

“Everyone understood me, and no one judged me”

Studying language learning within a highly motivated engagement with valued social
practices

Elmeri Seppänen
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English Philology
Faculty of
Humanities
University of Oulu
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1 INTRODUCTION

In this thesis I study the spoken language learning environment provided by the international theatre project YET utilising ethnographical methods and an ecological/sociocultural approach, specifically theories proposed by Gee (2004, 2007). The purpose is to determine whether the project is a beneficial and useful resource for an upper secondary school, as well as try to understand the phenomena that happen during the project as thoroughly as possible. Thus it involves not only methods to determine changes in learning identity and attitude, but also methods of established oral language proficiency testing to add some diversity to the data.

The YET (Youth, Europe and Theatre) project is a multicultural theatre project held in English in the Finnish upper secondary school Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukio in the spring of 2015. It is an international, multicultural theatre project that has been going on in one form or another since 1997, although the Finnish school in question has only been a part of it since 2001. In the YET project two schools (or more on previous years) from different countries, depending on the participants in the given year, gather in one of the schools for two weeks. During this time they divide themselves into groups that have roughly equal numbers of students from both nationalities and create theatre performances in these groups. As the students share no native language, the working language of these groups is English. It is, however, important to note that there are no native speakers of English in these groups (unless there happen to be students who are bilingual or native English speakers for some other, unrelated reason) nor is the English the students use graded in any way. The YET project that was studied for this research was YET16, held in 2015. In addition to this, two other, earlier YET projects will also be used for comparison: YET9 (in 2007) and YET10 (in 2008), both of which I participated in during my time as an upper secondary school student. They will mostly be referred to when asserting how YET projects usually work.

A working presumption is that Finnish students, in general, have some anxiety when using their oral English skills, especially in a classroom environment. This has been the conclusion of multiple research papers (see for example Korpela, 2010; Renko, 2012; Lahtinen, 2013 or Pietilä 2014: section 6.4.1), and it was also corroborated by some of

the students taking part in this study. This research works on the hypothesis that the anxiety that Finnish students feel while speaking English harms their communication, as they do not feel comfortable using the skills that they may, in actuality, possess. For example, students may feel it is unacceptable to speak in a heavily accented manner or using simple terms, even if those do not impede (and in fact sometimes may facilitate) communication. The hypothesis is that given a situation which does not emphasise English language education, but instead focuses simply on communicating in English, some of the trepidation the students feel will not be present, or will dissipate once they are accustomed to speaking English – and that their communication skills will improve. For further information, speaking tests were administered both before and after the project, even though this is not a common ethnographical approach. They were utilised for a more thorough understanding of the phenomena that were present in the project. The IELTS exams that were used as speaking tests are widely used, and even if the data that they give has to be critically viewed, they do still give some information that would be inaccessible with other methods.

However, as this thesis is defined by the sociocultural and ecological approaches, specifically as defined by Gee, it works on the assumption that learning is not simply a cognitive process that happens within the learner, but a larger experience that is intimately connected with cultural and social activities tied to identity. This is why this thesis employs ethnographical methods – namely observation, participation and theme interviews – as these are good at studying such features. These methods were applied to determine whether there was any change in the students' language identities, whether they thought the project enjoyable or useful in general, and what they thought about using English during the project. In effect, I have studied whether the students' experiences with the project have been positive or negative, and the kinds of effects it has had on them. Additionally, the data gathered from the speaking tests was compared to the results of the interviews and observation where possible, determining for example if the students views on their own skills reflected reality (as presented by the language tests). From all that information, I will try to determine if the project has proved to be a good language learning environment, and in what ways.

As this thesis has a sociocultural/ecological approach, it is accepted that for effective, sustained learning to happen, learners must have a positive outlook on their own language learning skills, or at the very least believe that the content being learned is valuable for them, usually both. Because of this, how the students' attitudes towards speaking and learning English change are crucial for this study. While many, if not all of these phenomena could be discussed and analysed using, for example, the socio-cultural theory as proposed by Lantolf (Lantolf, 2004) or ecological theory as proposed by Van Lier (Van Lier, 2004), Gee's theories regarding semiotic domains and how identities work within them address the problems of this research elegantly, as they commonly speak of affinity spaces and groups that can be compared to the YET project (Gee 2004, 2007). The theory section of this thesis will also cover ethnographic research and theme interviews, as well as take a brief look at the theory of assessing oral communication skills.

As stated earlier, the topic of communication anxiety has been researched by others, and it has been accepted as being a problem in Finnish second language teaching (see Korpela, 2010; Renko, 2012; Lahtinen, 2013 or Pietilä, 2014). As such, the information possibly gathered by this study can be important in further studying the matter, and perhaps in devising ways to create educational environments in which such anxiety is decreased. In addition, as the purpose is to determine if the YET project is a good language environment and in which ways, it can also be used to create other, similar language learning environments that deal with actual language use situations as opposed to constructed, class-room language use situations. Similar projects and research have been conducted before, usually under CLIL, or Content and Language Integrated Learning, which today encompasses a wide variety of different teaching methods that employ a second or foreign language in content teaching (see for example Harrop 2012, Pérez-Cañado, 2011 or Darn 2006 for an overview on CLIL). CLIL has had good results, and it is a varied and still widely researched field. The YET project is different, however, as it strives to distance itself from normal school routine and instead exploits valued social practices as a medium for language learning.

The next section of this study will cover the theories and methods used in this study. Section 3 will describe the research material and case description, section 4 will present

the analysis of this data, and section 5 will discuss the analysis and findings. Finally, section 6 is the conclusion of this thesis, which is followed by references and appendices.

2 THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section of the thesis I will fit the study into the wider framework of, especially, ethnographic research and go through the various methods of study. The topics of theme interviews and spoken language evaluation are also discussed, as they are the central methods which I will use for information gathering. Observation as a valid research method will also be dealt with in the wider depiction of ethnographic research. I will, however, emphasise the theories of good learning principles, affinity groups, semiotic domains and identities as presented by Gee (2004 and 2007), as these form the basis of my thesis.

2.1 ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

This subsection will cover the wider field of ethnographic research and explain how this study fits its framework. Ethnography encompasses a wide variety of different research methods, theoretical backgrounds and ideologies that share a similar core of trying to give credence to individuals' subjective experiences and views. This is also why it is utilised in this research paper, as learning and identity are very subjective phenomena. Ethnography has been employed in many different kinds of studies, but this research mainly draws from school ethnography as described by Lappalainen et al. (Lappalainen et al., 2007). The following passages express that focus.

Ethnographic research has been defined in a variety of ways, and there is no exact description or necessarily even consensus on what it is exactly. However, Lappalainen (Lappalainen, 2007: 11), referencing books from Atkinson & Coffrey (Atkinson & Coffrey, 2001: 4) and Skeggs (Skeggs, 2001: 426), lists some common characteristics of ethnographic research as: fieldwork that lasts for 'a reasonable amount of time' (*'kohtuullisen aikaa kestänyt'*), diversity of methods and analytical perspectives, conducting the research in the same circumstances as the informants live in and having participation, observation and experience in a central role in the research process. She also states that the creation of research material happens at least partly simultaneously with analysing as well as theorising and interpreting the data, because many of the

methods used for data collection cannot be utilised without somehow interpreting the data. For example, simply deciding what to record or what to write down influences the scope and focus of the research, as not everything can be recorded. The researcher has to make decisions in the field that affect the material that they collect. (Lappalainen 2007: 13).

As mentioned above, participation, observation and experience are central to ethnographic research, and these lend themselves especially well to studying individual experiences, minority groups, gender differences, societal constructs and a multitude of other subjects that usually deal with authority, power and/or the use or division of control. One of the most common examples of a research subject that deals with the latter is education, which is also the subject of this research. Studying it in the context of ethnographical research is usually called school ethnography (*'kouluetnografia'*). In general, ethnography is often used to study highly personal experiences, and commonly in ethnography the objective is to give the informant a voice and to expose the informant's life as honestly as possible. This also means taking into account the researcher's role while conducting the study: whether they unintentionally affect the situation by simply being present, if they have some sort of authority role, or how they might influence an interview by their personality etc. (Lahelma & Gordon, 2007)

As a general rule, ethnography does not pose the question whether a researcher has a bias or not, but rather works on the assumption that there is always a bias; there is no way to fully distance oneself from the context of the study and be a completely impartial observer. For example, a common problem with researching education is that most, if not all, researchers have extensive personal experiences with schools and education – usually from when they attended school, but also in many cases from being teachers, lecturers or other educators. This means that approaching the subject impartially is very difficult. For example, when Gordon et al. (Gordon et al. 2007: 43) decided to gather research data jointly by following certain schools, they 'prepared for entering the field by trying to identify and question [their] presumptions about school' in order to combat this problem. (Lappalainen et al., 2007a)

School ethnography has many roots: in North America it is said to be an extension of anthropology or, in some cases, socio-cultural research. In Europe it is considered to

stem from the sociology of education from the 1970s. Current ethnography can be divided into many approaches, such as social interactionism, which discusses social interaction usually within the classroom; ethnomethodology, which uses microanalysis that is especially well suited for the study of power and control; or cultural ethnography, which focuses on how adolescents create, maintain and modify their particular subgroups' cultures. According to Lahelma and Gordon Finnish ethnography stems mostly from the European tradition, favouring large, comprehensive data instead of microanalysis, and focusing on differences and inequality, often within schools or other educational structures, both material and immaterial. (Lahelma & Gordon 2007)

Interviews are common and very useful data gathering methods for ethnographical research, as explained by Tolonen and Palmu, who also move on to describe what an ethnographic interview is like. They state that, despite numerous different definitions, presence and context are always very important factors in an ethnographical interview – for example, the questions of how long should the researcher stay in the lives of the interviewees and in what role. Another important factor is that the interview questions are formulated during the research, not before it. The interview is guided by preliminary analysis – as is common for ethnographical research. Tolonen and Palmu also emphasise that the relationship the researcher and the subject have is not static, but changes during the course of the research. If there are multiple interviews there may well be a defined difference in interviewer/interviewee roles between the first and the last interview. (Tolonen & Palmu, 2007: 89-92)

In this research paper a specific interview type was used, called a theme interview. It will be discussed in detail further, but is a clear example of an ethnographic interview. Tolonen and Palmu state the following:

Tiukasti määriteltynä etnografinen haastattelu on tehty etnografisen kenttätöyön yhteydessä ja perustuu tuttuuteen, läsnäoloon ja tutkimussuhteen laatuun. Etnografisessa haastattelussa kannetaan yleensä mukana sosiaalista yhteisöä taikka muistoja menneestä.

Strictly defined, an ethnographic interview is conducted during fieldwork and is based on familiarity, presence and the quality of the research relationship. The participants usually share a common social group or common past memories.

(Tolonen & Palmu, 2007: 110)

The common social group refers to the fact that usually the researcher shares the environment with the informants in some way, maybe by participating in activities in e.g. schools, or simply by being present and observing. Nevertheless, usually the research relationship encompasses a shared experience which both can draw from.

Next we will talk about theme interviews, which are a common ethnographical interview type.

2.2 THEME INTERVIEWS

This section will cover theme interviews, which are a specific subset of semi-structured interviews. A structured interview has set questions in a set order, while a semi-structured interview is planned in advance, but has some aspects which are unsystematic. There are multiple variants of semi-structured interviews. Usually what they have in common is that there is no specific, set question order for the interview, nor are there specific questions to ask the interviewee. The researcher does, however, have certain subjects or themes that they wish to broach. There have been multiple semi-structured interview types used by different researchers (for example, Jonsson & Kälvesten, 1964; Dahlgren, 1977). Most of them, however, resemble what Merton and Kendall referred to as a ‘focused interview’ as early as 1946. They explain the differences with other, similar data collection methods (i.e. interview types) as follows:

1. Persons interviewed are known to have been involved in a particular concrete situation [...]
2. The hypothetically significant elements, [...] have been previously analyzed by the investigator. [...]
3. On the basis of this analysis, the investigator has fashioned an interview guide [...]
4. The interview itself is focused on the subjective experiences of persons [...]. The array of their reported responses to this situation enables the investigator
 - a. To test the validity of hypotheses [...]
 - b. To ascertain unanticipated responses to the situation, thus giving rise to fresh hypotheses.”

(Merton & Kendall, 1946: 1)

Essentially, it is an interview type that focuses on a certain situation that all the informants have experienced, and especially focuses on subjective experiences. The semi-structured interview guide that is used in the interview is formed by the interviewer by analysing the possibly significant elements in the situation beforehand. After the interview, the interviewer uses the answers to test the hypotheses that have already been formed, as well as to create new hypothesis that have not been thought of yet.

The semi-structured interview that was used in this thesis most closely resembles theme interviews as they were introduced by Hirsjärvi & Hurme (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1982). Theme interviews, as designed by the writers, retain almost all of the characteristics that a focused interview has, with the exception of the first one. According to the writers, there is no need for a concrete, common situation that all of the informants have experienced; instead it works off the assumption that common, everyday experiences can be studied as well. It is called a 'theme interview' because the main areas of inquiry – the themes – are already known, but there are no specific questions characteristic of structured interviews. In addition, the interviewee is free to broach any subject that they wish to add to the conversation. Still, just as with Merton and Kendall, the emphasis in theme interviews is in the personal experiences and views of the subject and, as such, it is excellent in dealing with subjects that: are emotionally sensitive, the informants are not fully conscious of, are easily forgotten or the informants are not used to speaking about. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1982: 35-37)

According to Hirsjärvi and Hurme, theme interviews allow the informant to answer and react as naturally and freely as possible. The conversational nature of the method appeases the informants and allows for profound conversations that reveal things that would otherwise stay hidden. When done right, theme interviews take into account people as a whole. (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1982: 8)

Next the thesis moves on to spoken language assessment testing.

2.3 ASSESSING SPOKEN LANGUAGE

This thesis uses IELTS, the International English Language Testing System, as a speaking language proficiency test. This section will cover spoken language assessment and the common problems faced with it in a wider sense, as well as describe the major theories behind the IELTS test. This subsection covers spoken language assessment testing generally, while a detailed description of the IELTS test and its practices is depicted in section 3.2.2.

It is widely accepted that assessing oral language skills is a difficult task, as deciding upon exactly what and how the applicant should be assessed can be tricky (see for example Luoma, 2004; Itkonen, 2010; Roca-Varela & Palacios, 2013; Takala, 1993: Part III etc.) Part of the problem is that for there to be effective spoken language testing, one would need to define what language and spoken language is. However, there is no single, unifying language theory that would be accepted by all linguists. According to Takala, however, despite the fact that most language theories do not agree with each other, they do have common characteristics which make it possible to create a spoken language assessment test using multiple language theories as a basis. (Takala, 1993: 131) Because of this, it is certainly possible to isolate features of speech for an assessor to focus on, or evaluate speech as a whole. The latter is called a ‘holistic approach’, while the former, the ‘analytical approach’ – dividing language proficiency into sectors – is used in the IELTS exam and will be focused on in this thesis (Takala, 1993: 146).

One of the problems with the analytical approach is to decide what categories of assessment there should be, and how many. There cannot be too many, as it is only possible to concentrate on a few features at a time (Airola, 2003: 72; Takala, 1993: 154). Even more problematic, Takala states that it is very difficult to define language features precisely enough to form good categories (Takala, 1993: 153).

Usually tests are ‘criteria based’, which means that they refer to something outside the test, such as a chart of features with scores for certain proficiency levels. This is a good way to, for example, assess whether a candidate can use the language effectively in a given situation. These criteria should be based on features that can be separated into their own, assessable categories. Furthermore, the categories should be made in such a

way that the test makers believe them to be sensible and useful. Common categories are: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and fluency, which are also approximately the same categories as those that are used in the IELTS test. (1993: 155-156)

Most commonly an oral language skill test is performed in a face-to-face interview session. There are other types, such as peer-to-peer tests, where candidates talk with each other, or a semi-direct interview which is an interview-type test conducted via computer in order to give all of the candidates the exact same exam for increased consistency. The biggest problem with interview tests for spoken language is that they are not actual dialogues or conversations. Instead “many researchers have come to agree that the oral exchange that occurs between an interviewer and a test taker does not reflect, or even closely replicate, natural or real-life conversation” (Ussama & Sinwongsawat, 2014). Another problem is the role of the interviewer; who is qualified to do such a test? There are differing opinions on the matter, but it is commonly accepted that it should be, at the very least, someone who has a better understanding of the language than the interviewee. Some, however, argue that even that is not necessary (Takala 1993: 128-129). The problem with interviewers is also the fact that the tests become very subjective; there is a chance that the individual’s opinions or skill sets affect the result of the test, regardless of whether it happens on purpose or not.

Other problems brought up by Takala include: the tests rarely comprehensively include all of the strengths and weaknesses of an individual’s oral language skills, an individual’s oral language skills change a lot depending on context and situation and in time (a grade from a language skill test might be outdated in a very short time) (1993: 126-127). Despite these problems, however, oral language assessment is commonly thought to be possible, if somewhat error-prone.

The IELTS test, according to what was written above, is: an analytical, criterion based interview-type test with the strengths and weaknesses of such an exam. It is an entry-test, meaning that it is used to gauge whether a candidate is ready for further academic pursuits, or if the candidate is capable to use English as an everyday language depending on which test, the Academic or General, is used. This works well regarding the goals of this thesis. The speaking test is used to gain more varied information about the phenomenon in the project.

2.4 WHAT CONSTITUTES ‘GOOD LEARNING’?

Gee’s work (2003, 2007) on semiotic domains, affinity groups and spaces, and identities stems from the same basis as sociocultural (see e.g. Lantolf, 2004) and ecological (see e.g. Van Lier, 2004) language learning theories – that is, the works of Vygotsky (see for example Kozulin et al., 2003 for a contemporary discussion on Vygotsky). These perspectives, while distinct, nevertheless have a similar focus; how learners react and interact with the outside world, which is heavily connected to the idea of identity and how it changes. Gee’s concepts specifically deal with socially situated identities (see also e.g. Mishler, 2000; Rifkin, 2000; Sternberg & Grigorenko, 1999), which is the major reason his theories are employed in this thesis. However, to understand identities in that context one must also understand affinity spaces and how Gee constructs his learning principles.

During the last two decades Gee has worked extensively on video games and how they pertain to language and learning. He lists 36 ‘learning principles’ that constitute good learning (Gee, 2007: 56), although he also has similar ideas in many of his earlier works (such as Gee, 2004). While Gee has created these principles by studying what good learning aspects video games have, he states that these are general principles, not specific to video games. In this section, I will introduce Gee’s theories about good learning (active, critical learning), and elaborate on the parts that are especially important regarding this thesis. Affinity groups and spaces will be dealt with first, as they form the basis of Gee’s arguments, after which I will concentrate on the identity principle and identity repair work. Finally, an abridged version of Gee’s learning principles that are not covered by earlier sections can be found in section 2.4.4.

2.4.1 Affinity Spaces

Gee states that “people learn best when their learning is part of a highly motivated engagement with social practices which they value” (Gee, 2004: 70). This is the shortest possible summary of his theory on the subject, and there are certainly others who ascribe to a similar view (see e.g. Brown 1994; Brown & Campione 1994; Wenger 1998). The learning principles he has stated are merely a way to explain why this is so.

What constitutes a ‘highly motivated engagement with social practices which [the learners] value’, then? For the most part, this alludes to affinity groups and affinity spaces, both of which deal with semiotic domains.

A semiotic domain is “any set of practices that recruits one or more modalities (e.g. oral or written language, images, equations, [...] etc.) to communicate distinctive types of meanings” (Gee 2007: 25). That means that basketball, anthropology, first-person shooter games and school are all semiotic domains. They have their own language; symbols that mean different things in the context of their domain. For example, the semiotic domain of school has a lot of specific vocabulary. Take, for example, the word ‘lesson’. The dictionary definition of ‘lesson’ states more than a dozen different descriptions for it, such as class, period, instruction, etc. (Chambers Online Dictionary)¹ However, in the school setting we know fairly explicitly what it usually means: students gather around their desks and listen to their teacher, we know the students are children, we know how they are grouped, we know the teacher is (usually) an expert in their chosen field (or, indeed, semiotic domain) etc. There is quite an enormous amount of information that we know about these situations. This means that we are able to read the language and symbols of the semiotic domain of school. Gee refers to this as being ‘literate’ in a semiotic domain (Gee, 2007: 26).

Semiotic domains are, however, often not that clearly divided. They can have sub-domains (movies are a semiotic domain in and of itself, but different genres of movies also have their own semiotic domain), or a situation can include multiple semiotic domains. For an example of the latter kind, the YET project has multiple semiotic domains: it is a theatre project (one semiotic domain) held in a school (another semiotic domain) in English (a third semiotic domain) by youths (youth culture can be regarded as a semiotic domain) and teachers (also a semiotic domain) etc. Partly because of this, it is more fruitful to speak about affinity spaces, which can encompass multiple semiotic

¹ www.oed.com

domains. An affinity space is “a place or set of places where people can affiliate with others based primarily on shared activities, interests, and goals, not shared race, class, culture, ethnicity, or gender” (Gee 2004: 67) - that is, a place where people who are literate within a certain semiotic domain or domains can interact, with that semiotic domain being what brings them together.

Gee further states (Gee, 2004: 73-74) that any kind of ‘semiotic social space’ (of which affinity spaces are a subgenre of) needs to have content (something the space is about), generators (which create the content) and portals (which people use to access the content). Elaborating on the YET project as an affinity space, the main generator, which creates the content for the space, would probably be the novel *Karhun kuolema*, ‘the Death of the Bear’ which was what the participants turned into a play, but other things were generators as well. For example, longstanding theatre traditions that guided the kinds of roles people took during the project as well as directors, singing and dancing teachers and, in this particular project, even the students themselves to a large extent. These created the content: the actual screenplay, the final form of the play, what was written about the project (by the media team), the songs, the dances etc. The avenues people used to access all this content were multifaceted as well. The school in which practices were held was a portal, but the teachers, in addition to being generators were also portals, group conversations on Facebook and WhatsApp etc. were portals as well as group exercises and practices. It is good to note that being a generator or portal is not a binary state, instead a dress rehearsal, for example, can be a strong portal (as everyone participates actively), but a weak generator (at this point there will most likely not be any major changes to the play – but there might be some).

For a space to be an affinity space, however, this is not enough. Instead Gee also states eleven features that together define an affinity space. These can be read in their entirety in appendix 7, but they are abridged here. He states that the endeavour that the participants are undertaking is also the thing that connects them the most, not race, class, gender or disability. Both participants that are new to the space and those that are masters in its semiotic domain share the same space, they are not segregated in any way. Some portals to the space are also strong generators of content. The way the content is organised can be changed by how the people act and socialise in the space – that is,

content organisation is changed by interactional organisation. Knowledge is also crucial in affinity spaces, and Gee has multiple principles regarding it. Both intensive, specialised knowledge as well as extensive, general knowledge must be encouraged and valued. The same is true for individual knowledge, which is stored within individuals, as well as distributed knowledge, which is stored in tools, artefacts, technologies as well as other people. Useful knowledge can also be found elsewhere than the affinity space – knowledge is dispersed so that it can also be stored in materials and resources outside of the space. Not all knowledge need be explicitly formed, instead, tacit knowledge, which is built in practice, is also honoured. An affinity space needs to be open and varied in such a way that participating can take different forms and routes, and status can be gathered in many ways. Finally, the leadership of the affinity space must be porous; it is less bound by status, and leaders can instead be used as resources by almost any member of the space. Leaders can also arise in different situations and domains; they need not adhere to a certain type of leadership. (Gee 2004: 99-101)

Affinity spaces are important in this context, because if an environment or a learning experience can be said to happen within an affinity space in which the learner has willingly participated, it ensures, or at least allows for good learning. It is, after all, by definition a highly valued social practice. An affinity space is a good basis for the learning principles that Gee has put forward – in fact, there is a very similar principle already listed among the principles, which is the Affinity Group principle. An affinity group is simpler than an affinity space – a group of individuals who are literate in a given semiotic domain are called an affinity group. They usually interact within an affinity space.

Gee's 36 learning principles are not necessarily definite – as in, there might be other good learning principles and for good learning to happen, all of the principles do not necessarily have to be fulfilled. Nor are the principles necessarily binary in nature; they are not either fulfilled or not, instead they can be fulfilled to some degree. Still, Gee mentions (Gee, 2007: 56) that the principles are equally important. Indeed, many of them can be thought to be different viewpoints on the same theme.

2.4.2 The Identity Principle

In this subsection I will concentrate on principle 8, called the Identity Principle, which deals with learning and identity. The principle states the following:

Learning involves taking on and playing with identities in such a way that the learner has real choices (in developing the virtual identity) and ample opportunity to meditate [sic] on the relationship between new identities and old ones. There is a tripartite play of identities as learners relate, and reflect on, their multiple real-world identities, a virtual identity, and a projective identity.

(2007: 215)

For these purposes Gee states that identity is “any specific way of reading and thinking [...], a way of being a certain ‘kind of person’”, and while everyone can have multiple identities in the way that people can think ‘as a literary critic’ etc., we also have a core identity that is formed because we exist in the same body for our life (Gee, 2007: 10-11). The ‘tripartite play of identities’ is essential in the above reference; it happens between three types of identities, **a real-world identity, a virtual identity and a projective identity.**

Gee uses the example of a science classroom to describe the three identities that influence each other in good learning. According to him, learners need to “be able to engage in words, interactions, and actions that allow them to take on the identity of a ‘scientist’” (Gee, 2007: 67) when working in a science classroom. This means that the teacher (in this case) needs to express a certain set of “values, beliefs and ways with words, deeds, and interactions” (Gee, 2007: 67). These define, for the teacher and the students, what it means to be a scientist (in this particular classroom), so that the students can act in ways that would be recognisable for someone in the semiotic domain of science. This virtual identity should stem from the history and workings of that particular semiotic domain, but still be open to some interpretation and choices for the person taking on the virtual identity – that is, the learners can choose in which ways they decide to exercise their virtual identity of how to be, for example, a scientist. Maybe they will decide to collaborate closely with their friends (other virtual scientists), or do certain experiments, ask certain questions, talk in a certain way. Not all

classrooms work like this, but then, not all classroom learning is good learning. (Gee 2007: 65-67)

All learners also have several real-world identities which inevitably affect their learning situations. Students could, for example, have separate identities as a middle-class person, a good student, an African-American person, a man, a football player etc. Not all of these are, however, important in the context of a learning environment. Instead, it is the identities that interact with, reflect and filter through the virtual identity that the learner is taking in the learning environment that are important. A student must be able to construct bridges from his real-world identity to the new, forming virtual identity. If, for example, a learner has an identity as a good student, then a virtual identity as a scientist (in school) would be a natural progression from the real-world identity (as the student is used to taking on virtual identities in school and firmly believes they are able to do so). Some identities might be in conflict with the virtual identity – maybe an identity of not being good at school, or an identity as a ‘working class family member, who doesn’t need the sciences’. If a student cannot or will not build any connection between one or more of their real-world identities, deep learning cannot occur. The student will not be actively engaged in the semiotic domain, cannot or will not enter an affinity space or join an affinity group. In this case, repair work needs to be done, so that the student either takes on new identities that can build bridges to the virtual one, or they will modify their existing identities. This repair work is in the core of this thesis, and it will be looked at in more detail shortly. (Gee 2007: 61-63, 66-68)

A projective identity is the interaction of the real-world identity with the virtual identity. According to Gee:

if learners are to take on projective identities in the science classroom, they must come to project their own values and desires onto the virtual identity of ‘being a scientist of a certain sort’ [and] they also must come to see this virtual identity as their own project in the making [...] defined by their own values, desires, choices, goals and actions”

(Gee 2007: 71-72)

Continuing on the earlier scientist-example, what this means is that a student has certain aspirations for their virtual identity. They want to create a narrative for their virtual identity as a certain type of scientist, for example, as a sceptical, analytical person –

regardless of whether they are those things themselves. If a science classroom is well organised, the students do not simply role-play the kind of scientist their virtual identity is, instead they also proactively improve and modify that virtual identity. They modify it not only by projecting their own values, hopes and fears onto the virtual identity, but also with the information that they receive from the ‘virtual world’ that scientist is in (what it means to be a scientist in this particular classroom). (Gee 2007: 72-73)

The projective identity is one of the most important things concerning critical, active learning, as evidenced by Gee’s statement that if students, or any learners, do take on a projective identity, they will eventually realise that they have the capacity, “at some level”, to take on the virtual identity as a real world identity. This virtual identity does not need to be realised into an actual real world identity, it is enough that a learner understands the possibility of it. Gee states:

If children are learning deeply, they will learn, through their projective identities, new values and new ways of being in the world based on the powerful juxtaposition of their real-world identities (“So, that’s what I really feel, think, and value”) and the virtual identity at stake in the learning (‘So, these are the ways of feeling, thinking, and valuing open to a scientist’). This juxtaposition is the ground on which their projective work has been done. (‘So, I want, for this time and place to have been *this* type of scientist and person and not *that* type.’)

(Gee, 2007: 73)

Gee argues in the above citation (as well as throughout his books) that learning is not simply about learning content, but about learning new ways to think, act and react; new ways to ‘be in this world’, which is also the stance this thesis chooses to accept.

2.4.3 Identity Repair Work

This subsection covers identity repair work, which is an essential part of learning. Repair work is needed when a learner cannot or will not build connections from their real world identities to the virtual identity that is at stake. A fairly simple example is a student who comes from a working class background and believes that in his family, people do not need the sciences and that they will not be important or useful for him. If such a student does not find some identity that he can connect the virtual identity of being a scientist, they will only access the semiotic domain in a passive sense. That

would mean the semiotic domain is not a ‘social practice which they value’, which means there is no incentive to try to learn the semiotic domain. They could, of course, have another identity to connect to the virtual identity at stake – for example, perhaps they want to be an astronaut and realise that sciences are needed for that.

How, then, does one do ‘identity repair work’? Gee states three principles that need to be followed:

1. The learner must be enticed to try, even if he or she already has good grounds to be afraid to try.
2. The learner must be enticed to put in lots of effort even if he or she begins with little motivation to do so.
3. The learner must achieve some meaningful success when he or she has expended this effort.

(Gee 2007: 68-69)

Gee mentions that, in fact, all good teaching applies these principles. The principles are equally important, as people need to be willing to try if they plan to put in a lot of effort into something, as effortless success is not rewarding, and neither is little success with a lot of effort.

How these principles are achieved is another notion entirely. To get the learner to try entering a certain semiotic domain they must be helped (or learn by themselves) to explore their real world identities in such a way that they find something to connect with in the virtual identity, or to create a completely new identity for that purpose. Gee also mentions a ‘psychosocial moratorium principle’ (2007: 71), which means an environment where the learner can try and practice with minimal real world consequences. This may entice the learner to try, but to keep them trying the virtual identity and world surrounding it need to be compelling for the learner on their own terms. That is, they need to see the virtual identity as a gain for themselves, and not a loss (because changing identities always also means losing something, a previous identity). Finally, this effort needs to be met with an appropriate amount of success – not too little so as not to make the task too challenging, and not too much so that it does not seem trivial. Gee also speaks of an ‘amplification of input’ principle, which means that the input the learner adds to the system yields amplified output, such as a chemist

combining a few elements and gaining a huge explosion as a result. Again, it does not mean that all effort should be met with immediate success, but instead that success should yield major results. (Gee 2007: 68-72)

Next the learning principles that were not covered already will be described.

2.4.4 Other Learning Principles

This subsection covers the rest of the good learning principles that Gee states. The principles are merely glossed over; if they are brought up later, they will be explained further. The list can be found as it was written by Gee (Gee 2007: 213-219) in appendix 6. Gee's learning principles have a lot of overlap; they cover many of the same themes, simply from a different viewpoint.

The active, critical learning principle means that the environment where the learning happens must be constructed in such a way as to facilitate active, critical learning as opposed to passive learning.

The design principle states that the learner must learn to appreciate design and design principles.

According to the semiotic principle the learners need to appreciate interrelations within and across multiple sign systems (images, words, actions etc.

The semiotic domain principle states that learning is about mastering semiotic domains, while the metalevel thinking about semiotic domains principle states that the learners must actively and critically think about the relationships of these semiotic domains.

Committed learning principle means that the learners participate in an extended engagement with a lot of effort and practice.

The self-knowledge principle states that the identity play in question must steer the learner to learn about their current and potential capacities.

According to the achievement principle, learners of all skill levels need to have built-in intrinsic rewards that are customised to them and their growing mastery.

The practice principle states that learners need to get a lot of meaningful practice.

The ongoing learning principle states that masters of semiotic domains need to undo the routines they have created and adapt to new conditions. This is also closely related to the “regime of competence” principle, according to which the learners have many opportunities to operate within the edges of their resources.

The probing principle states that learning is a cycle of probing, reflection, forming new hypotheses and reprobating and confirming hypotheses.

The multiple routes principle declares that there are many ways to make progress.

The situated meaning principle argues that the meaning of signs and symbols needs to be situated in embodied experience; meaning is contextualised and specific.

According to the text principle texts are not understood as being purely verbal, but instead interrelated with embodied experiences; texts need to be based on things the learner understands and is a part of.

The intertextual principle describes related texts as families of certain types of texts.

The multimodal principle asserts that meaning and knowledge are created through different modalities (images, texts, symbols etc.), not simply words.

The material intelligence principle states that information is stored in material objects and the environment.

The intuitive knowledge principle states that intuitive or tacit knowledge is created via repeated practice and experience.

According to the subset principle learning needs to take place in a simplified subset of the real semiotic domain, and according to the incremental principle the learning situation needs to be ordered so that progress is logical.

The concentrated sample principle further states that the learner needs to see and experience many different kinds of fundamental signs and actions than they normally would so they can learn them immediately.

The bottom-up basic skill principle states that learning basic skills cannot be done in isolation, but in context with other actions and engagements.

Explicit information should be given sparingly according to the discovery principle, but always when he needs and wants it according to the explicit information on-demand and just-in-time principle.

The transfer principle proclaims that learners need to have ample opportunity to apply the skills they have learned earlier to new problems.

The cultural models about the world principle declares that learners need to be encouraged to think consciously and reflectively about their cultural models regarding the world, while cultural models about semiotic domains principle says the same about learning.

The distributed principle states that knowledge is stored across learners, objects, tools symbols, technologies and the environment, while the dispersed principle asserts that knowledge is shared with people and resources outside of the domain or affinity space.

Finally, the insider principle says that the learner is not simply a consumer, but also a producer, who is able to modify their learning experience and the domain.

Examination of both the features of affinity spaces and good learning principles reveals that if a learning environment is an affinity space, it already encompasses at least the following principles: the insider principle, the affinity group principle, the dispersed principle, the distributed principle, the intuitive knowledge principle, the situated meaning principle, the multiple routes principle, the semiotic domains principle, and the semiotic principle. This proves that affinity spaces are a good basis for Gee's good learning principles.

Section 2 has covered the methodology and theories used in this thesis: ethnographic research, theme interviews, assessing spoken language skills, affinity spaces, the identity principle and identity repair work. Ethnographic research works as a framework where the methods and theories fit. Theme interviews are used later in section 3.2.1 when the interviews that were conducted for this thesis are talked about, and finally while analysing the data. Spoken language skill assessment theories are important in section 3.2.2 and later in analysis and discussion. The concept of an affinity space is paramount for this research, as it works as a basis for most of Gee's learning principles,

while identity and identity repair work are used to gauge how students opinions of themselves change during the project. The next section will cover research the data and process.

3 DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH MATERIAL

This section of the paper covers a description of the research material: case and data description as well as an account of the research process. There are three main methods for gaining research material for this thesis – theme interviews, spoken language tests and observation. These are employed to answer the research question “what kind of a language learning environment does the YET project offer” as well as “is the YET project or projects similar to it useful tools for schools”.

3.1 CASE DESCRIPTION

The YET project is a very specific, genuine language-use situation (as opposed to an artificial class-room situation). Using English during the project is unavoidable, but made as casual and easy as possible, because communication is the aim, not proper grammar. This is because English is used as a true tool for communication, not something to be perfected and scrutinised. That is, English is not the aim, communication is.

The YET project was chosen as a research subject because I was already familiar with its effects. I had participated in it in 2007 and 2008 when I was a student of Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukio. I had witnessed students who were unsure about their English skills get more confidence and improve. Therefore, I wanted to study these phenomena, investigate whether they could be reproduced and discuss whether they might be valuable tools in teaching languages.

3.1.1 The YET Project (Youth, Europe and Theatre)

The YET Project is an international theatre project that in 2015 was held between two upper secondary schools, one in Finland (Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukio), the other in the Netherlands (Teylingen College). It is a part of the Socrates Comenius 1.2

language project, as stated on the YET16 website². Comenius is a program for exchange and co-operation between European schools focused on language and cultural interaction, which was recently moved under the management of Erasmus+ (Cimo.fi)³. The YET Project started in 1997 with Greece, Italy and the Netherlands. Finland has been a part of the project since 2001. The 2015 YET project was the sixteenth time the project was held (YET16).

The YET Project takes two weeks and it could well be described as an intensive theatre project, as for the two weeks that the students participate, they do not take part in any regular classes, their days are full from mornings to late afternoons and after practice they usually spend time with each other in either scheduled programming or in informal gatherings. Students get independent work from the teachers of their courses during that period, which they are expected to finish in the following spring break week. The work they have to do depends entirely on the teacher, but usually they have to follow the course syllabus and study independently the subjects written there. They ‘live and breathe’ the YET Project, with little to no time for any other considerations. This lack of time for anything else is corroborated by both the students in interviews as well as my own experiences when I participated in the project in 2007 and 2008. (YET16)

The working language of the project is English, due to the fact that there is no other shared language between the participants. However, while speaking English at all times is encouraged (instead of falling back to Finnish or Dutch when possible), it is focused on communication instead of grammar or vocabulary. The students are not graded or evaluated in their English during the project in any way (the exception being my own speaking tests with the students, but it was made clear that no teacher would ever hear the grades of those).

² http://osyk.fi/wordpress_4/

³ <http://www.cimo.fi/ohjelmat/comenius>

Before the project both countries created a National Presentation. All the students from their respective countries participated in the making of this presentation on stage, and the purpose of it was to introduce Finnish or Dutch culture to the other group. During the rehearsals for their presentation the Finns also began to get to know each other and create a well-integrated group. After the project began proper, all students from both countries were divided into mixed-nationality teams. The teams were: the Finnish team (the actors who were directed by Finnish teachers), the Finnish art factory (who created props and set pieces for the Finnish team), the Dutch team (the actors who were directed by Dutch teachers), the Dutch art factory (who created props and set pieces for the Dutch team), the technicians (who ran the lights and sounds for both teams) and the media team (who created a website, took pictures and wrote articles about the project). The teachers that participated in the project were called the creative team.

During the two-week project, the students created a play from Essi Kummu's novel *Karhun kuolema*, 'the Death of the Bear', although only the Finnish students had access to the whole book. Approximately 40 pages of the book were translated, but an English abridged version was also provided for the Dutch. The two teams had somewhat different approaches to creating a play from the text – the Finnish team created their play almost entirely from improvised scenes they did during practice about themes and scenes from the book, while the Dutch team had a somewhat more director-led creative process, although they too took ample input from students. The art factories helped their respective teams create set pieces, the technicians created lights and sounds and the media team recorded the progress in articles and photos on their website. The creative team (the teachers) worked as directors, song and dance teachers etc. A typical day would start at 8.30-9.00 am and practice would end at 4.00 pm, after which, usually, they would have some other activity, such as visiting the snow castle in Kemi or going ice swimming.

The Finnish students acted as hosts for the Dutch students, who lived in the Finns' homes for the duration of the project. It is worthy of note that this project created close friendships among the participating students, and many of them mentioned still being in contact and planning to visit each other in the future. In fact, according to my own experiences as well as observing and interviewing the students this time, it seems

common that the students participating in the project on any year feel very close to one another and create lasting friendships.

3.1.2 The Students and Informed Consent

The Finnish students that participated in the project were first and second year upper secondary level students from Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukio, which means that they were 16 to 17 years old. The Dutch students were a year or two younger, but this study covers only the Finns, because gathering consent forms from the parents of the Dutch students was not logistically feasible. Informed consent was gathered from both from a student and a parent or a guardian (the consent form can be found in appendix 5). A parent-teacher conference was held in November 2014 before the beginning of the project where this study was introduced to the parents and students that were present along with other information about the project. I also talked to the students and explained the purpose and mode of the study again during the first National Presentation rehearsals, making sure that every student and their parents knew about the study and agreed to it. No students declined to be a part of the study, although due to time constraints six students were left out of the study because a suitable interview time was not found inside a reasonable timeframe after the project was held.

It should be noted that, according to my experiences, the students taking part in this study do not represent the average upper secondary school student in Finland. The reasons are numerous. The students had to apply for the project, already changing the demographic, and the teachers who chose which students got to participate had their own qualifications for acceptance. They emphasised English skills, previous theatre or art classes, grade point average as well as interest in the project and interpersonal skills; they wanted the students to get along with and support each other. This last criterion was, in fact, the most important, and English, for example, was not actually emphasised that much. The general idea was that the students should be able to gain as much as possible from the project. As such, moderate skills in English were actually a good thing, as that student would most likely gain more from speaking it than someone who was already fluent. In addition to the criteria the teachers set for the applying students, it

is highly probable that the project attracted certain types of people to begin with – those interested in theatre or arts, and those who felt that they could survive two weeks using only English. Therefore, the students that were chosen for the project were motivated, got along well with others, were interested in theatre and spoke at least passable English. They were not representative of an average upper secondary school student in Finland.

The project is annual, and usually students participate in it twice, once on both their first and second years of upper secondary school. As such, 9 students out of the 18 that were interviewed had already participated in the project once, and the remaining 9 will most likely participate in 2016.

The next section will concentrate on the data and data gathering methods that were used in this thesis.

3.2 DESCRIPTION OF DATA

This section of the study covers the description of the collected data. It has been divided into three main categories according to the three data collection methods – interviews, oral skills test and observation and participation. Only the practice of how and why data was collected is covered in this section, no analysis is done, nor are the results of the tests or interviews discussed.

3.2.1 The Interviews

I chose theme interviews as one of the data collection methods in this study. The interviews were used to gather information about multiple aspects of the project: how the students felt about speaking English before, during and after the project, whether they felt their or their friends' skills changed or if they had noticed any other changes speaking English etc. They were also invited to speak about anything regarding the project that they felt they wished to speak about. The common theme, besides the project, were the students own feelings regarding speaking English and the project. This

emphasis on subjective experiences and emotions was also the reason for this choice of method; as Hirsjärvi and Hurme say in their book, theme interviews are especially suited for situations that elicit free-form, deep conversations and natural, free reactions, and that it is a method which takes into account the subject as ‘a thinking and acting human being’ (Hirsjärvi & Hurme, 1982: 8).

Compared to regular theme interviews and ethnographic research the observation and participation time before the interviews was quite short; often in ethnographic research the observation period before the interviews can last for a full year, while in this instance it was only two weeks and a few weekends before that. This was because of the nature of the project – there was no more time to observe, as it did not last any longer. However, ethnographic research is based on a familiarity of setting that the interviewer and interviewee share. In addition to the observation conducted during the interview, this was also achieved by the fact that I had also participated in the project during my own time in OSYK, and I was able to build on that familiarity.

The interviews were conducted on 18 students immediately after their second speaking test had been done. The interviews were done within a month of the end of the project. This was a longer time period than I would have felt comfortable with, but after the project ended it became increasingly difficult to book times for the students. Immediately after the project the students had a week off for their winter holiday, during which no interviews were booked. After that, the students returned to school having lost two weeks’ worth of lessons and were all very busy catching up and preparing for the coming exam week, which was only a week and a half away – and during that the students were either studying for their exams or extremely unwilling to use their day off to come to school for their interviews. For this reason the timeframe of the interviews grew longer, and I eventually settled for the 18 students that I had been able to interview within a month.

The interviews were conducted in private with the students and it was emphasised that anything they say about the project would be anonymous in the study. They were encouraged to speak about anything they wished during the interview, but I did have an interview outline which listed themes that I brought up as the interview went along in the order that I felt necessary at the time. There was no set order or, indeed, any set

questions that had to be asked, only a pre-set which was changed and altered according to the situation. I recorded the interviews on an audio device as well as made notes about remarks that I felt were probably valuable to look into when the interviews were done and analysis of the data began. The interview was divided into three rough topics with several example questions: the project, English language and skills and attitude towards speaking English. However, this order was in no way adhered to during the interview, they existed simply to help structure the interview topics on a meta-level. There were three main themes, the project (did they enjoy it, preconceptions, anxiety etc.), English language and skills (previous English skills, improvement etc.) and Attitude towards speaking English (how did it feel, did it get easier etc.) The themes had quite a lot of overlap, and during the interview it was common move from one topic to another quite quickly and often. The outline of the interview can be seen as is in appendix 1.

The interviews were held in Finnish, as speaking English would have forced undue anxiety on the student, and they might have been less natural and not always able to express themselves. There also would have been no added benefit to speaking English in the interview.

3.2.2 Oral English Language Aptitude Tests

The oral English language skill test chosen for this study is the IELTS (International English Language Testing System) test, which is used by over 9000 institutions and organisations as proof of proficiency in English. It is owned jointly by British Council, IDP: IELTS Australia and Cambridge English Language Assessment and is offered in over 140 countries. Usually the IELTS test is comprised of four parts, Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking, but only the fourth part, Speaking, was used in this study.

There are two versions of the IELTS test, Academic and General, but the speaking test is the same for both, so it is of no consequence regarding this study.⁴

While these sorts of language aptitude tests adhere to a classical language learning principle, rather than language as participation, the results of these tests provide additional information that can be used to study the effects of the project in an interdisciplinary, full understanding of phenomena sense. Still, the data gained from these tests must be analysed very critically. The IELTS test was chosen for its widespread and relative ease of use and my own previous experiences with it – that is, as I was already familiar and felt it was a fairly good test, I thought it a good idea to use my previous experience. I acquainted myself with the IELTS test in the summer of 2014 in India while working for a company called First Academy. My job was to teach the IELTS exam to students and prepare them for the exam. That being said, the test administered by me in this study was not an official IELTS test and I am not, nor have I ever been, an official IELTS tester – I was a third party counsellor. Therefore, these results cannot reliably be compared to any other IELTS test results. They should still be valid for comparison within the confines of this study.

The IELTS Speaking test takes about 10-12 minutes and it has three parts: part 1, introduction and interview; part 2, individual long turn; and part 3, two-way discussion. Part one is mostly warm-up – the interviewer introduces themselves and asks some fairly simple questions from the interviewee. The idea is to get the person talking and familiar with the situation. This lasts 3-4 minutes. After that, in part two, the candidate is given a card that has a subject (e.g. ‘describe someone you love’) and some additional questions (e.g. ‘How did you meet them’, ‘Why are they important to you?’). They have a minute to prepare and make notes, if they wish, after which they are expected to speak about the subject for 1-2 minutes. This ends with a few simple questions from the interviewer (e.g. ‘Do you think they like you as much as you do them?’). Finally, in part

⁴ www.ielts.org

three, the candidate is asked some more questions that are loosely related to the topic in part 2 (e.g. ‘Do you think people can choose who they love?’). This time they are a bit more demanding, and it is expected that the candidate give some more elaborate answers. This lasts another 3-5 minutes, after which the test is concluded. Example questions taken from the IELTS website can be found in appendix 2 at the end of the study. Further information about the test can be found in the website, such as a transcript of an example test.⁵

The IELTS exam has four separate categories of assessment that are graded from tier 0 to tier 9: fluency & coherence, lexical resources, grammatical range & accuracy and pronunciation. *Fluency and coherence* uses discourse markers, cohesive devices, pace and hesitation as gauges for the score. Long pauses, repetition and failing to speak for two minutes in the second part of the test are examples of mistakes in this category. *Lexical resources* gauges appropriate and versatile vocabulary and the ability to paraphrase when needed. Lack of idiomatic language or inappropriate choice of vocabulary (a common example being the idiom ‘kick the bucket’; one has to know not to use it during a funeral) as well as simple, unsophisticated use of words are examples of common mistakes in this category. *Grammatical range and accuracy* concerns the use of complex structures as well as grammatical errors. Some grammar errors are accepted as far as tier 8, and even tier 9 mentions ‘slips characteristic of native-speaker speech’ (UCLES 2011: 2). However, I learned from working with Fist Academy that mistakes with tense and verb-subject agreement are penalised rather harshly. Using only simple sentence forms is also a clear mistake. *Pronunciation* deals with intonation, mispronunciations of words and single phonemes as well as general intelligibility, with the latter being the most important aspect. The IELTS test is international and deals with communicating; accent or dialect is not graded, the focus is rather on being understood. (UCLES 2011: 1-12)

⁵ http://www.ielts.org/test_takers_information/test_sample/speaking_sample.aspx

All of these categories are given a band score from 0-9, 1 being a 'non-user' and 9 being 'an expert user' (0 is 'did not attempt the test'). A score of 5, 'modest user', means a working understanding of the language, even if frequent mistakes persist, and, relying on my personal experience and my personal experience only, most Finnish upper secondary school students are capable of at least this level of English, with 6, 'competent user' and 7, 'good user', being fairly, if decreasingly, common, and 8, 'very good user', and 9, 'expert user', being rare and extremely rare, accordingly. An increase or decrease of one point in one category of the speaking test is not yet a significant change; the test scores can fluctuate that much during a single day. An increase of two or more points is far more difficult to achieve, and for the purposes of this study that is viewed as a significant change. The criterion for a significant change is based on my personal experiences with administering the mock speaking tests to students in India. (Guide for Agents, p. 5).

24 students out of 25 were tested initially, before the two-week intensive project, although weekly practice for the National Presentation had already started. The one student wished not to participate due to test anxiety. After the project only 18 of the students were tested again due to time constraints – the students had an exam week immediately following the project, which severely limited their time. The last test was held the first of April, a full month after the project had ended, and doing speaking tests after that was deemed to be useless, as it would have been difficult or impossible to say that the results had anything to do with the project anymore.

Before the initial speaking test the proceedings of the exam were explained to the students so that they would understand what was happening before the actual test. Also, in order to decrease test anxiety, I participated in some teambuilding exercises with the students to get to know them better. My reasoning was that they would feel more at ease doing the test if they already knew me. This worked to some degree. Still, it should be noted that most of the students felt less anxiety during the second speaking test that was conducted after the YET project had taken place. While some of this could be attributed to getting used to speaking English, some of it was undoubtedly because they were already familiar with the test itself. This should be taken into account when studying the collected data.

Before the beginning of the first speaking test, the students were asked what the grade point average of their English courses in upper secondary school was. They were also asked to summarise in Finnish their own views on their English skills. In table 2 in appendix 4, this is simplified into a grade of ‘poor’, ‘mediocre’, ‘moderate’, ‘good’ and ‘excellent’. It should be noted that the student were asked an open question and this is simply my approximation to ease charting the data. The results of their speaking tests were told to them only after both the speaking tests as well as the interview were done.

The data collected from the speaking tests can be found in detail in appendix 4. The candidates were assigned a random number for easier reference later on.

3.2.3 Observation and Participation

Observation and participation were used as research methods for this study. It was most active before the actual two week intensive project during the National Presentation rehearsals. They began on Friday 9th January and were held on Fridays and Saturdays until the beginning of the project on February 15th, with the exceptions of January 23rd and 24th and February 13th. I was present for all but February 6th and 7th. These were really the practices that started forming the participants into a group, and while for most of the practices I followed from afar, I participated in a lot of the games that were used exclusively to form the group. I was also always within shouting distance and was consulted on grammar or ideas at times. The National Presentations were created before the YET project with all the Finnish students participating.

Both my participation and my observation lessened during the actual two-week project. I mostly observed rehearsals, but never for a full day, only an hour or two occasionally. I concentrated on the Finnish-led group, as I had created a rapport with the director and felt that they would accept me easier. At the half-point of the project while I observed I was given a chance to sit the Finnish group down and ask them how they felt about the project at that moment and have them say a word or two about their feelings. A similar situation repeated itself after the project when I was invited to join the YET feedback session. During both conversations I was allowed to speak to and ask questions from the students.

No recordings of any kind were made from the observations, as the Dutch students were present at all times, and I had been unable to get written permissions from them to film or record them. As such, the analysis rests on my field notes.

Participation during the project after the National Presentations were done was mainly due to being present and accessible to the students for questions, mostly to do with English grammar. In addition, I was employed at the school as an English teacher during the project, and had the authority role that teachers commonly have. Some of the students attended my lessons, although mostly after the project. Still, it is important to note that I was not an impassive, unapproachable observer, but a member of the community that was asked to weigh in with my opinions from time to time. I also talked with some students when I saw them outside of rehearsals. The focus of the participation was not really to gather information, but to facilitate more relaxed conversation during interviews and speaking tests later.

3.3. Research Process

During the research I concentrated my focus on the question of how the students felt about speaking English during the project. This included before, during and after the project. This was the main concern, but in addition to that I analysed the YET project as a language learning environment in general and its usefulness. As stated above, this was done via interviews, speaking tests, observation and participation. A major part of this research data is gathered and filtered through my own judgement. I, as a researcher, have decided what is important to note from my observations as well as what sort of analysis can be made from the interviews I have conducted.

The principal ideas of the thesis are to gather evidence of some change in language identity from this relatively short period of time, as well as analyse the sort of language learning environment the project provides. This is done by sifting through the interview and observation material, and then comparing that to the data gathered from the speaking tests and trying to answer: generally, has the project affected the students' identity as language learners, do their views of themselves as language speakers reflect

the reality of the situation, and is the YET project a useful language learning environment for schools to use.

The analysis of the data follows this section.

4 PRESENTATION OF THE ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

This section covers the analysis of the collected data. It is divided by data gathering methods, which are further divided into subheadings according themes that were formed while analysing it.

4.1 SPEAKING TESTS

The results of the speaking tests can be seen in tables 1 and 2. As mentioned before, the test was conducted twice; Speaking Test 1 was conducted before the project and Speaking Test 2 afterwards (the 1 and 2 in the table after the acronyms for sections of the test signify from which test the results are). The students were graded from zero to nine on four categories: Fluency and Coherence (FC), Lexical Resources (LR), Grammatical Range and Accuracy (GRA) and Pronunciation (P). These results on both tests have been collected in table 1, with a green colour on the results of test 2 signifying an increase and a red colour signifying a decrease from test 1. Table 2 shows the average grade from both tests (what the IELTS exam would call a band score), notes the change (positive or negative) that happened from test one to test two, and also lists the students English courses Grade Point Average (GPA) as well as a self-evaluation of the student's own English skills summarised into one word from a free-form answer from the question 'what do you think about your spoken language English skills at the moment?' There are five categories of self-evaluation scores. There were two students who clearly indicated that their skills were significantly above average, so they are marked 'excellent'. Some students simply said that they had good skills, maybe a bit above average; they are graded as 'good'. The students that said their skills are average, or on par with most other students are 'moderate'. The students that indicated that their skills were not really bad, but that they were somewhat below average were given the score 'mediocre', and finally one student clearly stated that his or her skills were poor, so she was given the score 'poor'. This self-evaluation is not a part of the official IELTS testing.

Table 1. Results of individual sectors

Candidate	FC		LR T1	LR T2	GRA T1	GRAT2	P T1	P T2
	FC T1	T2						
1	8	8	7	8	8	9	8	9
2	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6
3	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	5
4	7	6	7	7	7	7	6	6
5	5	6	5	5	6	6	6	5
6	5	5	5	5	5	6	4	5
7	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6
8	7	7	6	7	7	7	6	7
9	7	7	8	7	8	8	7	7
10	6	7	7	8	7	7	6	7
11	7	8	8	8	9	8	8	8
12	7	8	7	9	8	8	7	8
13	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
14	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9
15	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	6
16	7	7	7	8	7	7	7	7
17	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	7
18	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	7
	Total pos.	6	Total pos.	8	Total pos.	3	Total pos.	6
	Total neg.	1	Total neg.	2	Total neg.	1	Total neg.	2

FC = Fluency and Coherence
T1 = Speaking test 1

LR = Lexical Resources
T2 = Speaking test 2

P = Pronunciation
Increase

GRA = Grammatical
Range and Accuracy
Decrease

Table 2. Average results, change, GPA and own views

Candidate	Avg.		Change	GPA(4-10)	Self-evaluation
	T1	Avg. T2			
1	7,75	8,50	+0.75	10	Good
2	6,25	6,00	-0.25	7	Moderate
3	5,50	5,50	-	6	Mediocre
4	6,75	6,5	-0.25	9	Mediocre
5	5,50	5,50	-	10	Mediocre
6	4,75	5,25	+0.50	6	Poor
7	5,75	6,00	+0.25	7	Moderate
8	6,50	7,00	+0.50	7	Moderate
9	7,50	7,25	-0.25	9	Good
10	6,50	7,25	+0.75	9	Moderate
11	8,00	8,00	-	9	Excellent
12	7,25	8,25	+1.0	9	Good
13	6,75	6,75	-	9	Moderate
14	8,25	8,50	+0.25	10	Excellent
15	6,00	6,50	+0.50	7	Moderate
16	7,00	7,25	+0.25	9	Good
17	7,50	7,25	-0.25	9	Good
18	6,00	6,75	+0.75	10	Moderate

Avg. = The average of the four sectors/ band tier

Change = The change from speaking test 1 to 2

GPA = Grade Point Average

T1 = Speaking test 1 T2 = Speaking test 2

Table 1 has a limited number of significant observations: there is no one section of the test that can be said to have improved or declined more during the course. Even though Lexical Resources has more positive changes than other groups, such a small difference is not significant enough. A similar fact applies to the negative changes, they are equally distributed and with such a small sample size they do not signify a substantial change (even if the ratio is 1:2). However, it can be said from the data that the Grammar-category of the test saw the least improvement, to a somewhat significant degree.

Table 2 has more observations. Firstly, there were nine students whose scores saw an increase, four that showed no change, and three that dropped 0.25 points. However, when working with the IELTS test I have noticed that a change of 0.25 points (that is,

an increase or decrease in one category) can happen within a day; maybe the candidate got questions that they knew well how to answer, maybe they were having a bad day, or from any number of other reasons. Therefore, a change of a fourth of a point is not considered significant enough to merit a true change in the skills of the student. This means that there were 11 students whose scores saw no significant change and seven that showed a significant enough of an increase to be noted: three students with an increase of half a point, three with three fourths of a point and one with a full point. Therefore, it can be said that the test affects some students' skills in a positive manner, but not all. However, there is no significant evidence of it affecting their skills negatively.

There is no clear trend to show which group gained the most out of the project in this data. The test results for those students whose results increased significantly were anywhere from 4.75 (the lowest score) to 8.5. Their GPAs also range anywhere from 6 to 10. From the sample size in the thesis it is difficult to make any definite implications, as there simply is not enough data. Still, another way to look at the data would be to say that half of students with GPAs from 6-7 improved, while only a third of students with a high GPA (9-10) improved. At the very most, it could be said that it appears the test may improve the skills of any skill group (or at least those tested here), but there might be a greater chance for a student of moderate skills to improve than one with good skills.

Another observation is that the students' GPA, self-evaluation, and their results from the speaking tests correlate fairly well. Students with a high GPA (9-10) believe they have moderate, good, or excellent skills and also do well in the speaking tests (an approximation of how the self-evaluation scores relate to IELTS-scores can be found in table 3, however, there is some overlap because of the self-evaluations' inaccuracy). Of course, this gives quite a lot of flexibility for students with such high scores – after all, scores 9 and 10 are both above 8, which is considered a 'good' grade in Finland. If one were to say that students with a GPA of over nine should have at least a 7 (a 'good' grade in the IELTS exam) from their speaking test, the results would still be fairly reliable. Out of the 12 students with that GPA eight indicate skills of band score 7.0 or above, or two thirds. Three of the four have a score of 6.75 in at least one of the tests. This means that even if it were said that a student with a high GPA would need oral

language skills of at least a grade 7.0 in IELTS, this would still hold true for most informants, and almost all of the rest are very close to that. The rest, students with a GPA of 6-7 (there are no students with a GPA of 8 in this study), all fall within appropriate categories regarding their skills, GPA and self-evaluation.

*Table 3.
Approximate self-
evaluation
relevance to
Speaking test score*

S-Eval.	ST Score
Excellent	8.0-9.0
Good	7.0-8.0
Moderate	6.0-7.0
Mediocre	5.0-6.0
Poor	4.0-5.0

There are a few exceptions. There were five informants who scored clearly lower or somewhat lower scores than would have been expected based only on their GPAs (informants 18, 5, 10, 13 and 4) and one who scored higher (8). Of these some improved to their level in the second test, and most were not drastically underperforming. Informant 5, however, stands out; while having a GPA of 10 they only self-evaluated ‘mediocre’ skills for themselves, and, indeed, scored a fairly low 5.5 on both tests. Informant 4, (GPA of 9) also had low skills considering their GPA, an IELTS score of 6.5 and 6.75, but only evaluated having ‘mediocre’ skills in speaking, which is worse than their actual score, which suggests at least moderate skills (officially a ‘competent user’). Therefore, informant 5 breaks the pattern by having lower skills than their GPA would suggest, while informant 4 under-evaluates their skills, but still is somewhat (if slightly) worse than could be expected

It is also of some interest to note that students whose skills were poorer than could be expected also knew and acknowledged it – there is no indication of a student having worse skills than they expect themselves.

In summary, it can be said that the project has been generally beneficial for the students that participated, even if not for everyone. However, there is no clear indication as to what group benefitted the most, or which section improved the most, even though it can be said that Grammar improved the least. In addition, it seems that students GPAs, their self-evaluations and their scores in the IELTS exam generally seem to compare well with each other, despite some exceptions.

4.2 INTERVIEWS AND OBSERVATION

In this section I will analyse the data that was gathered via theme interviews and observing the project. In the following text the informants will be referred to as ‘she’ for simplicity and anonymity. The citations in this section are taken from the interviews if not otherwise stated. The section is covered into subsections based on larger themes: ‘the YET Project as an Affinity space’ compares the project to an affinity space, ‘the Students’ views on the Project’ deals with the expectations and reality of the project from the perspective of the students, while ‘Speaking English’ covers how the students reacted to speaking English during the project.

4.2.1 The YET Project as an Affinity Space

This subsection analyses the YET project as an affinity space, referring to the theory presented in section 2.4.1. The data for this analysis was gathered mostly from observing the project, but also by formulating what the project was like from the theme interviews.

As stated earlier (see section 2.4.1), there are eleven attributes that an affinity space must have to be categorised as such. The YET project features all of them.

1. Common endeavour is primary.
2. Everyone shares a common space
3. Some portals are strong generators
4. Content organisation is transformed by interactional organisation
5. Both intensive and extensive knowledge are encouraged
6. Both individual knowledge and distributed knowledge are encouraged

7. Dispersed knowledge is encouraged
8. Tacit knowledge is encouraged and honored
9. There are many different forms and routes to participation
10. There are lots of different routes to status
11. Leadership is porous and leaders are resources

(Gee 2004: 77-79)

The YET project covers all of these points. The students in the YET project do not participate in it because they are students of the school, or friends with each other, but instead because they were interested in the project and decided to apply for it (point 1). All students, despite their skills in acting, speaking English, dancing etc. were treated the same and were not segregated in any way (point 2). The students had a great part in creating the play through different exercises and conversations with the directors. Their input through them directly affected the content, making them both portals and strong generators (point 3). The core, original generator (the play) was changed and modified according to how the students acted and what they did in different interactions (since the play was being created mainly by the director, but from input given by the students) (point 4). In the project intensive knowledge and extensive knowledge were encouraged, as students were utilised somewhat according to their specialised abilities (some students, for example, played instruments in the play while others did not know how). However, students also participated in group exercises where extensive knowledge was used (most students acted and participated in group dances and singing, despite having no to only some earlier experience on it). This created people who shared lots of knowledge, but each had something special to offer (point 5). Individual knowledge (how to dance, act, sing or write) was networked into other people's individual skills. These could be accessed in group work situations where students helped each other and shared their skills. No one could necessarily do everything (props and outfits, act, sing, dance, play music etc.), but due to the nature of the project, these skills became part of a larger whole (point 6). During the YET project students regularly used resources that were not really a part of the project: they searched for national anthems, used online dictionaries and talked with people who were not a part of the project for advice and tips (point 7). Students that participated in the YET project had different sets of skills, and some had, for example, done considerably more theatre than

others, learning some tacit theatre knowledge (or music etc.) The input of these students was taken seriously (point 8). There were multiple groups in the YET projects – the media team, two acting teams, two art factory teams and technicians (as well as the teachers, who constitute the creative team). While being a part of one team typically excluded the student from another, the students could participate in a peripheral manner in another activity as well (giving ideas, writing something short, being interviewed etc.) (point 9). If a student was good in any of the activities that contributed to the project (acting, dancing, singing, speaking good English, making props etc.) that could bring status, as did organizing extracurricular activities, social events etc. (point 10). While the project was done by teachers and they had the status that teachers normally have in school, the project was held in such a way that the creative input came mostly from the students, not the teachers (although this did depend somewhat on the director of the team), putting the students very much in control. In addition, some students tended to rise to leadership positions in certain situations, and this was usually not restricted by the teachers (point 11).

As the YET project fills the prerequisites for all of the categories of an affinity space, it can reasonably be said to be an affinity space.

4.2.2 Students' Views on the Project

Most students had high expectations for the project; in fact, some students said that one of the reasons they applied for Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukio was this very project. Some students had already participated in the project once, and usually had had very good experiences, so they expected this year to be equally good. This is shown, for example, in the answers of informant 17, who kept the excitement for the YET project alive throughout the year.

(17)Tässä [YET-projektien] välillä me aina nähtiin välillä sillä mejän niinku vanhalla suomiporukalla ja silleen, niin sitten pysy semmonen innostus läpi vuoden. Ja sitten varsinkin syksyllä oli ihan silleen että [vahva sisäänhengitys] millon saadaan tietää kaikki uudet YETtiläiset [uudet osallistujat valitaan syksyllä] ja millon aletaan harjottelemaan national presentationia ja kaikkea. Jaa... sitten just ehkä joulun jälkeen oli jo ihan jotenkin eri maailmassa suunnilleen kun ootti vaan niin paljon sitä YETiä.

We met with the Finnish group here in between [the YET projects], so the excitement held through the year. And then in the autumn I was just, like [sharp intake of breath] when do we get to know who the next YET participants [they are chosen in the autumn] and when do we start practising for the national presentation and everything. And then... maybe after Christmas I was like in a completely different reality, because I was just waiting for the YET project so fervently.

(T1)

Students that had not participated earlier had heard talk from those that attended during the previous years and were suitably excited, as shown in the following extract:

(12) Ootin silleen semmosta just semmosta aika niinku hyvää yhteishenkistä kokemusta, silleen niinku että sais uusia kavereita ja tälleen, mitä niinku vanhat yettiläiset on niinku kertonut. [...] Mitä ne on kehunut siitä, että on hyvä yhteishenki ja on ihania ihmisiä ja tälleen.
I was expecting a kind of experience with a good community spirit, like that I would get new friends and the like, like the previous YET participants had told me. [...] They had praised that there would be a good community spirit and wonderful people and so on.

(T1)

However, not all students had enjoyed the project in 2014; there had been some problems with leadership in some teams. Some team directors were thought to not listen to students and had some fairly negative rumours circulating, while there had also been talk of poor leadership in general in some teams. In fact, a lot of the anxiety before the project seemed to be about the individuals leading the teams. Changes in the creative teams were also a source of nervousness for some, as some of the new directors were not really known to anyone. Another big anxiety-inducing aspect was the fact that the Dutch were placed into the Finnish families for the duration of the project (although all families did not host), and the students wondered if their guest would be satisfied and if they would get along well with each other. In fact, these problems usually dominated the language problem; the things students were generally nervous about were rarely related to language and commonly related to the people that were participating in the project.

One thing was commonly shared by each and every student that participated in the project – extremely high satisfaction with the project as a whole. All students, both when asked about it in the interview and also in the feedback session after the YET project stated that the project was a positive experience, usually extremely so. Even

further, most could not name a single bad thing about the project; if pushed, they would usually mention the fact that they were now two weeks behind in schoolwork and mostly lost their spring holiday catching up – a fact which, technically, is not a part of the project. This is well illustrated in the following data example:

- (11)No, ehkä vähän just lisää stressiä koulun kanssa, kun pitää kaks viikkoa tehdä tavallaan itsenäisesti hommia, mutta ei se mulle oo ollu niin iso juttu [...] joillakin meistä on ollut kaheksan kurssia YETin kanssa päällekkäin, niin se varmasti on paljon vaikeempi juttu.
Well, maybe it does increase stress with school somewhat, because you have to do, kind of, independent work for two weeks, but it hasn't been such a big deal for me [...] Some of us have had eight courses on top of the YET project, so that is probably a lot harder thing to do.

(TI)

Only one student needed to think about whether or not the project was positive as a whole or not. She stated that she was balancing between being stressed by school and enjoying herself in the project, but eventually decided that for her, too, the project was a success. Reasons for enjoying the project were numerous, but usually shared by most students: they enjoyed meeting new cultures and people, doing theatre, doing something different, learning new things, speaking English, the friendships that were formed etc. Students did not mince words while praising the project. Here are some examples from the data:

- (12)Oli ihan mahtava projekti ja suosittelen kaikille, tänne [Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukioon] tulin tuon projektin takia, enkä kyllä kadu yhtään.
The project was amazing and I'd recommend it to everybody. I came here [to Oulun Suomalaisen Yhteiskoulun lukio]because of this project and I don't regret it.

- (17)Oli ihan hirmu mukavaa.
It was really nice.

- (I) Mikälaisia positiivisia asioita koet saanees projektista?
What kind of positive things did you get from the project?

- (18)No, ystäviä olen saanut paljon. Olen kokenut uusia kulttuurijuttuja. Olen, no... silloin ku [hollantilaiset] oli täällä niin oppi arvostamaan kaikkea suomalaista juttua [...] näyttelemistä olen oppinut tosi paljon etenkin tänä vuonna, siinä oppi ilmaisemana itseään. No mitä muuta? No olen tutustunut ihmisiin, se on ehkä se tärkein, mitä tässä on tapahtunut.
Well, I've gained a lot of friends. I've experienced cultural things. I have, well... when [the Dutch] were here I learned to value all sorts of Finnish things.[...]

I've learned a lot about acting especially this year, I learned to express myself. What else? Well, I've gotten to know new people, that is probably the most important thing that has happened.

(T1)

It was clear that the students felt a very close kinship with each other both during and after the project. They shared more time with each other than was strictly necessary; like in previous YET projects, the students spent most of the two weeks with each other either in or outside of school and planned activities. The Finns created close friendships both with each other as well as the Dutch students. This was made evident in the YET feedback session, where many students said that they were still in contact with their Dutch friends and expressed longing for their friends that were now in the Netherlands. Observing the students, it became certain that this kinship made them put in more effort than they would have otherwise, as they wanted to be a meaningful part of the group with each other. Some students seemed even somewhat surprised about the intensity of the friendships that they formed in the project, as they were tired, stressed or busy before the project and did not necessarily expect that much. In addition, while these intimate friendships were very common, they were not shared by all students; still, all did seem to feel at least a sort of kinship.

For the duration of the project the students were, undoubtedly, highly motivated. This was evidenced by their long hours and the effort that they put in the project for those two weeks, despite the exhaustion that many seemed to feel in the end of the project. This motivation seemed to be a combination of the kinship and friendships mentioned in the previous paragraph, doing activities that they enjoyed and found challenging, and the interplay of one culture with another, among other reasons.

The Dutch and the Finnish acting teams reported somewhat different work styles. The Finnish team worked quite a lot with improvisation and collaboration – most of the input and content of the play came from the students, who seemed to be very excited about this type of theatre. They were excited to have been the ones to really give a shape to the play, which the director organised, rather than directed. The Dutch team seemed to employ some similar methods, the students created short pieces that were supposed to influence the play, but many students did not feel that their efforts were properly appreciated by the Dutch director. In the half-way point of the project they felt

somewhat desperate about the state of the play, and expressed frustration, although this seemed to pass once the play then took proper form.

4.2.3 Speaking English

Generally, students did not feel they had a lot of problems with their English. While many stated that they were a bit out of practice in the beginning of the project, they quickly got used to speaking English to the point where they eventually started thinking in English:

(3) Lopulta sitä niinku ajattelikin englanniksi.
Finally you even thought in English.

(TI)

When the informants were asked about other students some, but not all, reported recognising their peers having some problems or nervousness while speaking English. A few students mentioned that others, those who were not as comfortable with English, were very quiet in the beginning of the project; one student mentioned that she was asked to speak to the group quite often in the beginning by her friends, because she had already spoken English in the earlier project (which the other students took to mean that she would not be hesitant to speak):

(10) National presentation harkoissa ekoissa harkoissa muut oli sillain että ”puhu sinä, puhu sinä kun oot viime vuonnakin puhunut englantia”.
In the National Presentation practices in the first practise session others were, like ‘you talk, you talk, you’ve spoken English last year as well’.

(TI)

However, she, as well as most others who had witnessed such behaviour, said that in a few days (or at least by the end) everyone was willing to speak publicly. Even so, a significant number of students did say that they had problems with their English as the project was approaching its end, but only because they were physically, mentally and/or socially tired. Some reported they were just ‘tired of speaking English’ in general and were somewhat unwilling to speak more, while others said that their weariness affected their English skills negatively. None, however, felt this was necessarily a bad thing, but rather that they were ‘just so tired’. They felt that even if their skills deteriorated towards the end, it did not accurately represent their skills as English speakers.

About half of the students reported feeling at least somewhat anxious about speaking English, but for pretty much all of them it rapidly dissipated once the project started, and only a few named it as a major concern before the project. In the YET-feedback session after the project when asked if speaking English in the project was a positive or a negative experience each and every student put their hand up. As stated earlier, the anxiety towards speaking English quickly passed. This seemed to happen for a few reasons. For one, the students realised the Dutch were not native speakers. Some commented that had the visitors been English “with a British accent” then they would have been more embarrassed to speak. Once they realised the Dutch were not perfect either, they felt they could make mistakes as well, something a lot of the students were afraid of. However, they quickly realised that it did not matter much; everyone made mistakes and they could still be understood. As one student said,

(3)Kaikki tiettenki ymmärsi silleen, että ollaan suomalaisia ja ei se oo niin vakavaa että miten sillä lailla puhuu. Jotenki tuntu että se on kaikille sillä lailla ihan ok, että miten sää puhut.

Everybody understood, of course, that we are Finnish and it is not that serious how you speak. Somehow it felt like it was okay for everyone how you spoke.

(T1)

Students seemed to be divided on the subject of skill improvement. Some thought that their skills had 'definitely' improved, while others were more hesitant. Some altogether denied improving at all and a very small minority said they ‘dumbed down’ their English to accommodate other speakers. Those that believed their skills had improved usually cited increased vocabulary and fluency, but denied grammar improvement specifically. Fluency was closely linked to confidence while speaking – almost every student stated that they had some kind of increase in confidence or attitude while speaking English, especially those who reported being anxious about speaking English before the project. The boost in confidence was, naturally, attributed to the same reasons that the dissipating anxiety was contributed to: the fact that no student was perfect, and that they were not penalised for making mistakes. Additionally, many students – including those that said they were anxious or nervous – said that they enjoyed speaking English and were happy that they got the opportunity to ‘know exactly what [they could] do with it’. They did not feel that a classroom situation was challenging enough, as they could always resort to Finnish if they were not understood. Many viewed the

project as a true test of their abilities. It is also important to note that for many students this was the first time that they were in a genuine language use situation and they were positively surprised by the fact that they could, in fact, survive using English. While no student explicitly said that this was a confidence boost, it would seem absurd not to count it as a factor.

Even the students that denied improving usually said that despite the fact that their skills have not improved their confidence or relaxation while speaking it had improved. This would imply they felt that such an increase in confidence was not an increase in their English skills. As a rule, only the students who stated that they were confident to begin with while speaking English were the ones who said that their self-confidence while speaking English did not improve at all – and many of those (somewhat inconsistently, perhaps) still maintained that they now were ‘somewhat more relaxed’ while speaking English. This would imply that even the students that believed their skills and confidence had stayed the same believed that their communication skills had improved.

Section 4 has covered the analysis of all data that was collected in the study. The next section covers the discussion of that data.

5 DISCUSSION

This section will cover further discussion about the analysis done in section 4. The learning principles of Gee's which are referred to here can be found in appendix 5 (Gee, 2007: 213-219). Gee's learning principles have not been explained in detail in this thesis, they have only been glossed over. However, the principles that are discussed here are merely extensions on the affinity space and identity theories, or names for certain viewpoints within them. As such, they do not really bring new information to the theories; they are simply names for some of the phenomena that the project brings up. The discussion is divided into subcategories based on themes covered earlier.

5.1 “A HIGHLY MOTIVATED ENGAGEMENT WITH SOCIAL PRACTICES WHICH THEY VALUE”

This subsection discusses the YET project as ‘a highly motivated engagement with social practices the participants value’, and the results and effects of that.

The clearest result that this research had was the fact that the students enjoyed participating in the project, which, while not necessary a requirement for sustained learning, certainly facilitates a lot of the learning principles presented by Gee. The students were, without question, highly motivated throughout the project: they were willing put in a lot more effort than they do for normal school work; they felt it important that the results of their work were good; they worked long hours etc. They also clearly valued the social practices that they were participating in for much the same reasons. The students obviously felt the project was valuable, even though for some the reasons had a lot more to do with the social aspects of the project than the semiotic domains they were dealing with; they were working hard because of the community, not because they were doing theatre or other activities. Still, students did feel that theatre, other cultures, English and a multitude of other topics that were encompassed by the project were important. Therefore, it can be said that the students were participating in a ‘highly motivated engagement with social practices which they value’.

Further evidence of the aforementioned is that the project can successfully be considered an affinity space. Section 2.4.1 covers affinity spaces, and it is evident the

YET project exhibits all of the features listed there to at least some degree. There are some aspects of them that the YET project expresses better than others, however. In the YET project, people with different levels of skills and different skillsets inhabit the same space without any segregation; students with good English or singing skills work alongside each other and help others whenever needed. This is also true for the ‘leadership’ of the project (or rather, the teachers). While they have individual meetings, most of the time the teachers work with the students in dialogue. They help the students when needed and are also affected by them and their input. The students influence the play that is being created in a multitude of ways, so they work as content generators. There are also many ways to participate in the project, be it in the media, art factory, acting or technician team, and further in them by dancing, acting, singing, writing etc. These address categories 2, 3, 4, 5, 9 and 11 especially well (see section 2.4.1).

As argued above, the YET project is a good example of an affinity space and, by extension, the students taking part in the project are part of an affinity group that is literate in one or more of the semiotic domains encompassed by the YET project. This is a very different situation to a regular classroom learning environment, which usually exhibits very few of the features of affinity spaces. Being an active member of an affinity group (and thus, taking part in a highly motivated engagement with valued social practises) embodies some of the learning principles listed by Gee almost by default, as that is the core of Gee’s argument for good learning. The most notable principle here is the ‘affinity group principle’, which states that “learners constitute [...] a group that is bonded primarily through shared endeavors, goals, and practices [...]”. Closely related to that is the Insider Principle, which states that the learner can customize and affect the learning experience from the beginning to the end, a feature which, as discussed above, is also a part of the YET project, as the participants are also content generators and are able to affect and modify the way the project works. The ‘practice principle’ states that the learners get a lot of practice in a context where practice is meaningful and exciting and spend a lot of time on task. This is certainly true for the YET project, where almost all practice has a goal beyond simple practice; for example, the Finnish acting group created scenes via improvisation, and later some of those scenes were developed into scenes of the play, even though they were technically originally just practice and a way to talk about the themes of the play. The last learning

principle that clearly has a relationship to the social side of the project is the ‘active, critical learning’ principle, according to which the learning environment needs to be designed in such a way as to, ‘encourage active and critical, not passive, learning. There is very little possibility to be passive during the YET project, as every student is expected to not only participate, but also to attribute their ideas into scenes, articles, props etc.

The YET project is an international project with people from two different nationalities. While the Netherlands and Finland are both European nations, they have quite a few differences. The close contact that the students have with each other during the project ensures that they have to think about the cultural models that the other nationalities have. It is a fairly common practice during the YET project to compare and contrast the Finnish and Dutch cultures; even though students did not necessarily say this outright in interviews, it was very prevalent during both my own YET project, and I observed it happening a few times in practice. Also, because they are working as hosts for the Dutch, the Finns need to think about cultural differences with food, small talk, etiquette etc. simply to be good hosts. This cultural mixing ensures that the project features the criteria for cultural models about the world principle, according to which the learners need to be able to consciously and reflectively think about their own cultural models regarding the world in general (Gee 2007: 218).

The aforementioned learning principles were encompassed in the YET project mainly due to it being an affinity space, and worked well as such. During the project the informants were not merely students doing schoolwork, they were active participants in and creators of a mutual project, which had people with different skill sets and abilities. Everyone did meaningful work that had a purpose in the ways that they best could help, and people were able to find help and information from the leadership or other participants. The authority roles had a far lesser impact on the end result as they would have in traditional school work, which generally cannot be considered to facilitate the creation of an affinity group or space.

5.2 IDENTITIES

This subsection discusses how the YET project allowed the students to play with new virtual identities as well as fix and modify existing real-world identities.

The students access virtual identities through the YET project, which we have identified as an affinity space. Through this affinity space the students can take on the virtual identity of a *YET participant*. They know very early on the sorts of “values, beliefs, ways with words, deeds and interactions” (Gee 2007: 67) that are expected of YET participants, or which YET participants would value. For example, but not limited to, the YET participants share a lot of the same symbols, concepts and ways of using language and vocabulary as theatre and school, they value singing, dancing, writing, acting, English and music skills, and they strive to interact with other cultures politely and constructively and try to learn from them. Still, the students also have a lot of choices that they can make about the kind of YET participant they wish to be. The students already do this in a very concrete way when they apply for the project, as they apply for a certain team; they already make decisions about the kind of participant they wish to be. Later they have the ability to decide in which ways they wish to employ their virtual identity in all exercises and interaction thereafter. The virtual identity that they create can have a multitude of skills, but the students do not necessarily need to adopt a virtual identity that is adept in all the semiotic domains contained in the YET project, and in fact it is quite likely that they will not. Students that have no skills in, for example, music, rarely believe even entertain the idea that they should be able to do so in the span of the really very short project (that is, their virtual identity usually does not include musical skills).

The students’ projective identity is the medium they use to adjust the virtual identity that they are creating and constantly modifying. Through the projective identity they impose their own values and hopes for the virtual identity of a YET participant. For example, many YET participants wish to contribute scenes or songs, or they want to make new friends and have new experiences. This is the projective identity at work, creating the kind of YET participant that the students wish to be, whether or not they actually will be that; and, for the purposes of this study, it is important that one of the things that the students add to their virtual identity may or may not be ‘good at speaking

English', without this the students will not focus on learning English during the project. Of course, for some students it may already be a real-world identity; many students taking part in the project had very good English skills and knew it well.

What then, of the students that did not believe they had excellent English skills? All students, including all of the ones that were unsure about their English skills, stated in one way or another that speaking English the project was a positive experience. A few stated that they had been excited of that prospect even before the project, and many said that they had enjoyed speaking English during the project. This is illustrated in the following interview excerpt from a student that believed she was not very good in English:

- (1) Miltä se sitten tuntu [puhua englantia kaksi viikkoa]?
So, what was it like [to speak English for two weeks].
- (3) Se tuntu silleen aika yllättävänkin mukavalta. [...] mut se oli kiva että sää pääsit kerranki oikeesti käyttään sitä englantia tai niinku kokeileen, että mihin itestä on, kun on aina aatellu että on kamalan huono ja ei niinkö ossaa. Ja sitten ku joku ymmärsikin sua niin se oli tosi kiva.
It was surprisingly enjoyable. [...] it was really nice that for once you got the chance to actually use English and, like, try, see what you could do, because I had always thought that I was terribly bad and didn't know how to. And then when someone did understand you, it was really nice.

(TI)

A majority of the students also said that their attitude towards speaking English changed positively. None said it changed negatively, and a few students that already felt comfortable speaking English stated that their attitude or comfort speaking did not change at all. The same student that was in the previous example also stated the following, which well represents the opinions of many students in the project:

- (1) Muuttuko sun suhtautuminen sitten englanninkielen puhumiseen siinä projektin aikana?
Did your attitude towards speaking English change during the project?
- (3) No kyllä se silleen, että se ei oookkaan niin kamalaa. [...] Projektissa oli hirveen kiva puhua englantia, mutta sitten jos sää joudut puhumaan englantia tunnilla niin se ei oo niin kivaa.
Well it did, yeah, it wasn't that awful to speak it anymore. [...] It was really nice to speak English in the project, but if you have to speak it during class it's not so nice.

(TI)

Clearly, then, significant identity repair work happened during the project. In fact, all students that had identified themselves as having poor or mediocre skills also stated that during the project they became more relaxed, more fluent and realised that they could survive by using English. Students that previously had the real-world identity of a ‘bad or mediocre English speaker’ had managed to build bridges to a virtual identity of a ‘YET participant that speaks good English’ and had come to realise that they could achieve it, even if they had not done so yet, or even if they never would. They realised that they had the capacity to do so.

What features of the project facilitated this repair work? There are three criteria listed for assisting identity repair work in section 2.4.3:

1. The learner must be enticed to try, even if he or she already has good grounds to be afraid to try.
2. The learner must be enticed to put in lots of effort even if he or she begins with little motivation to do so.
3. The learner must achieve some meaningful success when he or she has expended this effort.

(Gee 2007: 68-69)

In addition, the psychosocial moratorium principle (a space where the negative ramifications of actions are nullified or greatly reduced) and amplification of input principle (a small amount of input yields great results) terms are explained there as well, both of which contribute to the three categories presented before them. Somewhat surprisingly, considering that the psychosocial principle is quite clearly something that is very characteristic of video games, it also applies very well to the YET project. For many students the main reason their confidence speaking English increased was because they realised that they were allowed to make mistakes, no one judged them for it and it did not reflect badly on them. This is in fact what the psychosocial moratorium is about. The amplification of input principle worked as well; students quickly realised that it was enough to be understood (despite their mistakes) and they could communicate with the Dutch – something which I argue is ample result for little input. The success of these principles during the project meant that the criteria for identity repair work are fulfilled as well. The learner is enticed to try, as her mistakes are not penalised and she gains much from applying even a little input, and the learner achieves meaningful success for

her expended effort due to the fact that all successes garner amplified results. Lastly, the learner is enticed to put in lots of effort even with little effort or motivation before, because the virtual reality around her – the YET project – is enticing to her due to it being an affinity space that she willingly participates in.

This play of identities is also strongly connected with a few other principles that are well represented in the YET project. Due to the fact that students can do identity repair work, it is very likely that they often work at the periphery of their resources, doing activities that they find challenging, but not insurmountable. It is very likely, due to the wide variety of skills that the project employs, that all students used skills that they did not possess before the project – and used them successfully. This accounts for the regime of competence principle, which states that “the learner gets ample opportunity to operate within, but at the outer edge of, his or her resources, so that at those points things are felt as challenging but not “undoable“ (Gee 2007: 215).

The self-knowledge principle states the learners learn about their own current and potential capacities (Gee 2007: 214). It was also already stated that the students realise that they are capable of acquiring new skills, such as English, but other skills apply as well. The tripartite play of identities that was described previously also includes, by definition (see section 2.4.2), awareness of the learners current skills. Therefore, the self-knowledge principle is fulfilled as well.

The aforementioned principles describe ways that the identity play happening within the YET project affects the learners. It is evident from this discussion that identities, their modification and creation are a major part of the YET project.

5.3 ISSUES WITH THE PROJECT

The project was short, only two weeks. This makes it difficult for deep learning to occur, as it usually needs more repetition than simply two weeks. The length is probably the project’s greatest weakness, as it limits the effectiveness of the project. It has been demonstrated that the project facilitates good learning principles, most notably identity play and affinity spaces. However, some of the learning principles that have been discussed usually need time to work. For example, the committed learning principle states that students participate in extended engagements with lots of effort and practice

(Gee 2007: 214) and the practice principle states that learners need a lot of practice (Gee 2007: 215). While there are no clear time limits for when good learning can happen, it can be said that usually learning occurs over long periods of time; active school work happens nearly year round, and even the video games that Gee studies can take up to hundreds of hours. If the engagement were longer, there would be more chances to improve.

The length severely restricts increases in learning English content. Most students deny learning new skills, while some say that they learned vocabulary. While it is likely true that some vocabulary was learned during the test, it would be a difficult task indeed to master many new language skills in such a short amount of time. The speaking tests also reflect this – there is fairly little change in the results, and very little in grammar. It is likely that the students could have improved more had they had more time in the project.

Of course, there are practical issues that prevent a very lengthy project. The students were not present for two weeks of school during the project, and many felt stressed by trying to catch up to the other students during the one week holiday they had after the project, and losing even more time in other classes would have likely been detrimental to their overall success in school; some students already had trouble. It would also be difficult to do the project in such a way that other school work was possible during it. The YET project relies heavily on the intimacy induced by the intensity of the project, and it is likely that much would be lost if the timetable was more lenient. Also, it would be understandably difficult, if not outright impossible, to coordinate such a long project with a school that is in another country; the students would have to reside in the other country for too long.

There are also a few learning principles that were not really featured in the project, or only to a small extent. There is little emphasis on meta-level thinking in the project. For example, during the project students are not encouraged or enticed to think actively and critically about the relationships between the semiotic domains that they are working with and other semiotic domains (the metalevel thinking about semiotic domains principle). The same is true for thinking about consciously and reflectively thinking about learning and semiotic domains; it is not emphasised in the project (cultural

models about learning principle and cultural models about semiotic domains principle). The rewards gained from the project are not customised towards different learner levels, nor is there anything really to signal the achievements of the learner (achievement principle). There is also fairly little contact with people outside of the project; generally, knowledge is not shared with outsiders, and neither do they help the learners (dispersed principle). The other learning principles Gee has mentioned are not emphasised in the project, but they are contain contained in it.

6 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this research was to determine what kind of a language learning environment the YET project facilitated and to answer whether similar projects would be useful resources for schools, as well as ascertain whether the students' views on their own skills matched the reality of their situation.

It has been demonstrated in this thesis that the YET project is an affinity space, which is rare for regular school learning environments. This is also the greatest strength of the project, as it also facilitates the fulfilment of many of Gee's learning principles (Gee, 2007: 213-219). The principles that are utilised best relate to the fact that the project was a positive experience for all of the participants; a conclusion which must be uncommon in a school environment. While the project might not have had a concrete effect on the English skills of all students, the effect it had on their identities as language learners was invaluable. The lack of grading and teacher oversight of the use of English freed the students, who quickly realised that making mistakes was not a serious issue, and therefore gained confidence while speaking, even if they were uncomfortable doing so before. The students generally reported that their skills, confidence and/or fluency while speaking English was improved and that they now believed that they could survive using English (if they did not think so to begin with). The results are cohesive with results from CLIL studies, which have shown among other things that students' risk-taking and fluency improve when taught content in a second language, although due to the large number of different research done in its name, there are multiple other documented results as well (Pérez-Cañado, 2012: 329).

These results are invaluable in schools in Finland (at the very least), as it is common for students to experience communication anxiety while speaking English in the classroom (see introduction). Because of this, it is recommended that similar projects be further developed and arranged in schools, although there are some aspects that would benefit from further research. First of all, the length of the project is problematic; it is fairly long considering the school work that the students lose, but short for the purposes of deep language learning. However, if the purpose is simply identity repair work, the length is fine, as it is time enough for the students to realise they have the potential to

improve their skills. Still, as the project exhibits many principles of good language learning, it could be further utilised as a language learning environment if it was longer. This does, however, provide problems with other school work. Because of this, it would be valuable to research conducting similar projects in such ways that they would not be as intensive (while still retaining the social aspects of the project) and would allow other school work. While I believe the intensity of the project greatly attributes to its good qualities, there is nothing in the theory of affinity spaces that suggests it should.

An interesting phenomenon arose from the data of the speaking tests; it was somewhat surprising that the GPA, self-evaluation and results of IELTS tests of the students' matched so well. I would have expected more disparity with them. The students had a good grasp on their skills (at least those skills that were measured in the IELTS test). One idea for further research would be to make multiple such tests after certain amounts of time, combine them with theme interviews and go through the data as it was collected here with the interviewee. This would give them an idea of how language is not simply one quantifiable skill, but is instead affected by a multitude of different things.

Even though the main outcome is very clear – that the students enjoyed the project and grew more confident speaking English – other aspects of the study failed to produce as clear meaningful results. This might partly be because of some failures in the data collection methods. The data from the oral skill tests was poorly comparable to results from theme interviews. The theme interviews probably suffered to some extent due to my own inexperience with the format; the interviews were fairly short for theme interviews, and while students mostly spoke openly, the interviews usually followed a fairly similar route, which is usually not indicative of theme interviews. While writing the analysis it was also clear that some themes that would have been beneficial to the thesis were not always broached (such as 'why did you apply for the project' and 'what did you get out of the project', even though the latter was usually mentioned in some form). While participation worked well for the purposes that it was used (that is, to endear myself to the students), observation was lacking. The original plan was to observe the practices every day, but due to problems with my personal timetable that became an unviable option. That is a shame, as it would have probably yielded results

on subjects that the students did not necessarily be conscious of. Finally, the IELTS exam was chosen primarily because of its ease of use and familiarity to me, not because it was particularly good at measuring what was being studied. It is wholly possible that another test would have been more successful in this aspect.

In conclusion, the YET project successfully increased the confidence, fluency and/or skills of the participants, and it proved to be a valuable tool in any school's arsenal. As such, creating similar projects would be recommended.

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APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW OUTLINE

Teemahaastattelurunko

Onko menossa englannin kursseja:

Oliko ensimmäinen vai toinen kerta mukana YETissä:

Missä ryhmässä olit:

1. Projektin kulku

- a. Oliko jotain ennako-odotuksia/oletuksia, miksi lähdit projektiin
- b. Piditkö projektista
- c. Aiheuttiko englannin puhuminen ahdistusta tai vaikeuksia
- d. Oliko muilla vaikeuksia?
- e. Saitko sanottua haluamasi, teitkö itsesi ymmärretyksi
- f. Turvauduitko suomeen

2. Englannin kieli, taidot

- a. Aikaisemmat taidot/ahdistus
- b. Paraniko taidot
- c. Oliko projektista hyötyä, millaista

3. Suhtautuminen kielen puhumiseen

- a. Miten suhtauduit englannin puhumiseen projektin alkaessa, entä nyt?
- b. Helpottuiko puhuminen projektin aikana
- c. Muuttuiko itsevarmuus itsellä, entä muilla?

Theme Interview Outline

Did you have any English courses during this period:

Was this your first or your second time participating in YET?

Which group were you in?

1. The project

- a. Did you have any preconceptions about the project, why did you participate?
- b. Did you enjoy the project?
- c. Did speaking English cause any anxiety or difficulty?
- d. Did you see others having any difficulty or anxiety?
- e. Did you manage to communicate well? Did people understand you?
- f. Did you have to use Finnish as a back up?

2. English language and skills

- a. What were your previous skills, have you previously had any anxiety?
- b. Did your skills improve?
- c. Was the project useful? How?

3. Attitude towards speaking English

- a. How did you feel about speaking English when the project began? What about now?
- b. Did speaking English get any easier during the project?
- c. Did your confidence while speaking English change? How about for others?

APPENDIX 2: IELTS SPEAKING TEST EXAMPLE QUESTIONS

Speaking sample task,

http://www.ielts.org/test_takers_information/test_sample/speaking_sample.aspx

Part 1 – Introduction and interview

[This part of the test begins with the examiner introducing himself or herself and checking the candidate's identification. It then continues as an interview.]

Let's talk about your home town or village.

- What kind of place is it?
- What's the most interesting part of your town/village?
- What kind of jobs do the people in your town/village do?
- Would you say it's a good place to live? (Why?)

Let's move on to talk about accommodation.

- Tell me about the kind of accommodation you live in?
- How long have you lived there?
- What do you like about living there?
- What sort of accommodation would you most like to live in?

Part 2 – Individual long turn

Candidate Task Card

Describe something you own which is very important to you.

You should say:

where you got it from

how long you have had it

what you use it for

and explain why it is important to you.

You will have to talk about the topic for 1 to 2 minutes.

You have one minute to think about what you're going to say.

You can make some notes to help you if you wish.

Rounding off questions

- **Is it valuable in terms of money?**
- **Would it be easy to replace?**

Part 3 – Two-way discussion

Let's consider first of all how people's values have changed.

- What kind of things give status to people in your country?
- Have things changed since your parents' time?

Finally, let's talk about the role of advertising.

- Do you think advertising influences what people buy?

APPENDIX 3: IELTS PUBLIC BAND DESCRIPTORS

Public Speaking Band Descriptor, <http://www.cambridgeenglish.org/Images/168250-ielts-speaking-test-assessment-scale-and-video-document.zip>



Assessing Speaking Performance IELTS

IELTS Speaking Band Descriptors (public version)

Band	Fluency and	Lexical resource	Grammatical range	Pronunciation
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks fluently with only rare repetition or self-correction; any hesitation is content-related rather than to find words or grammar speaks coherently with fully appropriate cohesive features develops topics fully and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses vocabulary with full flexibility and precision in all topics uses idiomatic language naturally and accurately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a full range of structures naturally and appropriately produces consistently accurate structures apart from 'slips' characteristic of native speaker speech 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a full range of pronunciation features with precision and subtlety sustains flexible use of features throughout is effortless to understand
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks fluently with only occasional repetition or self-correction; hesitation is usually content-related and only rarely to search for language develops topics coherently and appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide vocabulary resource readily and flexibly to convey precise meaning uses less common and idiomatic vocabulary skilfully, with occasional inaccuracies uses paraphrase effectively 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of structures flexibly produces a majority of error-free sentences with only very occasional inappropriacies or basic/non-systematic errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a wide range of pronunciation features sustains flexible use of features, with only occasional lapses is easy to understand throughout; L1 accent has minimal effect on intelligibility
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks at length without noticeable effort or loss of coherence may demonstrate language-related hesitation at times, or some repetition and/or self-correction uses a range of connectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses vocabulary resource flexibly to discuss a variety of topics uses some less common and idiomatic vocabulary and shows some awareness of style and collocation with some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of complex structures with some flexibility frequently produces error-free sentences, though some grammatical mistakes persist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows all the positive features of Band 6 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 8
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is willing to speak at length, though may lose coherence at times due to occasional repetition, self-correction or hesitation uses a range of connectives and discourse markers but not always appropriately 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> has a wide enough vocabulary to discuss topics at length and make meaning clear in spite of inappropriacies generally paraphrases successfully 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a mix of simple and complex structures, but with limited flexibility may make frequent mistakes with complex structures, though these rarely cause comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a range of pronunciation features with mixed control shows some effective use of features but this is not sustained can generally be understood throughout, though mispronunciation of

5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> usually maintains flow of speech but uses repetition, self-correction and/or slow speech to keep going may over-use certain connectives and discourse markers produces simple speech fluently, but more 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> manages to talk about familiar and unfamiliar topics but uses vocabulary with limited flexibility attempts to use paraphrase but with mixed success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produces basic sentence forms with reasonable accuracy uses a limited range of more complex structures, but these usually contain errors and may cause some comprehension problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows all the positive features of Band 4 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 6
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cannot respond without noticeable pauses and may speak slowly, with frequent repetition and self-correction links basic sentences but with repetitious use of simple connectives and some 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is able to talk about familiar topics but can only convey basic meaning on unfamiliar topics and makes frequent errors in word choice rarely attempts paraphrase 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> produces basic sentence forms and some correct simple sentences but subordinate structures are rare errors are frequent and may lead to misunderstanding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses a limited range of pronunciation features attempts to control features but lapses are frequent mispronunciations are frequent and cause some difficulty for the listener
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speaks with long pauses has limited ability to link simple sentences gives only simple responses and is frequently unable to convey basic 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> uses simple vocabulary to convey personal information has insufficient vocabulary for less familiar topics 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempts basic sentence forms but with limited success, or relies on apparently memorised utterances makes numerous errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> shows some of the features of Band 2 and some, but not all, of the positive features of Band 4
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> pauses lengthily before most words 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> only produces isolated words or memorised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> cannot produce basic sentence forms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> speech is often unintelligible
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> no communication possible 			
0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> does not attend 			

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APPENDIX 4: ORAL LANGUAGE SKILL TEST RESULTS

Table 1. Results of individual sectors

Candidate	FC T1	FC T2	LR T1	LR T2	GRA T1	GRAT2	P T1	P T2
1	8	8	7	8	8	9	8	9
2	6	6	7	6	6	6	6	6
3	5	5	6	6	6	6	5	5
4	7	6	7	7	7	7	6	6
5	5	6	5	5	6	6	6	5
6	5	5	5	5	5	6	4	5
7	6	6	5	6	6	6	6	6
8	7	7	6	7	7	7	6	7
9	7	7	8	7	8	8	7	7
10	6	7	7	8	7	7	6	7
11	7	8	8	8	9	8	8	8
12	7	8	7	9	8	8	7	8
13	6	6	7	7	7	7	7	7
14	8	8	8	8	8	9	9	9
15	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	6
16	7	7	7	8	7	7	7	7
17	7	7	7	7	8	8	8	7
18	6	7	6	7	6	6	6	7

Total pos.	6	Total pos.	8	Total pos.	3	Total pos.	6
Total neg.	1	Total neg.	2	Total neg.	1	Total neg.	2

FC = Fluency and Coherence
T1 = Speaking test 1

LR = Lexical Resources
T2 = Speaking test 2

P = Pronunciation
Increase

GRA = Grammatical Range and Accuracy
Decrease

Table 2. Average results, change, GPA and own views

Candidate	Avg.		Change	GPA(4-10)	Self-evaluation
	T1	Avg. T2			
1	7,75	8,50	+0.75	10	Good
2	6,25	6,00	-0.25	7	Moderate
3	5,50	5,50	-	6	Mediocre
4	6,75	6,5	-0.25	9	Mediocre
5	5,50	5,50	-	10	Mediocre
6	4,75	5,25	+0.50	6	Poor
7	5,75	6,00	+0.25	7	Moderate
8	6,50	7,00	+0.50	7	Moderate
9	7,50	7,25	-0.25	9	Good
10	6,50	7,25	+0.75	9	Moderate
11	8,00	8,00	-	9	Excellent
12	7,25	8,25	+1.0	9	Good
13	6,75	6,75	-	9	Moderate
14	8,25	8,50	+0.25	10	Excellent
15	6,00	6,50	+0.50	7	Moderate
16	7,00	7,25	+0.25	9	Good
17	7,50	7,25	-0.25	9	Good
18	6,00	6,75	+0.75	10	Moderate

Avg. = The average of the four sectors/ band tier

Change = The change from speaking test 1 to 2

GPA = Grade Point Average

T1 = Speaking test 1 T2 = Speaking test 2

Table 3.
Approximate self-
evaluation
relevance to
Speaking test score

S-Eval.	ST Score
Excellent	8.0-9.0
Good	7.0-8.0
Moderate	6.0-7.0
Mediocre	5.0-6.0
Poor	4.0-5.0

APPENDIX 5: THE CONSENT FORM

OULUN YLIOPISTO
UNIVERSITY of OULU



17.11.2014

SUOSTUMUS TUTKIMUKSEEN OSALLISTUMISEEN JA SIINÄ KERÄTTÄVIEN HENKILÖTIETOJEN KÄSITTELYYN

Tutkimushanke: Nuorten suhtautuminen englanninkieleen vapaaehtoisessa kielenkäytön tilanteessa

Tutkimuksen toteuttaja: Oulun yliopisto

Yhteyshenkilöt, jolta voi tarvittaessa pyytää lisätietoja tutkimuksesta:

Elmeri Seppänen, puh. 0407457368, s-posti: elmeri.seppanen@student oulu.fi

Maarit Siromaa, puh. 0445959365, s-posti: maarit.siromaa@oulu.fi

Tutkimukseen osallistujan koko nimi

Tutkimukseen osallistujan syntymäaika

Suostun, että lapseni osallistuu yllä mainittuun tutkimukseen ja siinä tarvittavien tietojen keräämiseen. Minulle on ennen suostumustani annettu tutkimuksesta ja siihen liittyvästä henkilötietojen käsittelystä informaatiota suostumuslomakkeen liitteenä olevalla tiedotteella, johon olen tutustunut. Annettu informaatio sisältää selvityksen tutkimuksen tarkoituksesta ja tutkimuksessa kerättävien henkilötietojen käsittelystä. Voin milloin tahansa peruuttaa tämän suostumuksen ilmoittamalla peruutuksesta tutkimuksen toteuttajalle.

Paikka ja aika

Suostumuksen antajan allekirjoitus
(nimen selvennys)

Vakuutamme, että käytämme aineistoa henkilösuojalain ja tutkimusetiikan hyvien käytäntöjen mukaisesti. Suostumuslomakkeesta toimitetaan suostumuksen antajalle kappale tutkimuksen vastuuhenkilön allekirjoituksella varustettuna.

Paikka ja aika

Elmeri Seppänen,

LIITE - TIEDOTE TUTKITTAVILLE

Tutkimushanke: Nuorten suhtautuminen englanninkieleen vapaaehtoisessa kielenkäytön tilanteessa

Tutkimuksen taustatiedot

Tutkimuksen suorituspaikka:

Oulun yliopisto

Tutkimuksen liittymäkohdat muihin hankkeisiin:

Tutkimus suoritetaan yhteistyössä CIMO-järjestön rahoittaman YET-projektin kanssa.

Valmistuvat opinnäytetyöt:

Tutkimuksessa kerätään aineistoa, jota voidaan hyödyntää erilaisissa opinnäytteissä (väitöskirja, pro gradu –tutkielma, kandidaatintutkielma).

Tutkimuksen suoritus aika:

Tutkimusaineisto kerätään tammi-helmikuussa 2015. Tutkimuksen pohjalta tehtäviä opinnäytteitä ja/tai tieteellisiä artikkeleita koskeva aikataulu sijoittuu pitemmälle aikavälille.

Yhteyshenkilöt, joilta voi tarvittaessa pyytää lisätietoja:

Elmeri Seppänen, puh. 0407457368, s-posti: elmeri.seppanen@student.oulu.fi

Maarit Siromaa, puh. 0445959365, s-posti: maarit.siromaa@oulu.fi

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus, tavoite ja merkitys

Tutkimuksen tarkoitus on selvittää, millä tavalla nuorten opiskelijoiden suhtautuminen englanninkieleen mahdollisesti muuttuu kahden viikon intensiiviprojektin aikana, jossa englanti on työkieli, ja vastaavatko heidän käsityksensä heidän aitoa kielitaitoaan. Tavoitteena on selvittää mm. onko projektin kaltainen aito kielenkäytön tilanne hyödyllinen opiskelun kannalta. Tutkimuksen on merkityksellinen opetuksen kehityksen kannalta.

Tutkimuksessa kerättävät tiedot

Tutkimusaineistoa kerätään tammi-helmikuussa 2015 suullisen kielitaidon testeillä ennen ja jälkeen YET-projektin, haastatteluilla YET-projektin jälkeen sekä observoimalla YET-projektia. Haastatteluita ja kielitaidon testejä voidaan nauhoittaa.

Tutkimusaineiston käyttö, suojaaminen ja säilytys

Tutkimusaineistoa tullaan hyödyntämään yksinomaan tieteellisessä tutkimuksessa (mukaan lukien opinnäytetyöt) ja opetuksessa, eikä sitä käytetä kaupallisiin tarkoituksiin. Julkaisuissa ja tieteellisissä esitelmissä aineistoa käsitellään osallistujien yksityisyyttä kunnioittaen siten, ettei tutkimukseen osallistujia voida aineiston pohjalta tunnistaa. Tutkimusaineisto voidaan myös arkistoida sellaisenaan pitempiaikaiseen käyttöön tutkimus- ja opetustyötä varten. Tällöin tieto arkistoidaan Oulun yliopiston humanistisen tiedekunnan englantilaisen filologian oppiaineessa. Arkistoitua aineistoa voidaan käyttää englantilaisen filologian oppiaineessa opetukseen, tutkimukseen ja opinnäytetöihin.

Lisätietoja tutkimuksesta antavat kohdassa ”Yhteystiedot” mainitut henkilöt.

APPENDIX 6: LEARNING PRINCIPLES

1. Active, Critical Learning Principle

All aspects of the learning environment (including the ways in which the semiotic domain is designed and presented) are set up to encourage active and critical, not passive, learning.

2. Design Principle

Learning about and coming to appreciate design and design principles is core to the learning experience.

3. Semiotic Principle

Learning about and coming to appreciate interrelations within and across multiple sign systems (images, words, actions, symbols, artifacts, etc.) as a complex system is core to the learning experience.

4. Semiotic Domains Principle

Learning involves mastering, at some level, semiotic domains, and being able to participate, at some level, in the affinity group or groups connected to them.

5. Metalevel Thinking about Semiotic Domains Principle

Learning involves active and critical thinking about the relationships of the semiotic domain being learned to other semiotic domains.

6. “Psychosocial Moratorium” Principle

Learners can take risks in a space where real-world consequences are lowered.

7. Committed Learning Principle

Learners participate in an extended engagement (lots of effort and practice) find compelling.

8. Identity Principle

Learning involves taking on and playing with identities in such a way that the learner has real choices (in developing the virtual identity) and ample opportunity to meditate on the relationship between new identities and old ones. There is a tripartite play of identities as learners relate, and reflect on, their multiple real-world identities, a virtual identity, and a projective identity.

9. Self-Knowledge Principle

The virtual world is constructed in such a way that learners learn not only about the domain but about themselves and their current and potential capacities.

10. Amplification of Input Principle

For a little input, learners get a lot of output.

11. Achievement Principle

For learners of all levels of skill there are intrinsic rewards from the beginning, customized to each learner’s level, effort, and growing mastery and signaling the learner’s ongoing achievements.

12. Practice Principle

Learners get lots and lots of practice in a context where the practice is not boring (i.e., in a virtual world that is compelling to learners on their own terms and where the learners experience ongoing success). They spend lots of time on task.

13. Ongoing Learning Principle

The distinction between learner and master is vague, since learners, thanks to the operation of the “regime of competence” principle listed next, must, at higher and higher levels, undo their routinized mastery to adapt to new or changed conditions. There are cycles of new learning, automatization, undoing automatization, and new reorganized automatization.

14. “Regime of Competence” Principle

The learner gets ample opportunity to operate within, but at the outer edge of, his or her resources, so that at those points things are felt as challenging but not “undoable.”

15. Probing Principle

Learning is a cycle of probing the world (doing something); reflecting in and on this action and, on this basis, forming a hypothesis; reprobating the world to test this hypothesis; and then accepting or rethinking the hypothesis.

16. Multiple Routes Principle

There are multiple ways to make progress or move ahead. This allows learners to make choices, rely on their own strengths and styles of learning and problem solving, while also exploring alternative styles.

17. Situated Meaning Principle

The meanings of signs (words, actions, objects, artifacts, symbols, texts, etc.) are situated in embodied experience. Meanings are not general or decontextualized. Whatever generality meanings come to have is discovered bottom up via embodied experiences.

18. Text Principle

Texts are not understood purely verbally (i.e., only in terms of the definitions of the words in the text and their text-internal relationships to each other) but are understood in terms of embodied experiences. Learners move back and forth between texts and embodied experiences. More purely verbal understanding (reading texts apart from embodied action) comes only when learners have had enough embodied experience in the domain and ample experiences with similar texts.

19. Intertextual Principle

The learner understands texts as a family (“genre”) of related texts and understands any one such text in relation to others in the family, but only after having achieved embodied understandings of some texts. Understanding a group of texts as a family (genre) of texts is a large part of what helps the learner make sense of such texts.

20. Multimodal Principle

Meaning and knowledge are built up through various modalities (images, texts, symbols, interactions, abstract design, sound, etc.), not just words.

21. “Material Intelligence” Principle

Thinking, problem solving, and knowledge are “stored” in material objects and the environment. This frees learners to engage their minds with other things while combining the results of their own thinking with the knowledge stored in material objects and the environment to achieve yet more powerful effects.

22. Intuitive Knowledge Principle

Intuitive or tacit knowledge built up in repeated practice and experience, often in association with an affinity group, counts a great deal and is honored. Not just verbal and conscious knowledge is rewarded.

23. Subset Principle

Learning even at its start takes place in a (simplified) subset of the real domain. 24. Incremental Principle Learning situations are ordered in the early stages so that earlier cases lead to generalizations that are fruitful for later cases. When learners face more complex cases later, the learning space (the number and type of guesses the learner can make) is constrained by the sorts of fruitful patterns or generalizations the learner has found earlier.

25. Concentrated Sample Principle

The learner sees, especially early on, many more instances of fundamental signs and actions than would be the case in a less controlled sample. Fundamental signs and actions are concentrated in the early stages so that learners get to practice them often and learn them well.

26. Bottom-up Basic Skills

Principle Basic skills are not learned in isolation or out of context; rather, what counts as a basic skill is discovered bottom up by engaging in more and more of the game/domain or game/domains like it. Basic skills are genre elements of a given type of game/domain.

27. Explicit Information On-Demand and Just-in-Time Principle

The learner is given explicit information both on-demand and just-in-time, when the learner needs it or just at the point where the information can best be understood and used in practice.

28. Discovery Principle

Overt telling is kept to a well-thought-out minimum, allowing ample opportunity for the learner to experiment and make discoveries.

29. Transfer Principle

Learners are given ample opportunity to practice, and support for, transferring what they have learned earlier to later problems, including problems that require adapting and transforming that earlier learning.

30. Cultural Models about the World Principle

Learning is set up in such a way that learners come to think consciously and reflectively about some of their cultural models regarding the world, without denigration of their identities, abilities, or social affiliations, and juxtapose them to new models that may conflict with or otherwise relate to them in various ways.

31. Cultural Models about Learning Principle

Learning is set up in such a way that learners come to think consciously and reflectively about their cultural models of learning and themselves as learners, without denigration of their identities, abilities, or social affiliations, and juxtapose them to new models of learning and themselves as learners.

32. Cultural Models about Semiotic Domains Principle

Learning is set up in such a way that learners come to think consciously and reflectively about their cultural models about a particular semiotic domain they are learning, without denigration

of their identities, abilities, or social affiliations, and juxtapose them to new models about this domain.

33. Distributed Principle

Meaning/knowledge is distributed across the learner, objects, tools, symbols, technologies, and the environment.

34. Dispersed Principle

Meaning/knowledge is dispersed in the sense that the learner shares it with others outside the domain/game, some of whom the learner may rarely or never see face-to-face.

35. Affinity Group Principle

Learners constitute an “affinity group,” that is, a group that is bonded primarily through shared endeavors, goals, and practices and not shared race, gender, nation, ethnicity, or culture.

36. Insider Principle

The learner is an “insider,” “teacher,” and “producer” (not just a “consumer”) able to customize the learning experience and domain/game from the beginning and throughout the experience.

(Gee 2007: 213-219)

APPENDIX 7: CHARACTERISTICS OF AFFINITY SPACES

1. **Common endeavor, not race, class, gender, or disability, is primary**

In an affinity space, people relate to each other primarily in terms of common interests, endeavors, goals, or practices, not primarily in terms of race, gender, age, disability, or social class. These latter variables are backgrounded, though they can be used (or not) strategically by people if and when they choose to use them for their own purposes. This feature is particularly enabled and enhanced in *AoM* Heaven because people enter this and other *AOM* portals with an identity (and name) of their own choosing. They can make up any name they like and give any information (fictional or not) about themselves they wish to. This identity need not—and usually does not—foreground the person’s race, gender, age, disability, or social class.

2. **Newbies and masters and everyone else share common space**

This portal does not segregate newcomers (“newbies”) from masters. The whole continuum of people from new to experienced, from unskilled to highly skilled, from minorly interested to addicted, and everything in between, is accommodated in the same space. They each can get different things out of the space—based on their own choices, purposes, and identities—and still mingle with others as they wish, learning from them when and where they choose (even “lurking” on advanced forums where they may be too unskilled to do anything but listen in on the experts). Affinity spaces may have portals where people with more expertise are segregated from people with less (e.g. players usually choose whom they will play against on multiplayer game sites in terms of their level of expertise), but they also have ones where such segregation does not occur.

3. **Some portals are strong generators**

The portal allows people to generate new signs and relationships among signs for the *AoM* space. That is, the portal is also a major generator. Fans create new maps, new scenarios for the single-player and multiplayer games, adjust or redesign the technical aspects of the game, create new artwork, and even give tutorials on mythology as it exists in the game or outside the game world.

4. **Content organization is transformed by interactional organization**

Based on what the players do and say on sites like *AoM* Heaven, the core original generator (the game) is changed via patches, new content, and new expansions offered by the company that makes the game. That is, the content of *AoM* as a space is transformed by the actions and interactions of players acting and interacting on sites like *AoM* Heaven.

5. **Both intensive and extensive knowledge are encouraged**

The portal encourages and enables people who use it to gain and spread both intensive knowledge and extensive knowledge. They can readily develop and

display specialized knowledge (intensive knowledge), in one or more areas: for example, learning how to tweak the game's AI and advising others in this area. At the same time, the portal encourages and enables people to gain a good deal of broader, less specialized, knowledge about many aspects of the space (extensive knowledge), which they share with a great many others who use the portal or otherwise use the *AOM* space. Intensive knowledge is specialized, extensive knowledge is less specialized, broader, and more widely shared. This creates people who share lots of knowledge, but each have something special to offer.

6. **Both individual and distributed knowledge are encouraged**

The portal also encourages and enables people both to gain individual knowledge (stored in their heads) and to learn to use and contribute to distributed knowledge. Distributed knowledge is knowledge that exists in other people, material on the site (or links to other sites), or in mediating devices (various tools, artifacts, and technologies) and to which people can connect or “network” their own individual knowledge. Such knowledge allows people to know and do more than they could on their own. People are encouraged and enabled to act with others and with various mediating devices (e.g. level editors, routines for tweaking the AI of the game, strategy guides) in such a way that their partial knowledge and skills become part of a bigger and smarter network of people, information, and mediating devices.

7. **Dispersed knowledge is encouraged**

The portal also encourages and enables people to use dispersed knowledge: that is, knowledge that is not actually at the site itself, but at other sites or in other spaces. For example, the portal enables and encourages people to learn about mythology in general, including mythological facts and systems that go well beyond *AoM* as a game. Much of this information is not directly in the *AoM* Heaven site, but on other sites it links to or in books or movies the site will mention or review. When a space utilizes dispersed knowledge it means that its distributed knowledge exists in a quite wide and extensive network. When knowledge is dispersed in a space, the space does not set strict boundaries around the areas from which people will draw knowledge and skills.

8. **Tacit knowledge is encouraged and honored**

The portal encourages, enables, and honors tacit knowledge—that is, knowledge players have built up in practice, but may not be able to explicate fully in words. This knowledge may be about how to play the game, how to design new maps and scenarios for the game, how to form a forum party, or a great many other things. Players pass on this tacit knowledge via joint action when they interact with others via playing the game with them or interacting with them in other spaces. At the same time, the portal offers ample opportunities for people, if they wish, to try to (learn to) articulate their tacit knowledge in words, for example when they contribute to a forum on technical matters like how to design good maps.

9. **There are many different forms and routes to participation**

People can participate in *AoM* Heaven or other portals to the *AoM* space in many different ways and at many different levels. People can participate peripherally in some respects, centrally in others; patterns can change from day to day or across longer stretches of time.

10. **There are lots of different routes to status**

A portal like *AoM* Heaven, and the *AoM* space as a whole, allows people to achieve status if they want it (and they may not) in many different ways. Different people can be good at different things or gain reputes in a number of different ways. Of course playing the game well can gain one status, but so can organizing forum parties, putting out guides, working to stop hackers from cheating in the multiplayer game, posting to any of a number of different forums, or a great many other things.

11. **Leadership is porous and leaders are resources**

A space like *AoM* and a portal to it like *AoM* Heaven do not have “bosses.” They do have various sorts of leaders—people who design the game or the website—though we have seen that the boundary between leader and follower is vague and porous, since players can generate content for the game or site. Leadership in an affinity space like *AoM* consists of designers, resourcers (i.e. they resource other people), and enablers (teachers). They don’t and can’t order people around or create rigid, unchanging, and impregnable hierarchies.

(Gee, 2004: 99-101)