices (historical bodies) through discourses in place, emerging from situated needs, and advancing more or less explicit agendas.

4.3 Making Sense of Designing Language Learning

This section presents an analysis of the post-course reflection papers written by the students (in English). The examples below are illustrative extracts from the reflection papers of the teacher track university students, amounting to ten papers with a typical length of 1,000–2,000 words. The students worked in four groups (Project Management, Research, Activity, and Technology). Some students in the Activity Group also participated in the Technology Group's activities. The reflections of students not intending to become teachers were excluded from the analysis. All these students were from the Technology Group.

The analysis focuses on how the students made sense of the collaborative work to design the project, the university course, and their own role and learning during the course. The university students knew something about the course approach in advance. It had already been applied for some years, which meant that the students must have been aware of how the course would differ in relation to their experience of courses in general. The university students' stance towards the prevailing learning culture in terms of accustomed practices was echoed in expressions such as *sitting in class*, *writing papers*, and *studying for exams,* and the relevance of university studies in relation to actual practice in the field, the '*real' world* (S1_ActivityGroup).

The participants' accustomed practices related to being students and learning and teaching languages were about to be challenged in designing the learning project during the university course. Sense making took place in joint meetings, working groups collaborating on their special topics, and various situations where work was done together. In their reflection papers, the university students contemplated the teamwork, division of labour, and problems arising from working in a real-life project in which they had to take active decisions concerning how to organise the work to achieve a successful language learning experience for the pupils.

The project-based course offered the students a new way to participate in a university course, and they were ready for this. There was more to deal with in relation to designing a new kind of learning project for schoolchildren and acting as their teachers online. Example 4 illustrates how the students balanced diverse feelings, ranging from uncertainty to empowerment, while they were working.

(4) *From uncertainty to empowerment*

> We were insecure about the suitability of the theme for the target group, since we did not know what would be appropriate and not too childish for fifth-graders. On many occasions we asked the other participants of the course to give us feedback on our thoughts, but it was difficult to get. Personally I felt that the first breakthrough of the course was the first <online meeting system> meeting we had. Overall, to meet that way online was new and very exciting and inspiring, but the effect or result of the meeting was something that truly made me believe in the project and that it was going to be great. (S3_ProjectManagement)

The development of the design ideas into a final product became visible in the interactions between the participants and the choices they made about the emerging school project. Examples 5 and 6 illustrate the kinds of challenges that the university students raised as central in their work in their reflection papers.

(5) *Understanding the pupils' perspective*

> I feel that our group had a lot of good ideas and the most challenging aspect of this phase was finding out just what kind of exercises would be suitable for children of that age, fulfilling the learning goals set by the teachers and of course possible to realise in the <online workspace> environment. (S1_ActivityGroup)

(6) *The pressure of diverse constraints on design*

> [when designing activities] The interaction part proved to be the most difficult aspect since it was somewhat unclear what kind of technology we would be able to use and it was also important to try to keep the exercises manageable both for the <pupils> and the teachers as well as for the technology group. (S4_ActivityGroup)

It was not easy for the university students to understand what the pupils in the schools would be like as learning project participants. The preparatory work done on the course gave some support in this. The accounts in Examples 5 and 6 show the university students' awareness of the diversity of aspects that required consideration when designing pedagogical approaches and activities (pupil's perspective, the teacher's aims and skills, available technologies).

The range of resources available for making sense of how to shape the learning project for the fifth-grade pupils was highlighted in the papers (see Example 7).

(7) *Resources for making sense about suitable designs*

> The OPS [curriculum] was a useful tool, as well as the comments from the teachers, when planning the exercises since it was sometimes quite difficult to know what kind of skills level the [pupils] had. The chatlogs were also useful in this because by reading them you got at least some idea of what level their English was. (S4_ActivityGroup)

The university students considered the national curriculum and their interactions with the schoolteachers useful means for designing learning. Although the designed learning project could be characterised as following the sociocultural understanding of language learning, emphasising language learning through meaningful participation (van Lier 2000; Kramsch and Whiteside 2008), the accounts also reveal competing discourses during the course. For example, the vocabulary used in the papers (e.g., *level*, *age,* and *skills*) refers to an understanding of language learning as largely an individual-based phenomenon. However, in designing the city as a language learning environment, the university students were actually leaning on a broader understanding, emphasising interaction between pupils and their possibility to choose their paths themselves. This stance is very visible in Example 8, which highlights the value of peer interaction in language learning.

(8) *Facilitating pupils' interactions and learning*

> I think that the main point of the tutoring was getting the pupils to chat in English, guiding the conversation, answering questions (if there were problems), monitoring that everything is in order (e.g. no one is getting bullied online) and correcting the grammatical or spelling errors of the pupils (though, it must be said, the pupils were very good at correcting each other). (S1_ProjectManagement)

The example above shows that the university student's understanding of a fruitful learning situation involved reciprocal work among peers on linguistic aspects. This is also visible in Example 1's case of self and other repair in a chatlog. Furthermore, the example shows that the teacher's responsibilities were not only seen as focusing on the language itself but on overall organisational tasks, with the aim of facilitating interaction between the pupils.

The university students felt that the hands-on collaborative work in the chat sessions had been meaningful for the growth of their professional expertise in designing learning activities for children. The students highlighted the importance of being in contact with the pupils and seeing their own design become real: *it was a great feeling to realize that we were working with real live kids and helping them learn and grow.* (S2_ActivityGroup). Furthermore, their reflections illustrated that the course's set-up facilitated the taking of responsibility. One of the students wrote: *Also, taking responsibility came quite naturally in this course, where the teacher or the lecturer was not in control for the whole time.* (S3_ActivityGroup). The students worked their way from feelings of uncertainty and confusion of the beginning towards a successfully implemented school project, and even stated that they gained confidence in facing new technologies.

As the reflection papers show, the students elaborated their understandings of the overall process and their learning from different perspectives. They pondered the complexity of the aspects related to the work and the changes in their perceptions of language teaching with special reference to their experiences of planning and putting into practice the online project for the schools. The reflections also foregrounded an interesting aspect related to changing practices in the field of language pedagogy. Although the modern views of language learning seemed foregrounded in the course of the learning project, the university students saw the project quite marginal when considering the lessons learnt for their future careers. The learning project was seen as something that could take place as an exceptional experience every now and then rather than as a basis for developing modern language pedagogy as a whole.

5 Discussion and Conclusion

This study aimed to shed light on how language students learned to orchestrate complex

pedagogical situations during a university course to create an online English project for Finnish schoolchildren. Video recordings from tutoring encounters in the university lecturer's office were used as primary material with the chatlogs generated during the sessions. Reflection papers written after the experience were also examined, because they provided a glimpse into the participants' personal understandings and feelings related to the project.

As the analysis above shows, the university lecturer's office offered a site for a nexus of numerous converging practices (Scollon and Scollon 2004) in the course of managing the online chat sessions with the school pupils. The encounters can be viewed from a situational perspective, paying attention to how the participants were engaging in activities that made children's participation in the language learning project possible. In the course of the work, the university students assumed new roles as teachers, acting variously as guessing-game animals, online tutors, co-teachers, in technical support, and as students of the university lecturer, to name a few.

During the sessions, everyone needed to sort out technical matters, coordinate the work together and with the teachers in the schools, distribute the workload in the team, tutor the pupils in the chat and discuss various pedagogical issues and solutions (some more general, some specific to the situation). At times, the university lecturer adopted the teacher position, and at times she took part in the joint activities as a team member. The participants solved problems together, joked, had relaxed conversations and laughed together, which provided an experience of a different interaction order than is typical in classroom-based language teaching. The university students' primary focus was to act as animal tutors in the chat with pupils. At the same time, they continued to negotiate aspects of language, language learning, course design, and tutoring strategies. While doing one thing, they continued to monitor the ongoing activities and each

other's actions surreptitiously, ensuring that the redirection of orientations and transitions between activities took place smoothly.

If we apply the perspective of *discourses in place* to social action, we can say that the confined office space was in many respects a great affordance for the joint negotiation of meanings between the teacher and the students. This is impossible if the teacher is not part of the teamwork – in the extreme case, the traditional teacher merely distributes the tasks, while the students do their projects on their own. The important topics that emerged during the work can be seen on a more abstract level to deal with some basic questions: What is language and what is language learning in the modern world? What kinds of teaching practices promote pupils' language learning? Who are we as language teachers?

An important thread was to advance the view of language learning as part of everyday life (a holistic and ecological perspective) versus language learning as a subject slot in the timetable. The participants were able to challenge their previous understandings and gain new experiences. The students engaged in a real-life project designing something that nobody had known about beforehand – not even the teacher. You could say that their *historical bodies* were renewed in this respect. The pedagogical setting also supported the emergence of the *interaction order* between the participants, which was balanced in contrast with typical teacher-led situations in which interaction is distributed through the teacher.

Using the analytical lenses of nexus analysis (discourses in place, historical body, interaction order), the study exposed how the interactions and collaboration in the university lecturer's office allowed space to promote the students' agency as future language teachers. Given the traditional roles of learners and teachers, the setting provided new experiences for the participants: they learned to design and orchestrate

technology-mediated language learning, which also involved rethinking the meanings assigned to some basic concepts relevant for language pedagogy, such as language, language learning and language teaching (see also Blin and Jalkanen 2014).

The school project was an important mediational means to trigger meaning making of different kinds leading to new kinds of teacherhood vision. The findings provide perspectives for language teacher education and the practice of language pedagogy. Given the slow pace of change in education practices, it will be important to conduct more research that draws on longitudinal research designs and approaches allowing the analysis of change as a complex phenomenon combining (inter)actions *in situ* and in their wider societal frameworks.

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