

THE IMPACT OF THE *STORYLINE* APPROACH ON THE YOUNG LANGUAGE LEARNER CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY IN SWEDEN

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Abstract

In the *Storyline* approach a fictive world is created in the classroom. Learners become characters in a story, which develops as they work in small groups on open *key questions*, devised by the teacher on the basis of curriculum content and in which practical and theoretical tasks are integrated. Though established in first language contexts, *Storyline* is less known in second language education, although it would seem to offer conditions considered to promote language development in young learners: the story framework provides an engaging and meaningful context in which learners use their language skills holistically, in tasks which simulate the way they might use English in the real world, and in which they can use their creative talents. This multi-strategy case study investigated the language development of a class of Swedish 11-13 year olds who took part in *Storyline, Our Sustainable Street*, lasting five weeks. In the topic the learners were families living in a new street in a fictive English town. The aim was to consolidate their existing structural and lexical knowledge, develop their language skills and introduce the lexis of sustainability. Findings show that the learners became engaged when they worked with the *Storyline*, and that this impacted positively on their language development, especially regarding the learning of new words, losing the fear of speaking English before their peers, and in the voluntary production of longer and more structurally and lexically complex written texts. Features which contributed most to learner engagement were found to be *group work*, *art work* and the *variety* of task types, with the boys also motivated by *not working with a textbook* and girls by opportunities to use their *imagination*. The results suggest that inclusion of the *Storyline* approach in a teaching repertoire can facilitate language development in young learners.

Key words: second language acquisition, *Storyline*, young learners, task

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In the autumn of 1999 at Kristianstad University, Sweden, I received notification of the first international *Storyline* conference to be held in Aalborg, Denmark the following year. In my ten years as a teacher of English I had never heard the word *Storyline*, but understood from the conference information that in the *Storyline* approach practical and theoretical subjects of the curriculum can be combined holistically and meaningfully when a fictive world is created in the classroom; a story develops in which the learners take on the roles of characters. This appeared to me, intuitively, to have potential for the communicative teaching of English as a foreign language. In the ten years since that first conference I have incorporated the approach into my work as a teacher trainer on initial primary and secondary courses as well as on in-service courses for teachers. The responses of students and teachers to working through a *Storyline* topic themselves in order to understand its possibilities for the classroom, my observations of *Storyline* classes when visiting students on teaching practice, and of learning about students' and teachers' experiences of working with the approach led me to the current study: to investigate in what way and to what extent *Storyline* (as it is usually referred to) might facilitate the development of English in young language learners.

In order to do this I designed a *Storyline* topic, which was implemented by two teachers working with one class of 11-13 year olds over a period of five weeks. The aim of the study was to identify which aspects of the *Storyline* approach contributed to language learning, in what way they contributed to language

learning, and to do so from the perspectives of the learners, teachers and myself as researcher. The data were to consist of questionnaire, observation notes, interviews, learner journals, samples of learner writing and some video recording.

In this chapter I will first consider the role of English in Sweden and the nature of the Swedish national curriculum, which are necessary for an understanding of the theoretical appropriateness of *Storyline* in the Swedish context. I will then present an overview of the approach, and conclude with a consideration of the status of the researcher who undertakes a study of this kind - at once present in the classroom and yet outside the activity going on there.

1.1 THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN SWEDEN

The Swedish national curriculum is based on principles of a democratic western society (Skolverket, 2006). Values such as equality, solidarity, justice and fairness are emphasized for their role in preparing the child to take his or her eventual place in society. In addition to this is recognition of the important role that school plays in educating future citizens to live in a sustainable world. It is also stipulated that one role of school is to foster a positive self-image in children. Teaching should therefore be adapted to the needs and abilities of the individual. In line with this, no particular materials or methods are prescribed, although children should be given the opportunity to work across subject boundaries. The aesthetic subjects, creativity, practical work and play are considered key to the learning process.

English is a core curriculum subject, along with Swedish and mathematics, and compulsory up to and including the first year of tertiary education (ages 16-19). Schools are currently required to introduce the teaching of English in year (henceforth Y) 4, when children are 9 to 10 years old, though in practice many schools begin before this. As from autumn 2011, and the introduction of a new national curriculum, English should be introduced from Y1 (age seven). However, the total number of hours allocated throughout the compulsory education period (up to Y9, age 16) will remain at the current level of 480.

The curriculum stresses the importance of communicative competence in English in a globalised world. Communicative competence is deemed to include intercultural competence, that is, an ability to compare one's own and the cultures of others in a wide sense, namely beliefs, values and customs. With regard to the language, the aim is to foster a love of language learning which will continue beyond school. At present there are national syllabi for Y5 and 9, and for three levels at tertiary college, the final one being the equivalent of the Cambridge Certificate in Advanced English (CAE), which is offered by some schools. In 2010 just over three thousand Swedish 19 year olds took the CAE examination.

The differences between the syllabus levels are in the depth and breadth of what learners are required to do. For example, in Y5 learners should be able *to convey information in writing in a very simple way*; in Y9 they should be able *to give and request information as well as narrate and describe*. In other words, younger as well as older learners should learn to use the language

communicatively in relation to their capabilities and to take increasing account of register, as determined by interlocutor and situation (Skolverket, 2000). This emphasis on communication from an early age reflects the sociocultural theoretical perspective that language use and acquisition co-occur. In developing all-round communicative competence, emphasis is placed on vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling and grammar, as well as coping strategies such as the ability to paraphrase and use body language. Not least, the learners are expected to develop metacognition in order to become ever better language learners and users. Based on the national syllabi, schools produce their own syllabi of lexical areas, grammatical structures and strategic competence to be developed in each year group.

With regard to assessment, while accuracy becomes increasingly important, the emphasis in Y5 is on content. Although learners do not currently receive grades before Y8 in any subject, there are national tests in the core subjects in Y5 and 9, and at tertiary college. In Y5 the purpose of these tests is partly to ensure parity of standard in teaching throughout the country, partly diagnostic, to identify individual learner strengths and weaknesses, and also to help teachers assess whether the syllabus goals have been fulfilled. The results are used in discussions with parents and as the basis for planned development in an *individual development plan*, which teachers draw up with the learner and the learner's parents, and which is evaluated at the next meeting (the following term).

Though national tests in English in Y5 have existed since 1996, they have been compulsory only since 2009 (unlike the obligatory tests for older learners). Each test consists of separate parts for the four skills, with instructions given in English in order not to disadvantage those from a non-Swedish-speaking background (Skolverket, 2010). In 2009 over 80% of learners were considered to have fulfilled the goals in all the separate tests, with *reading* the skill at which they were least proficient (Skolverket, 2010). The results reflected how the learners themselves judged their capabilities, and also their preferences (information gathered as part of the testing process). The most popular test, as in previous reports, was found to be *speaking*, in which the learners talk in pairs with a friend. As regards *listening*, in 2009 the most successful were those who reported listening to English in their free time. Over 40% of all learners failed on a listening task which required them to know the letters of the alphabet in English.

The strengths and weaknesses of Swedish learners should be placed in context. A survey of eight European countries (Skolverket, 2004) revealed that Swedish pupils have a good level of English in comparison with others. In some ways this is not surprising given the prevalence of the language in Sweden. For example, only films and television programmes for the youngest children are dubbed. Thus, from an early age Swedes are used to hearing other languages, which can be compared with Britain, for example, where voice-over translations into English prevent the individual's exposure to another language. Just as the English language dominates television and film in Sweden, so it prevails in music and in the computer world. Even commercial advertising is increasingly

in English, from signs in shops such as *The Good Christmas* and *The Gift Shop*, (seen during the most recent Christmas season), *Merry Christmas*, *Sale*, *New Arrivals*, *Back to School*, to slogans on buses, such as *Coach of the Year 2008*. Slogans in English are used to promote some local authority areas (e.g. *Eslövs kommun*, *Investor in People*), and in business there are job titles such as *Team Leader* and *Coach*. Speech in private as well as public life includes formulaic phrases such as *business as usual*, *piece of cake*, *so what*, *laid back*, *naming and shaming*, *worst case scenario* (all recently overheard or read in a newspaper). Advertisements for jobs in the public and private sectors routinely state a requirement for competence in English. Indeed, the findings of a recent doctoral study into the use of Swedish as a second language in the workplace found that, for white collar workers, strategic use of English can sometimes enable them to maintain communication where they lack means of expression in Swedish (Nelson, 2010). The prevalence of English in Sweden in these different domains is potentially significant given the view that some learners may be particularly susceptible to incidentally-encountered language stimuli (Malmberg, 2000).

Two findings from the 2004 survey are particularly relevant to my study. Firstly, it was found that Swedish learners in both Y5 and 9 had 'very positive' (p19) attitudes to English, though they found the subject difficult. A common feeling expressed was that of embarrassment in speaking, not least because of the learners' conviction that what they said had to be grammatically correct. The learners' responses to the different parts of the national tests reveal a similar picture: learners like speaking English, but in pairs. If they are required to speak

in front of the whole class, some report feeling insecure; this is the case especially where the class does not routinely speak English, and where they are corrected in front of their peers.

The 2004 survey also revealed that the area in which Swedish pupils were weakest was in language correctness. Although the syllabus stipulates that communicative competence requires a focus on *vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar* (Skolverket, 2000), it is interesting to note that *grammar* is named last. While this may not be intended to suggest order of importance, it could be interpreted by teachers in that way. It should be noted that currently there is no requirement for primary teachers to be trained in the teaching of English, though this will change with reform of teacher education, to be introduced at the same time as the new curriculum. A lack of understanding of how another language is acquired on the one hand, and lack of grammatical knowledge on the other, can have a number of consequences. Firstly, if teachers are not confident about their own language correctness and do not know how to teach grammar, they may avoid doing so. Alternatively, they may rely on a textbook or workbook; that teachers do rely on such teaching materials in these circumstances was confirmed by teachers in the 2004 survey. This in turn might lead to an over-emphasis on grammar, with teachers insisting on grammatical correctness whenever their learners speak, which was the reported experience of the learners in this survey. However, lack of teacher qualification is only one explanation. A Schools Inspectorate report (Skolinspektionen, 2010), based on observations of 117 lessons in 30 schools not only in Y5 but also Y9, where the teachers *are* expected to be qualified in their subjects, found

a predominance of traditional teaching materials, such as textbooks. Yet as Samuda and Bygate note, 'learners of different levels of readiness learn at different rates' (2008:252). This indicates that there are limitations to the usefulness of pre-constructed syllabi on which textbooks are based and of teacher dependence on these textbooks, not least for learners whose particular needs may be inadvertently ignored. Indeed, failure to adapt instruction to the needs of the individual learner was highlighted as a weakness in the Schools Inspectorate's report.

Regarding teaching materials, methodology and the needs of the individual, there are several important considerations. One concerns the importance of motivation. Curtain and Dahlberg (2004) have identified age 10 as when learners become less willing to speak English. The survey of the situation in eight European countries (Skolverket, 2004) shows a similar picture: loss of motivation begins in Y4 to 6, when the learners feel they are not given the opportunity to show what they can do, only what they cannot. The authors point out that this is also the age when learners become more self-conscious about dance, song and movement, which provide multi-sensory approaches to language teaching and learning. A reluctance to engage with the language at this stage can have consequences at higher levels: for instance, a link was found between a poor self-image and failure to reach the syllabus targets in Y9. These findings are in line with the research into young language learners, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Before summing up this section I would like to add that my own experience as a teacher trainer matches the findings cited here: the European survey (Skolverket, 2004), report into the national tests (Skolverket, 2010), and the Schools Inspectorate study (Skolinspektionen, 2010). The majority of student teachers with whom I have worked over the last 10 years have been in their twenties, with a high proportion coming straight from school. For many, textbook work and traditional discrete-item vocabulary tests were the norm during much of their school days. Where teachers base their lessons on a textbook, even where they use the target language in the classroom, there may be little opportunity for the learners to use it communicatively themselves. Many of the students on the initial primary education programmes are not used to speaking English when they begin their studies and are sometimes nervous about doing so, especially where they have experienced correction at school in front of their peers; some are unable to say the date correctly or to spell their name in English. However, it is also the case that where these students have used communicative tasks during their teaching practice, their mentors have often expressed interest in and a desire to use such tasks themselves, indicating that the problem is one of lack of training in language teaching, a problem addressed by the 2011 teacher education reform.

To summarize, it can be said that in Sweden the English language has high status. This is due to its importance in mediating contact with an increasingly globalized world regarding business, leisure and higher education. The curriculum prioritizes development of the ability to communicate in the language while recognizing the role played by vocabulary and grammar in developing

communicative competence. This corresponds to current thinking in second language acquisition research, discussed in the next chapter, namely that the acquisition of a foreign language in institutional settings is optimally facilitated by a balance of explicit teaching and opportunities for the learner to use what they have learnt (e.g. Dörnyei, 2009).

The recommendations of the 2004 survey were that in order to develop learner proficiency, vocabulary should be taught in context and that communicative opportunities should be created in the classroom. These recommendations were in line with those which resulted from a longitudinal study of foreign language learning strategies in Swedish learners from Y5 to the first year of tertiary college (Malmberg, 2000), namely that explicit grammar teaching had limited value in Y5 and 6. Despite this, it would seem that classroom practice still does not always reflect what is both the spirit and letter of the national syllabus for English. Nonetheless, given that learners are found to have positive attitudes towards learning English, but that motivation may be lost by the time they start secondary education, it seems appropriate to look particularly at the pre-secondary age group and to consider how teaching approaches might foster a positive self-image in learners, so maximizing learning opportunities for all.

1.2 A HOLISTIC APPROACH TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

Taking into consideration the perceived benefits of contextualized vocabulary and communicative language use, as well as the more limited benefits of explicit grammar teaching (Malmberg, 2000), it would seem that a holistic

teaching approach might be appropriate. In other words, creating classroom conditions in which the learner is involved 'in dealing with the different aspects of the language in the way language is normally used' (Samuda and Bygate, 2008:7). One such approach might be task-based language and teaching (TBLT) or the *Storyline* approach, which has been described as a type of task-based education (Kocher, 2006; Kirsch, 2008), providing 'a purposeful and communicative context [which] makes links to the real world' (Kirsch, 2008:104). Kirsch also makes the point that it is 'based on the pupils' prior experiences and harnesses their creativity and desire to learn'. *Storyline* differs from TBLT in a number of important ways (discussed more fully in the next chapter); it is characterized by the fact that tasks are contextualized in the framework of a story, which concludes with some celebratory event such as a party. What it shares with TBLT are opportunities for small group and pair work, the conditions in which learners are most willing to use the spoken language particularly with friends (Skolverket, 2010). As Gieve and Miller (2006) note, an important characteristic of a classroom is that routines and relationships are formed over a period of time. In many Swedish primary schools learners may stay with the same peer group throughout the primary period and have a class teacher (teaching all or most subjects) for two years or sometimes more. This familiarity potentially creates a positive socio-affective context in which communicative competence can be developed, providing that the learners have something to communicate and are motivated to do so, for as Dörnyei observes, 'the learner's engagement in seeking situational meaning is a pre-requisite before attention to linguistic form can be expected to be effective' (2009:281). Advocates of *Storyline* as a teaching approach maintain that such

engagement occurs when learners take part in a *Storyline* topic in which they, as characters in the story, work individually and with others to carry out a variety of tasks through which the narrative is developed. Considering the implications of these claims, it is perhaps surprising that *Storyline* is not better known as a foreign language teaching approach. However, to my knowledge the only teaching resource book to mention it is the second edition of *Storytelling with Children*, in which Wright notes as advantages 'the motivation to take part, and the opportunity to experience the subject matter (and the language) rather than study it' (2009:138).

The *Storyline* approach was developed at Jordanhill College of Education (now part of the University of Strathclyde), Glasgow, in the mid-1960s to facilitate cross-curricular teaching in primary schools. Characteristic features are that a fictive world, set in a particular time and place, is created in the classroom. A *Storyline* topic often lasts for about four to six weeks, though this time span may be shorter or longer, with a part of each school day devoted to *Storyline* work. Learners working in small groups take on and retain the role of characters in a story, which unfolds when the learners work on *key questions*. These open questions, devised by the teacher on the basis of the curriculum content to be covered, may involve the learners in research. Starting from what they know, they form a hypothesis, then carry out research to verify and/or modify the hypothesis. Practical and theoretical work is integrated, with a frieze, (free-standing screen or empty classroom wall), used to display drawings, other artefacts, and written work as the story unfolds. The approach is underpinned by the theory of social constructivism, in which learning is considered to be 'a

process in which knowledge, abilities and attitudes are actively acquired by the pupil' (Schwänke and Gronostay, 2008:55).

Today *Storyline* is used at all levels of education and in many countries. Regions which have been particularly instrumental in its development are Scotland, the American state of Oregon (notably the Portland area), parts of Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland. With regard to the latter, it is claimed that 'virtually all Icelandic teachers are familiar with and have been involved in this educational approach' (Greven and Kuiper, 2006:59). Knowledge about *Storyline* has from the outset been spread by word of mouth, by teachers attending conferences, courses or workshops, and trying it for themselves. It is only when their work is submitted to the *Storyline Scotland* website (see reference list), or regional websites where such exist (e.g. Sweden), that others can learn about it. For this reason it is difficult to establish where and to what extent *Storyline* is used. In addition to the conferences, a number of academics and teachers who are experienced in working with the approach meet every two years at a so-called Golden Circle seminar, to which are invited individuals who may be breaking new ground geographically (most recently, Turkey and Slovenia) and/or who may be working for a higher degree based on the *Storyline* approach (to which I will return in the next chapter).

Trends in education come and go, often as the result of political innovation. The *Storyline* approach flourishes in countries where the curriculum is less restrictive and where teachers are allowed to choose their own materials and teaching methods. In the view of Barr and Frame, it 'is not compatible with high

levels of centralist control over teacher behaviours' (2006:51). They note that its impact in England is 'negligible' (p51), observe similar constraints in Germany and increasing centralization of education in Denmark. However, with regard to the United Kingdom there are some signs of change. During the spring of 2011, the local education authority of North Yorkshire is to pilot a project in which French will be taught through *Storyline* in six primary and four secondary schools. In Scotland, following a fallow period where very little *Storyline* work was done, there is now a resurgence of interest (Bell, personal communication, 2010); two of the originators of the approach, Dr Steve Bell and Sallie Harkness, lecture annually on the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) programmes at the major Scottish universities, and the city of Glasgow was recently awarded UK government funding to produce a curriculum framework for global education, based on the *Storyline* approach, to be implemented into the city's schools. Bell and Harkness are still both active in giving lectures and holding workshops throughout the world.

Although *Storyline* is well established in a range of countries and in different first language (L1) educational contexts, relatively little work seems to have been carried out in the context of second or foreign language teaching, though at both the Aalborg (2000) and Portland (2009) conferences at least two classroom teachers reported on their work: English in Lithuania and Spanish in the USA respectively. In Germany, Kocher (Freiburg University of Education) has for some years incorporated the approach into her work in teacher training and is herself working towards a PhD in *Storyline* as a teaching approach. However, it was a Comenius-funded partnership (2003 - 2006) between teacher

educators in Germany, Finland, Poland and the UK (Ehlers et al, 2006), which was the first project to link *Storyline* and foreign language teaching. The aim of the project was to investigate the possibilities of using the approach to solve transitional problems arising when learners move from primary to secondary education, and to produce materials for teachers. *Storyline* topics (that is to say, the story outlines, *key questions* and learner tasks) based on the Common European Framework's A1 and B1 levels were created, tested and evaluated. I will return to the outcome of this project in the next chapter.

1.3 CONDUCTING A STUDY WITH YOUNG LEARNERS

Any research which seeks to investigate subjects' experiences and opinions requires an early consideration of ethical issues, not least where the subjects are children. One aspect of ethics concerns the researcher's understanding of his or her status in the classroom in which the study is to be conducted: is the researcher an insider or outsider? As Hellawell (2006) argues, this is far from clear cut and is one of degree rather than absolutes; the status may change depending on the aspect of classroom life under consideration at any particular time. For example, to what extent and in what way are the individual subjects known to the researcher?

This issue is interesting because it highlights the fact that data obtained, such as observation notes, interviews and questionnaires, may be affected by the way in which subjects perceive their relationship with the researcher. Is the visitor a familiar face with whom they can relax or an 'expert' and therefore

distanced from them, and is it possible to predict the effects of their individual perceptions on the data? The presence of a complete outsider might affect some subjects' behaviour by inhibiting it and their willingness to use L2. Conversely, some subjects might strive to impress the visitor. If the researcher is known to the subjects some might behave as they would if the researcher were not there, or in some cases, the familiarity of the visitor might be a source of inhibition. The same can also be said of the perceptions the teachers have of their relationship with the researcher, and the way in which these perceptions might influence, one way or another, the information they divulge about individual learners. I return to the question of ethics in Chapter 3.

For purposes of clarity, background to the study is provided at the beginning of Chapter 3, preceding the outline of the research design. Before that, in Chapter 2, I will begin with a discussion of the current view in the literature regarding second language acquisition. I will go on to consider the implications for the classroom involving a discussion of TBLT. This will include the role played by the learners' L1. The chapter will then go on to consider the distinctive features of young learners and what these imply for the classroom, before concluding with a discussion of the theory and practice of the *Storyline* approach and its theoretical relevance to the teaching of young learners. At the end of the chapter I will state and justify my research questions.

Having considered the literature relevant to this study, I will then go on to describe the background to the study and research design (Chapter 3), present the findings of the study (Chapter 4), discuss these findings in light of the

literature surveyed and the rationale for the study (Chapter 5); finally, I will draw some conclusions with regard to *Storyline*'s potential for facilitating language acquisition in young learners. Based on these conclusions I will highlight areas of future research which might develop current understanding of the process of second language acquisition (SLA) and consider how this knowledge might benefit classroom practice (Chapter 6).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter I will first review the literature regarding sociocultural theory and its classroom application in the form of task-based learning and teaching (TBLT). I will then go on to consider the theory and practice in light of research on young language learners. Finally, I will discuss the theory and practice of the *Storyline* approach about which little has been written in scholarly contexts, particularly with regard to SLA, but which has an affinity with TBLT.

2.1 SOCIOCULTURAL THEORY

2.1.1 The Emergence of a Sociocultural Perspective on Second Language Acquisition

As Canale and Swain (1980) point out, the importance of motivation and other affective factors was recognized in Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence. Given this background, it is somewhat surprising that affective factors have been marginalized by the cognitive perspective on SLA, which has dominated research and which to some extent continues to prevail. The cognitive research perspective on interaction, in which interlocutors negotiate meaning by attempting to resolve a linguistic difficulty and achieve mutual comprehension (e.g. Long, 1983), has been criticized for focusing on performance (Newton and Holzman, 1996 cited by Lantolf and Thorne, 2006) but neglecting the factors which influence the performance, thus reducing interaction to an exchange of information (Platt and Brooks, 1994). However, a range of factors has been identified as influencing the nature and quality of interaction; for instance, differences in personality and motivation determine

how learners approach and carry out the task (Roebuck, 2000; Lantolf and Pavlenko, 2001). Other factors are said to include different *learning styles* (e.g. Kolb and Kolb, 2001), and *multiple intelligences* (Gardner, 1993). Both concepts, though popular with educators, remain controversial, the former for eluding 'rigorous scientific definition' (Dörnyei, 2009:183), the latter for its subjectivity and absence of empirical support (e.g. White, 2008). The quality of interaction may also depend on interpersonal relationships; for example, learners may converge to avoid inconveniencing each other (Aston, 1986), or feign understanding for the same reason (Breen, 2001). Research which focuses solely on performance ignores learner differences and the important social relationships in the context of which the interaction takes place. Over a decade ago Ellis warned that results from such studies must therefore be applied cautiously to classroom practice (Ellis, 1997 cited by Lantolf and Thorne, 2006).

However, as the above criticisms indicate, there is now recognition of the limitations of a purely cognitive perspective on SLA. Since Frawley and Lantolf (1985), two factors increasingly recognized to facilitate language acquisition are social context, as discussed, for example, by Lave and Wenger (1991), Block (1996), Atkinson (2002) and Van Lier (2005), and an individual's affective state, as considered, for instance, in the work of Williams and Burden (1996), Arnold (1999), Lantolf (2000b), Breen (2001), Dörnyei (2001), Lantolf (2005), Lantolf and Thorne (2006), and Lantolf and Poehner (2008). The importance of these factors is reflected in the fact that qualitative research, which Richards defines as locally situated, participant-oriented, holistic and inductive, now has 'a solid -

though minority - presence in leading journals' (2009:151). Impetus was given to the development of a sociocultural theoretical perspective on SLA with the plea from Firth and Wagner (1997) that attention be paid to factors other than the purely cognitive. Although this received broad agreement, it was Firth and Wagner's contention that the line between language acquisition and use is blurred, and that learners continue to learn as they use the language, which sparked a heated debate (Kasper, 1997; Long, 1997; Gass, 1998). Research conducted from a sociocultural theoretical perspective has for the last decade been defined by the recognition that learners acquire language as they use it (e.g. Lantolf, 2000a; 2000b; Donato, 2004; Lafford, 2007), and that together *acquisition* and *use* constitute *ability* (Johnson, 2004). A further point of disagreement concerns the significance of learner identity in the learning process. While not considered important in research from a cognitive perspective (e.g. Gass, 1998), the sense of self in a particular social context, and its impact on motivation and learning have been a focus of interest elsewhere in SLA research (e.g. Williams and Burden, 1996; Norton Peirce, 2000; Dörnyei and Ushioda, 2009).

2.1.2 A Sociocultural Perspective on the Role of Interaction in SLA

The benefit of a sociocultural approach to SLA research is considered to be that 'it offers a framework through which cognition can be investigated without isolating it from social context' (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006:19). The concept of language as a social tool acquired and used in a social environment (Atkinson, 2002) is based on Vygotsky's (1978) theory of mind, which gives prominence to the role of interaction. For example, when learners work collaboratively, it is claimed that they pool resources to achieve more than each would have done

individually (Donato, 1994; Wells, 1999; Ohta, 2000; Swain, 2000; Donato, 2004; Van Lier, 2004). This allows all learners to demonstrate their talents, but has particular implications for the less proficient. For instance, where the task includes practical work, Crandall (1999) argues that it provides an opportunity for such learners to be seen by their peers in a more multi-dimensional way, not just in terms of academic ability. Variables which facilitate effective collaborative work are considered to be how well the learners know each other (Breen, 2001 reporting on the findings of Coughlan and Duff, 1994), that they receive social and linguistic training and consciously vary their role in the group (Ehrman and Dörnyei, 1998), the establishing of rules (Fisher, 1995; Williams and Burden, 1996; Crandall, 1999) and evaluation of how well these rules are followed (Dörnyei, 2001). However, while Donato notes that working collaboratively 'transforms individuals from marginal members of a community to contributing participants' (2004:289), Williams and Burden (1996) highlight another aspect: group success can bolster the poor self-image of a less proficient learner, but failure can negatively affect the positive self-image of a proficient learner used to individual success. A sense of success or failure may influence the extent to which the learner is subsequently motivated to participate. Since this act of participation may itself be linked to learning gains, it is therefore important that all learners experience a sense of success.

However, the link between overt participation (that which can be observed) and learning gains, as judged for instance by test results, is inconclusive (Breen, 2001). There are a number of important issues here. Firstly, it is not perhaps surprising that test results do not reveal a link between overt participation and

learning gains. A less able learner may perform badly on a test no matter how engaged they were in the group task, just as a proficient, but less proactive, learner may do well on the test regardless of the level of participation. Secondly, much may depend on the nature of the test and the conditions in which it was delivered. As Leif Strandberg (2008), educational psychologist, points out, it is important for learners to be tested in different ways so that they can reveal their full potential. A more fundamental concern is the difficulty of defining and measuring overt participation. An individual's level of participation in a task is meaningful only in terms of how proactive they normally are, that is, the extent to which they *contribute*, to use Donato's term above. For Van Lier too, 'learning depends on the activity and initiative of the learner' (2008:163), which seems to suggest observable behaviour. Yet emphasis on overt participation ignores the fact that a learner may be less obviously proactive but still mentally participating in a discussion between others, as Seedhouse and Almutairi (2009) have shown. Learning gains may subsequently be revealed in individual or group written work, or in the production of an artefact. It may be safer to claim, as Breen (2001) and others do (e.g. McCafferty et al, 2006), that the quality of learning is determined by its importance to the learner.

2.1.3 The Zone of Proximal Development

That learners can achieve more together has implications for each learner's development within the Zone of Proximal Development or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). Lantolf and Thorne (2006) point out that although there are different interpretations of the construct, all emphasize the importance of collaboration and social interaction. For Vygotsky, the ZPD was created by learning, which 'awakens a variety of developmental processes that are able to

operate only when the child is interacting in his environment in co-operation with his peers' (1978:90). As applied to SLA, Ohta defines the ZPD as 'the difference between the L2 learner's developmental level as determined by independent language use and the higher level of potential development as determined by how language is used in collaboration with a more capable interlocutor' (1995:249). Lantolf and Thorne are more specific: the kind of assistance required is 'indicative of independent functioning in the future' (2006:263) while Kinginger cites the broader view of Wells (1999) that the ZPD is 'an interactive space that holds potential for multiple – unpredictable – transformations of individual identity' (2002:246). Though all definitions include the notion of change, Wells' view is broader, firstly in its concern with learner identity and, by implication, the role played by feelings. Secondly, Wells makes clear that artefacts produced in classroom work can serve a purpose in subsequent work thus providing 'an occasion for learning in the zpd [sic]' (1999:333). This emphasizes both the need for meaningfulness in the original task, and the implications for learning when such artefacts are treated as components in the continuing learning process, and thus with respect. This broader view of the ZPD can also be seen in the importance Wells accords to drama, dance and music as tools for thinking and communication. This resonates with the belief that learners are differently skilled or intelligent in different ways (reminding us of Gardner's *multiple intelligences*, e.g.1993) and therefore have the potential to make their unique contribution to the group effort.

For Wells, feelings and identity are arguably linked with the role the learner takes in the group and develop there along with cognition. Different group

constellations not only allow different abilities to emerge (Van Lier, 2004), but can also impact on learner identity. For instance, claims are made that all learners benefit from being in the role of tutor/tutee (Crandall, 1999), the less proficient benefitting from the knowledge of the more able learner, who has the opportunity to display knowledge (Wells, 1999) and consolidate it. Both can feel a sense of progress (Donato, 2004), particularly so with near-peers, where the less proficient see an attainable goal in their slightly abler peers (Murphey and Murakami, 1998) and where such peers can benefit from being at about the same level but in different content areas (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006). Although Lantolf and Thorne do not define *content*, it can be suggested that this may refer to both subject knowledge and skills. In all of these situations there are positive implications for the individual learner's sense of self. However, although ability differences should not be too great if the learners are to benefit from collaborative work (Watanabe and Swain, 2007), the extent to which they are willing to give and able to receive and benefit from peer assistance is also considered to depend partly on the personalities of the interlocutors and relationships between them (Klingner and Vaughn, 2000; Storch, 2001).

A focus of interest in the literature is how learners 'go about providing and appropriating help in order to learn' (Lantolf, 2000a:79) and the mediating role of printed materials and environment (Donato, 2000). Donato (2004) also raises the question of how *scaffolding* (Wood et al, 1976) may differ from other forms of assistance learners give each other. The point is an interesting one as definitions of the term, indeed its original definition, imply verbal help which is consciously and systematically provided. For Mitchell and Myles, for example, it

is 'supportive dialogue which directs the attention of the learner to key features of the environment and which prompts them through successive steps of a problem' (2004:195); Van Lier prefers the term 'assisted learning' (2004:147), though here too assistance is consciously given. While this may describe an adult and young learner working together, or peers who are expert and novice, it does not describe the situation in a classroom where one teacher has many learners, where written instructions supplement verbal instruction, nor where the learners are working collaboratively and helping each other spontaneously as the need arises.

2.2 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CLASSROOM

A suitable environment for learning is one which 'enhances trust needed to communicate and which enhances confidence and self-esteem' (Williams and Burden, 1996:202). Based on studies in American L1 classrooms they identify the importance of a warm and supportive atmosphere where the task and outcome are clear, and where there is structure in the classroom organization and development of lessons. Dörnyei (2001) adds to these the importance of humour, good relationships between learners and their teacher, and the use of a celebratory event to break learning up into meaningful periods. For Strandberg (2008) it is important that the learners understand the curriculum goals; Dörnyei, and Williams and Burden stress the need for learners to set their own short and long term goals, and to evaluate them.

There are a number of challenges here for the teacher. One is in providing tasks which allow these goals to be achieved. An ideal task might be said to

contain knowledge and skills relevant to the learners' lives beyond the classroom (Johnson, 2004), stimulate interest and cater for different learning styles (Williams and Burden, 1996), and involve the learners in meaningful interaction in which their attention is also directed to form (Lightbown, 2000). The teacher's second challenge is to ensure all learners understand what is expected; the third, to adapt to a role as facilitator rather than controller (Dörnyei, 2001). Not least, since the quality of interaction determines the impact on learning (Lantolf and Genung, 2002), the teacher must strive to construct effective pairs or small groups where communicative skills can be practised in a less stressful environment (Toussaint Clark and Clark, 2008), for according to Ohta (2000) group work both facilitates learner development and is the forum in which this development can be seen. However, it should be noted here that, as Ellis (2003) points out, Prabhu (1987) found that for some learners, speaking English in a small group was more difficult than speaking in front of the class. This may seem surprising, and Ellis speculates that it may be due to the specific cultural climate. However, another explanation could be that the learner perceives other group members to be more proficient; for a high-status learner in a group with friends this could be embarrassing. Conversely the problem might be poor interpersonal relationships. The root cause in both cases is self-consciousness, suggesting that group work creates intimacy and that its effect on an individual's participation is not necessarily positive.

2.2.1 The Case for Task-based Language Learning and Teaching (TBLT)

TBLT, which has received academic support over the last two decades, might be considered to fulfil the pedagogical requirements outlined above. A task-based syllabus provides natural recycling of language (Nunan, 2004) and offers

opportunities for 'extended discourse and informal spontaneous interaction' (Willis and Willis, 2007:136). Although there are different definitions (Skehan, 1996; J. Willis, 1996; Bygate, Skehan and Swain, 2001; Nunan, 2004; Van den Branden, 2006; Willis and Willis, 2007) there is broad agreement that a task should involve meaningful use of language in a communicative context bearing some resemblance to real life in order to produce a tangible outcome. That there should be an outcome as the goal of the task reflects the theoretical importance attributed to output (Swain, 1993, 1998), three functions of which are *collaborative dialogue*, *verbalizing* and *writing* (Swain, 2000; Swain et al, 2002). These require the grammatical encoding which 'forces learners to integrate the new items into a more cohesive structure' (Nation, 2007:5 citing Izumi, 2002). From a sociocultural perspective a study of what learners do as they engage in tasks has the potential to develop a researcher's understanding of the learning process (Donato, 2000).

Although there is agreement on the need for language focus in TBLT, reflecting the current consensus in the SLA literature that emphasis on meaning and form is a question of balance (Swan, 2010), there are differing views on where it should occur: in initial input (Ellis, 2001), as planned for or anticipated (Byrd, 2005), as the need arises (Williams, 2005 citing Laufer and Hulstijn, 2001; Van den Branden, 2006) or at the end of the task (Willis and Willis, 2007). The effects of planning have also been studied. Though inconclusive, research on the effects of planning time on accuracy, fluency and complexity - the three pedagogical goals of TBLT (e.g. Skehan, 1998) - suggests that while some learners may need guidance in using the time profitably, planning can have a

beneficial effect, especially on fluency and complexity (Ellis, 1987; Crookes, 1989; Skehan, 1998; Williams, 2005). More cognitively demanding tasks, which might benefit from planning time, are considered to have two advantages: they require the learner to think, which is motivating (Skehan, 1998), and lead to deeper interaction (Nunan, 2005). What is less clear in the literature on planning time is the role played by writing. It seems to me that the very act of writing down the thoughts to which Skehan, above, refers, might contribute to the language acquisition process. The findings of research conducted at the University of Stavanger (Alleyne, 2011) indeed suggest that hand movements and the time spent on forming letters can facilitate learning.

The issues mentioned above (focus on form, planning and the role that writing might play) have implications for task design. Lantolf (2000a), referring to Appel and Lantolf (1994), takes the view that the task in itself is not important, only the interaction between the individual and the task. However, if the task is intended to facilitate interaction, then it would seem that its nature must be important. This raises several issues. One concerns the need for learners to know what to do (Swain, 2000; Platt and Brooks, 2002) and why (Samuda and Bygate, 2008). A second aspect concerns content. As Ellis (2003) points out, the more relevant background knowledge the learner has, the more attention can be devoted to the language needed for the task. A third issue concerns the importance of variety in content and participation (Ellis 2003). The reason for this is more than the motivational effect of variety, important though that is. As Littlejohn (1996) makes clear, the task shapes what a learner is permitted to do, and as Jenks (2009) has shown, by extension, what a learner is allowed to say. It must surely

be the case then that the nature of the task does have consequences for the quality of learning, a view which Lantolf himself appears to take in more recent work in his assertion that what is learnt depends on learner engagement (Lantolf, 2005).

2.2.2 The Case against TBLT

Although much has been written on TBLT, the support for it remains largely theoretical based on 'limited research findings' (Samuda and Bygate, 2008:58). As Mitchell and Myles (2004) observe, linking interventions and outcomes is problematic as it is possible that the learner would have developed without the intervention. While neither socio-affective context nor learner differences have featured significantly in research into TBLT (Ellis, 2003), these may provide some explanation as to why it is difficult to link interventions and outcomes with any degree of certainty. These factors might also explain why, in Swan's view (2005), no one teaching approach suits all.

Other grounds for criticism concern the fact that research has focused on proficient learners (Edwards and Willis, 2005; Duran and Ramaut, 2006), on the spoken language (Ellis, 2003), and that there has been a failure to observe the distinction made by Breen (1987) between *task as workplan*, what the teacher intends, and *task as process*, what the learners do (Ellis, 2003; Seedhouse, 2005), a distinction formalized by Coughlan and Duff (1994) as *task* (workplan) and *activity* (process). Indeed, in the TBLT literature, tasks are routinely referred to as *activities*. A fourth criticism has been that the methodology is unsuitable for EFL classrooms, defined, for example, as where 'the classroom is the main or only source of students' exposure to the TL [target language]' (Littlewood

and Yu, 2011), and where teaching time is necessarily limited. However, this definition must be qualified: in countries such as Sweden learners are exposed to quite considerable amounts of the target language beyond the classroom, as was discussed in the previous chapter. A fifth criticism is that TBLT is unsuitable for low proficiency learners, who lack adequate linguistic resources, and is said to be useful mainly in developing fluency in advanced learners (Skehan, 1998; Bruton, 2002; Swan, 2005).

Indeed, it is in the development of fluency that TBLT finds support in the literature. Byrd (2005), for instance, in line with Johnson (1996, 2001), Dekeyser (1998, 2001), and Hulstijn (2002), argues that declarative knowledge can be automatized; this requires production practice (Ellis 2003; Dörnyei, 2009). Dörnyei's contention that the 'hallmark of good teaching is finding the optimal balance between meaning-based and form-focused activities in the dynamic classroom context' (2009:302) reflects Nation's (2007) recommendation that fluency practice should form an equal part of a four-strand approach (along with meaning-focused input and output, and targeted language practice), even at lower proficiency levels. Although he does not elaborate on this, it might be argued that if a learner feels they can produce language more fluently, however small the range, this sense of progress is likely to impact positively on their attitude towards the target language, motivation and continued learning.

However, the criticism regarding the ineffectiveness of task-based methodology for low proficiency learners is worth returning to because it brings into focus the potential mediating role of the learners' L1. For instance, Bruton (2002),

referring to similar results in Foster (1998), found that secondary school learners experienced frustration due to their lack of linguistic resources, leading to minimum negotiation for meaning, defined by Foster and Ohta (2005:405) as 'the attempts of learners and their conversation partners to overcome comprehension difficulties so that incomprehensible or partly incomprehensible input becomes comprehensible through negotiating meaning. In these negotiations, problem utterances are checked, repeated, clarified or modified in some way (lexically, phonologically, morpho-syntactically)' The discouraging results found by Bruton might be explained in a number of ways: the learners may have been used to a teacher-fronted traditional classroom where they had not previously worked in pairs or small groups and were unused to producing longer stretches of discourse; the task instructions may have been unclear, the task itself poorly structured, or too difficult. However, what is interesting in Bruton's study is the absence of discussion regarding the role of L1, given that it has been identified to serve several important functions:

- learners construct their identity (Fuller, 2009); they express this identity, including sense of humour, through L1 (Carless, 2008)
- use of L1 performs a social function mediating relationships (Swain and Lapkin, 2000)
- use of L1 establishes intersubjectivity (Dailey-O'Cain and Liebscher, 2009), which both serves a social function and mediates the task
- private L1 speech mediates L2 acquisition (Sieloff Magnan, 2008; Storch and Aldosari, 2010)
- learners use L1 to organize new L2 (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006)
- learners talk about the task and the language needed, which facilitates acquisition (Swain, 1993; Brooks and Donato, 1994; Antón and DiCamilla, 1998; Lantolf, 2000a; Swain and Lapkin, 2000; Van Lier, 2004; Storch and Aldosari, 2010)
- they use it to remain focused on completing the task, which is important for self-esteem and motivation (Swain and Lapkin, 2000; Platt and Brooks, 2002)
- not using L1 interferes with the learner's thinking process, which plays a vital role in acquisition (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998).

According to Platt and Brooks, the L1 is 'the only mediational tool fully available to learners, especially at the lower proficiency levels' (1994:509). This group includes young learners, and the view in the literature on young language learners is clear. Both languages are a resource; refusing to allow use of the L1 in the classroom might cause a negative reaction to the L2 (Moon, 2005) so impacting negatively on its acquisition.

2.3 YOUNG LEARNERS

2.3.1 The Distinctive Features of Young Learners

It is important to point out that most SLA research, and that to which I have referred so far, has been conducted with adults or teenagers. The question therefore arises to what extent findings from this research and recommendations for methodological approaches can be applied to younger learners. Mackey and Silver (2005) urge caution since child learners are different from older learners in a number of ways. For instance, although they can communicate verbally in their L1 in an adult-like way (Pinter, 2007), their reading and writing skills are still developing (Pinter, 2006); they have vivid imaginations (Halliwell, 1992; Pinter, 2006); can be creative with their limited resources (Halliwell, 1992); and learn holistically (Halliwell, 1992; Pinter, 2006; Tornberg, 2009), though they are starting to develop analytically (Ioup, 2005).

The latter is demonstrated in the learner's increased metalinguistic awareness and, for example, in their writing. According to Torras et al, 'the age of around 12 constitutes a turning point to develop a Grammatical and Lexical complexity

either triggering the development of subordination or accelerating the rate of development of coordination and the increase of language variety' (2006:177). Other ways in which young learners differ are that they are in the process of developing the social competence considered necessary for effective group work in L1 (Fisher, 2005) and L2 (Donato, 2004). They prefer to work with friends or others of the same sex (Åberg Bengtsson, 2000; Pinter, 2007; Shak and Gardner, 2008), and may take less account of the needs of their interlocutor (Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2007), an example of which is not listening properly (Fisher, 2005). Indeed as Fisher (2005) notes, for some, being able to collaborate constitutes an achievement in itself.

Another difference is the preference in children for classroom work which utilizes the different senses (Warrington and Younger, 2006). Although this research, based on a four-year project with boys in UK primary schools, does not claim that a multi-sensory approach enhances learning, it does claim positive effects on motivation and on the learners' ability to articulate thoughts on how they learn best. This can be seen in Gardner's terms, that a multi-sensory approach provides 'multiple entry points' (2004:13) which allow 'different kinds of minds' (2004:11) to understand, learn and exhibit their knowledge in different ways. While this opportunity can be considered important for all young L2 learners, just as in the L1 context, tasks which involve movement and tangible outcomes can play a valuable role in enhancing a positive self-image and motivation in the less proficient (Tornberg, 2009). This group includes dyslexic learners and those who struggle with reading and writing. As Schneider and Crombie (2003) point out, such learners benefit from

being active; they are often creative and innovative, with strong visual skills compensating for weak auditory skills.

A major difference between adults who choose to study a language and younger learners, who do not have a choice, may be seen in levels of 'enthusiasm, commitment and persistence' (Dörnyei, 2001:5). Indeed, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) maintain that young learner motivation is a particularly unstable construct, resulting from a complex blend of biological, socio-affective and contextual factors. As Lundberg (2010) notes, young teenagers may experience a period in which they feel their learning is not developing, and this can lead to loss of motivation. A summary of the findings of the Early Language Learning in Europe project (ELLiE, 2010) links decreasing enthusiasm with the onset of puberty. It is at this stage in their lives that learners begin creating an identity, in which self-confidence plays a part (Dörnyei, 2001), as do the views of their peers; they are more aware of their own and others' mistakes, and thus less willing to use L2 in the classroom (Nikolov, 1999). This is compounded by having to do so in whole-class teaching situations (Carless, 2008).

Learner engagement as a vital ingredient in effective learning is identified in the literature relating to older and younger learners, in both L1 and L2 contexts. It is therefore important that positive attitudes to language learning are created and maintained in childhood (Cameron, 2001; Nikolov, 2001; Ioannou-Georgiou and Pavlou, 2003). A learner's attitude may be formed partly by socio-affective factors such as home circumstances, the opinions of parents and siblings, relationships with peers and teachers; it may result in part from personality

traits. Based on his work with L1 primary learners, Fisher (2005) concludes that a *can do/can't do* mindset is established by the age of nine. As regards young L2 learners, Alanen (2003), Moon (2005), Mihaljevic Djigunovic (2009) and Lundberg (2010) note that an individual's negative self-image as a language learner can lead to anxiety, causing the learner to underperform, which reflects the findings for older learners (Freeman-Larsen, 2001; Mahn, 2008). While attitudes are found to be variable and context-dependent, they can become entrenched as 'part of the individual's knowledge reservoir' (Alanen, 2003:67). The literature on young language learners emphasizes the explicit link between enjoyment, memory and motivation. This, in Phillips' view, is 'commonsense' (1993:6) and it has important considerations for the second language classroom.

2.3.2 Implications for the Teaching of Young Learners

The special characteristics of young learners, as discussed above, place demands on the classroom teacher, who, at primary level, may not be a language-teaching specialist. Mihaljevic Djigunovic et al identify 'quality of teaching and exposure to and practice in the target language' (2008:448) as key factors in learning. However, this raises a question about what constitutes exposure and practice. Fisher's recommendation for the L1 classroom might be applied to the L2, namely, strategic use of 'productive, provocative and open-ended questions' (2005:64) to promote the deeper thinking which, in Nunan's view (2005), facilitates effective L2 acquisition. Fisher also highlights the importance of involving children, a point made by Moon (2005) in the L2 literature with regard to classroom displays, namely that young learners benefit most from a display when they have helped to make it. One reason for this

might be a sense of ownership (Hofmann, 2008b), another that the process of producing the display helps the learner to understand the context depicted in it. A third reason is that presenting a learner with a finished product obscures the process which underlies the production (Fisher, 2005). Yet young learners need to understand the importance of process, which includes making mistakes. Without this, there can be fear of failure, with the consequences mentioned above. A fourth reason may be found in the literature, and the role played by enjoyment in learning, namely that learners are enthusiastic about practical creative work and the result of what has been enjoyed is more likely to be remembered.

Teachers should therefore strive to create conditions in which their learners want and need to use English. In Moon's view (2005) these conditions are a friendly atmosphere in which varied and meaningful input is used to foster communication in different contexts. Indeed, for Philp, Oliver and Mackey (2008), meaningful communication lies at the heart of L2 development in children as well as adults. The importance of communicative need is also highlighted by Cameron (2001), Dörnyei (2001) and Pinter (2006). Nunan (2005) argues that grammar should emerge from context, with attention paid to form as learners are cognitively ready to see the relationship between structure and meaning, which, for Williams (1991), is when they can say it in L1.

Regarding content, in Cameron's view (2001), learners should work with the familiar and not be required to imagine others' state of mind. There should be opportunities for recycling the vocabulary which arises from this content (Halliwell, 1992; Cameron, 2001; Pinter, 2006; Read, 2007) and use made of

`dictionaries, internet and other resources' (Ioannou-Georgio and Pavlou, 2003:7), tools with which the learners mediate content and which facilitate the learning process. Finally, it is important to have a clear goal at the outset, as `ambiguity can be stressful' (Fisher, 2005:199), and constructive feedback, including self-evaluation in the context of the learner's own pre-set language goals (Cameron, 2001; Dörnyei, 2001; Ioannou-Georgio and Pavlou, 2003).

Certain types of classroom work are considered particularly beneficial to language acquisition in young learners. One is games, for their `fun', which `creates a desire to communicate', and `unpredictability' (Halliwell, 1992:5). A second is drama, in which tension is reduced and learners encouraged to speak in front of each other (Allström, 2010). Haught and McCafferty (2008) highlight the benefits for language development when a learner becomes engaged in another persona. Referring to the research of Fels and McGiven (2002), they argue that these benefits extend to `intercultural conversations and explorations' (2008:150) when learners write in their role. A third type of work considered to promote language acquisition is thematic work (Williams, 1991; Cameron, 2001), combining English with theoretical subjects and also art, which brings English to life (Wright, 2001). Like thematic work, storytelling can bring the outside world into the classroom. As Bruner notes, `for there to be a story, something unforeseen must happen' (2002:15), and it is partly this unpredictability which engages the learner in the story. Another route to engagement might be through the characters and the learners' empathy with these characters. That the learners experience the story together - a `shared narrative' - (Bruner, 2002:15), may also contribute to learner engagement.

There are three main advantages shared by drama, thematic work and stories. One is that they involve holistic use of the language skills (Kirsch, 2008). Another is that they provide meaningful contexts (Reilly and Reilly, 2005) in which these skills can be used. This is of particular significance for writing, for as Shak and Gardner (2008) report, young learners can find this the most difficult (and hence least preferred) language skill, calling as it does for a higher degree of linguistic control. It is therefore vital that writing tasks engage the learner, allowing them to write freely at their own level, thus providing insight for the teacher into the learner's interlanguage development (Tornberg, 2009). While boys may be less likely than girls to enjoy writing fiction (Warrington and Younger, 2003), thematic work offers scope for factual writing. This has benefits for all learners in that it widens the range of genres to which they are exposed and in so doing, to different discourse patterns and cohesive devices. Fisher (2005) suggests that learners who find it difficult to write should imagine an audience. Indeed, Mahn cites Vygotsky's view that the act of writing is, 'a conversation with a white sheet of paper, with an imagined or conceptualized interlocutor' (Mahn, 2008:132). The benefits of a genuine audience are arguably greater still; Lo and Highland (2007) report an improvement in low proficiency learner writing when this work was to be displayed in the school. While a genuine audience may not always be possible, it is nevertheless important, as Read (2007) and Kirsch (2008) make clear, that children's writing should occur in a context, have a purpose and sense of an audience, simulating the writing they would do in real life.

The third advantage is that drama, story and thematic work offer learners access to a wider range of language. Structure can emerge from context and links can be made between words, which, as Cameron (2001) points out, is how they are stored and remembered. The words should be relevant to young learners' lives (Cameron, 2001), and should be met in different contexts where they can be understood receptively and used actively (Nation, 1990, 2001; Lantolf and Thorne, 2006), both of which contribute to the consolidation of lexical knowledge (Kirsch, 2008). It is an important consideration, for vocabulary can be considered the 'stepping stone to learning and using grammar' (Cameron, 2001:72). This broader view of lexical knowledge is neglected in traditional classroom vocabulary tests in which decontextualized discrete items are translated from L1 to L2 or vice versa, prioritizing word-recall over word-recognition, and so failing to elicit a full picture of a learner's knowledge (Szpotowicz, 2009).

None of what I have written so far about methodology and materials precludes the use of a textbook/workbook as the basis for language teaching, particularly for teachers who are not trained language teachers. However, there are drawbacks in an over-dependence on such materials. For example, learners are developmentally at different levels. Workbook exercises based on grammatical input for which some are not cognitively ready may contribute to a negative self-image as a language learner. Other issues are that textbooks usually focus on meaning and form, neglecting other aspects of word knowledge (Brown, 2011), and because they also tend to be linear in structure (Cameron, 2001) may not offer opportunities for recycling. The latter is important with regard to a learner's

self-image, for as Read points out, 'children often measure their own language learning progress in terms of how many words they know' (2007:85); to facilitate vocabulary learning in late primary age learners it is therefore important that they have opportunities to use their developing cognitive capability in order to make connections between words (Szpotowicz, 2009). This leads to the question of available time, which in EFL classrooms is limited and where teachers may use textbooks in the belief that they are using the time efficiently. While it is true that textbook/workbook exercises focus on particular structures and functions systematically introduced, they are usually specific and short. If, as Kirsch (2008) argues, there is a direct correlation between time on task and learning gains, this will impact negatively on the learner's developing proficiency, particularly with regard to oral skills, where most children have no opportunity to practise outside the classroom (Bloor, 1991). Furthermore, systematic introduction of language may not be the most important consideration with young language learners. Expressing a view which is common in the literature, Bloor notes that children learn best when their attention is focused on meaning, and this is best communicated in informal settings and when their 'emotions and attitudes are more clearly identified with real experiences' (1991:129), a point also made by Cameron (2001).

The traditional *initiation, response, feedback*, or IRF, model (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975), in which the teacher asks a question, one learner answers and the teacher provides feedback, does not create the conditions advocated by Bloor and Cameron above. Kirsch (2008) argues that young learners benefit from a task-based approach 'rooted in a sociocultural view of language learning

and social constructivist theories' (2008:104). Interactive pair and small group work, the benefits of which have been discussed, create opportunities for integrated use of language skills 'in a culturally appropriate way' (Kirsch, 2008:115) and in a less threatening environment than before the whole class. It also frees the teacher to work with individuals and groups, providing encouragement and support. Furthermore, more proficient peers may be able to provide help or correction to the less proficient, peer-correction being in Cameron's (2001) view the first step towards self-assessment, which is considered to have a less negative effect on the learner's self-image than teacher-correction (Nunan, 2005). Peer support can be said to help maintain positive attitudes in two respects: young learners are not natural planners (Samuda and Bygate, 2008), and they find redrafting texts frustrating (Moon, 2000), especially so in the case of the less proficient (Griva et al, 2009). In both instances the process may be less irksome if done interactively, and it can be suggested that better planning may in turn reduce the need for redrafting.

Although the effectiveness of interactive pair and small group work with young learners has not been researched to the same extent as that with adults and adolescents, there are strong arguments in favour based on empirical findings in both primary L1 and L2 research. For example, in the L1 context Williams et al (2000), reporting on the benefits of cooperative learning for all learners, highlight the need for everyone's contribution to be seen to be important. Support for effective L2 young learner collaboration is found for instance, in Williams and Burden (1996), Cameron (2001), Moon (2005) and Pinter (2005, 2006, 2007). Philp and Duchesne observe that young learners provide more

than linguistic practice for each other, but create the 'social climate in which language is learnt and practiced' (2008:84). However, working together is a skill which has to be learnt. Obstacles to effective group work have been found to include the following: some learners dominate, others do not participate, the suggestions of some are ignored, higher status learners do not take the trouble to explain themselves (Van Gorp and Bogaert, 2006). Furthermore, Mercer and Littleton (2007) found that mixed-gender groups were dominated by boys irrespective of age. This becomes even more problematic when coupled with the finding that boys are more likely to feign lack of interest in the subject, to preserve status with their peers and provide cover for failure (Warrington and Younger, 2006). Other drawbacks to group work are considered to be a higher noise level, potential time wasting and use of L1 (Cameron, 2001; Carless, 2008).

2.3.3 The Role of L1

The use of L1 is an important issue, which can be considered in the context of Ellis's (2003) assertion that young learners achieve less negotiation of meaning in interactive tasks than do older learners. This lack of negotiation is not surprising for two reasons: the learners' lack of skill in their own language of the conventions of turn-taking (Read, 2007) and their limited L2 resource. However, as Pinter (2005) found in her study of task repetition, when learners feel that the task is useful, know what they have to do and are comfortable with each other, their performance improves; they interact more, can devote more attention to L2 and use the L1 less. Nonetheless, the L1 has important functions in the L2 classroom (see section 2.2.2), and its use is to be expected in a monolingual class, particularly at lower proficiency levels. The fact that even highly proficient

adults use the L1 to discuss tasks (Nikolov, 1999) suggests a strong link between thinking and the L1, a point also made by Antón and DiCamilla (1998). The extent to which its use is considered a disadvantage must surely be determined by the aims and objectives of the task. Young learners need particular guidance in what they are expected to do; one of these aspects is when to use the respective languages.

For Halliwell, a mix of L1 and L2 'allows children at different linguistic stages to participate equally in the lesson' (1992:165), which is important for the self-esteem of the learner. On the other hand it can also be suggested that use of L1 perpetuates the status quo – a dominant learner can continue to dominate regardless of L2 proficiency. Yet if learners were allowed to use L2 only, and if the most dominant were the least proficient, then the social dynamic in the group might change, and with it the motivation of the individuals in it. This is a significant variable, as learner engagement is considered to depend to a great extent on motivation. Referring to Dörnyei's (2001) three stages of pre-, while- and post-actional motivation, Van den Branden (2006) calls for tasks which stimulate learners' interest and desire to interact with others. Van Gorp and Bogaert (2006, referring to Letschert, 1995) suggest that one way to do this might be to 'embed them in a story line' (2006:83).

2.4. THE *STORYLINE* APPROACH

2.4.1 The Relationship between the *Storyline* Approach and TBLT

The integrating of tasks into the framework of a narrative characterizes the *Storyline* approach. As Bogaert et al observe, narrative 'has the power to create

a meaningful framework increasing the functionality of the separate activities' (2006:123). There are a number of important considerations here. One concerns the word *meaningful*, which is highlighted in the literature on both task-based education and young learners as being a key ingredient in effective learning. In Letschert's view 'a story is by definition a meaningful context' (2006:19). A second aspect is that a *Storyline* topic creates 'the opportunity to have early experiences and practices relating to the world of work and community' (Barr and Frame, 2006:54). This reflects the emphasis placed by proponents of TBLT on the kinds of tasks learners might encounter in the real world, which is seen, for example, with regard to project work in TBLT, in which different types of task and discourse are integrated. As in project work, a *Storyline* task serves a meaningful purpose and its outcome can be utilized in successive tasks (which in Wells' view can facilitate learning in the ZPD; see section 2.1.3). For example, a drawing, cardboard figure or model of the learner's character is subsequently used to mediate the oral and written descriptions that develop the character. Where these descriptions precede the art work, the detail in them can be incorporated into the physical image. Where models are created, these can then be used in role play.

A third important point is that the context remains the same throughout the *Storyline*, each task contributing to the development of the story. This is significant since in Ellis's (2003) view learner engagement is linked to the relevance he or she attributes to the task. Motivation which arises from engagement in one task may carry the learner into the next in the narrative (Van den Branden, 2006). A fourth point is that practice of phatic language,

considered to be difficult in the traditional language classroom (Ellis, 2003), can be integrated naturalistically. For example, a *Storyline* warm up can involve the learners in role mingling, initiating, conducting and concluding small talk with the other characters. The circumstances in which the characters socialize can be varied to suit the needs of the narrative and to provide practice of different kinds of social exchange.

Kocher (2006, 2008) considers *Storyline* to be a specific example of TBLT, the task cycle being reflected in the stages of a *Storyline* task. For example, learners might brainstorm words needed for the task, carry it out and then focus on the relevant target language. Alternatively, focus on the target language might occur as the need arises. Brainstorming and similar language awareness-raising exercises reap the benefits of the learners' collective existing knowledge (which can have a positive effect on self-esteem), prepare them to use this knowledge in the task, and also move them strategically towards the L2 and not away from it, as translation tasks do (Cameron, 2001). As in TBLT, *Storyline* provides conditions for lexical recycling offering 'opportunities for new experience, where the child can learn and develop new concepts and words, and use former knowledge, words and concepts in new situations' (Kristensson, 2008:102). In addition, when exploring the open *key questions* which develop the story and determine the tasks, the learners can be exposed to written and spoken L2, be required to write or speak in different genres, attend at some times to linguistic accuracy, while at others concentrate on fluency. In other words, in a *Storyline* framework Nation's four strands (see section 2.2.2) can be given equal weight. Although, as with TBLT, it can be problematic for the

teacher to pitch group tasks at a level appropriate to all individuals, the fact that tasks vary, involving mainly language skills on some occasions or practical skills on others, that some tasks are carried out individually, though contributing to a group task, and that the learners write individually in role, allows each to be challenged in their ZPD. Sitting close together, face to face and sharing resources such as dictionaries may lead to some off-topic talk and activity of the kind noted by Cameron (2001), but it also potentially creates a small and familiar unit which can become a source of assistance and support for the learners when working on their own.

The role of a supportive atmosphere in facilitating interaction is recognized in the sociocultural theoretical perspective on SLA, the literature on TBLT, and on young learners. It is agreed that this takes time to create but certain conditions are highlighted as contributing to an affectively positive atmosphere; among these are experiencing an unfolding story together and small group/pair work. In a *Storyline* topic the learners remain together in their group for the life of the *Storyline*, though there are occasions when other group constellations are formed and occasions when a task is completed in pairs. Breen (2001) maintains that learners' familiarity with each other contributes to effective group work, but this surely also presupposes that there is mutual liking. Providing the group members get on with, or at least can accommodate, each other, a heightened sense of solidarity may be created in *Storyline* work, not least because of the homogeneous nature of the group, for example, members of a family.

2.4.2 The Role of Imagination

The extent to which a group functions well depends not only on the personalities of the group members and interpersonal relationships, but on the power of the *Storyline* topic to motivate the learners to participate. A topic often begins with the arrival of a letter, with the intention of creating anticipation and engaging the imagination. The same device is commonly used to move from one phase of a topic to another. Kieran Egan, of the Imagination Education Research Group, has long argued that children's imaginations 'are the most powerful and energetic learning tools' (1988:2), which are not adequately exploited in the traditional classroom. It is a view shared by Letschert, who regards imagination as 'one of the most fundamental conditions for development' (2006:15). This has particular implications for learning in the less proficient; Sigrid Madsbjerg, a Danish *Storyline* teacher, observes that such learners can reveal unexpected knowledge when they are allowed to write freely (for example, about their character), which in turn boosts self-confidence (Håkonsson and Madsbjerg, 2004).

In Schwänke's view *Storyline* uses the superior imagination of children 'to achieve the educational objectives' (2006:38). However, one criticism of the approach has been the acceptance of unrealistic solutions, which do not extend the learners' knowledge (Håkonsson, 2004). For instance, allowing learners as families in an English street to live in castles fails to comply with the syllabus requirement for Y5 in Sweden that they learn about everyday life. Lack of emphasis on factual accuracy both misses opportunities for learning and underexploits the imagination, which, as Håkonsson (2004) points out, mediates

the understanding of fact as well as fiction. His view of powerful learning tools is broader than Egan's (1988) and includes knowledge of the world and rational thinking along with imagination, and so appears to link affective and cognitive engagement. Håkonsson expresses this in a metaphor of flying on the wings of imagination but landing on one's feet, which has implications for all learners, but again may have particular benefits for the less proficient. For example, Madsbjerg (Håkonsson and Madsbjerg, 2004) reports seeing an increase in self-confidence in a learner whose views were otherwise often disregarded by his peers, when he spoke in role as an expert.

The combined products of imagination, world knowledge and rational thinking can be seen most clearly in the artefacts learners create in their *Storyline* work: character representations and the homes or workplaces of the characters, and not least in the frieze. This plays a central role in a *Storyline* topic and has two main functions, depicting the shared world and documenting the developing story. The work displayed is intended to be a source of individual and collective pride in achievement so far, contributing to a strong feeling of ownership (Hofmann, 2008b), and also to offer inspiration for continued work. It provides a focal point in the classroom, which can be used for reflection, discussion and ensuring that all learners know what has happened to date. It is therefore a tool which aids metacognition. Working with the frieze is, in the view of Falkenberg and Håkonsson (2004), like putting flesh onto a skeleton, which conveys the notion of bringing a plot outline to life. According to Jete Kantstö (2004), a Danish classroom teacher, learners respond positively to practical work because it has both a meaningful function and fulfils their need to learn in a

different way. Madsbjerg (Håkonsson and Madsbjerg, 2004) underlines the wider issue here of the positive effect on the less proficient of incorporating a broader range of senses into classroom work, reflecting similar arguments in the TBLT and young learner literature.

2.4.3 The Research

Considering that the *Storyline* approach originated in the 1960s, that it has been developed as a methodology in the education departments of universities in northern Europe and practised by classroom teachers particularly, though not exclusively, in the primary sector in various parts of the world, it is somewhat surprising that it remains relatively unknown in mainstream education. However, the problem might be the lack of research or references to *Storyline* in the SLA, TBLT or young learner literature. Regarding research, the situation appears to be changing, with recent doctoral studies in learner ownership and alienation (Hofmann 2008a), clinical research (Mark, 2009), teacher development (Emo, 2010), motivation in primary school pupils (Mitchell-Barrett, 2010) and doctoral work in progress: for example, the effects of the *Storyline* approach on German learners of English at different ages, and on young learner attitudes and effective learning in an L1 Turkish context .

However, the research which has been conducted highlights several recurring themes. For example, the three-year Comenius project (Ehlers et al, 2006) mentioned in the previous chapter, in which a number of primary teachers in four countries were trained to use the approach to teach a foreign language, found particular benefits for vocabulary acquisition and motivation. Specific aspects of the approach have been the subject of final term dissertations by

Swedish student teachers, many of these at Luleå University of Technology, where it was introduced by Steve Bell in the 1990s. Dissertations focus, for example, on the teaching of French at tertiary college (Larsson, 2003), motivation at secondary school and tertiary college (Bergbäck and Forozin, 2004), as a classroom methodology (Björkman and Sundberg, 2005), role play and its impact on learning at secondary level (Hugosson, 2005), the benefits and drawbacks for young learners with attention impairment (Meijer, 2007) and the effectiveness of *Storyline* for integrating social studies, natural science and mathematics with 16-19 year olds (Lundgren, 2008). A study conducted by researchers at Sweden's Agricultural University (SLU) compared two classes of 14 and 15 year olds at different schools working on a theme of sustainable development (Lundström and Ljung, 2009). Common to all is the finding of increased learner engagement, which reflects the enhanced motivation found in Ehlers' study. What contributes to increased motivation seems to be the opportunity to work more independently, both individually and in groups, use skills other than reading and writing, and to be involved. While these studies show some older learners to be resistant to practical work, many responded positively, one reason perhaps being that such work has a function in the *Storyline*. Teachers in the studies also report that learners asked many more questions than usual.

One problem with the studies described above is that in most cases the teachers and their classes were using the *Storyline* approach for the first time. Another resides in the research design, possibly due to limited available time. Hugosson, for example, based his conclusions on a reading of the literature.

Meijer conducted interviews with teachers. This also applies to Lundström and Ljung, who selected a number of learners for interview and gave all learners a questionnaire. Lundgren conducted interviews with both learners and teachers but five weeks after the *Storyline* topic had taken place, and this in itself lasted for just one week. Only Bergbäck and Forozin conducted observations in the two schools they used and even then only one of them was present in each school, making comparison of field observations problematic. The importance of researcher presence is highlighted by the SLU study, where the learners at one school were seen (from questionnaires and interviews) to benefit less in terms of knowledge gains and positive experience from the *Storyline* work. In this school, one of the participating teachers was not only negative to the *Storyline* trial, but to teaching thematically and even to the particular topic chosen. Although this teacher was only one of three working with the class, it is not unreasonable to speculate that this would have had a rather negative effect on the way the *Storyline* was carried out and the experience of the class, which field notes might have clarified. The absence of field observation clearly raises a number of concerns, the greatest of which is that the researchers know only what the subjects choose to tell or can recall, as in the Lundgren example above, which he acknowledges can be considered a disadvantage. It is, however, possible to argue, as Lundgren does, that if subjects are interviewed at a later date they have time to reflect more deeply on the experience.

Although the studies referred to here would have benefitted from participant observation, with both researchers present in the case where two schools were to be compared, there are nonetheless some useful insights provided by the

data. For instance, with regard to subjects' interview responses, teachers in both the SLU and Lundgren studies commented that the learners learnt things which were not easy to test. This suggests the learners gained a broader understanding of the subjects than that which is specified on the syllabus. That this is beneficial to the learners can be seen in one teacher's opinion (in Lundgren) that learners tend to equate knowledge with facts and it is therefore instructive for them to learn that the concept of knowledge is broader.

With regard to more recent research conducted in Sweden, Gustafsson Marsh and Lundin (2010), moderators of the *Storyline Sweden* website, reported on the findings of a survey in which they had attempted to discover the extent to which the approach can help learners reach curricular objectives and to what extent the less proficient can benefit from being taught in this way. The responses of the 18 primary teachers highlighted the importance of the story itself, the open *key questions*, which allow learners to learn from each other, the clear structure, varied ways of working, group formation, and not least that the starting point is the learner's existing knowledge. Concerning the less proficient learners, one aspect of the *Storyline* approach from which they are considered to benefit most is the practical work, a point made by almost all the teachers. Although they note that not all learners take this seriously, the teachers report that such work allows the less proficient to develop, and display for others, talents they may not know they had, which enhances self-confidence. Furthermore, practical work is also considered to build a bridge to theory; in other words, an artefact can mediate the learner's understanding of more

abstract concepts. These findings reflect the empirical support for practical work in language education discussed in this chapter.

Another issue is that talkative children can be channelled into using their talk for the benefit of others, that is, sharing their knowledge. That learner-talk is valued and encouraged in *Storyline* work is also an advantage for those who are verbally strong but weaker in writing. The teachers conclude that in their experience, although less proficient learners mostly benefit from this way of working, there are certain pre-requisites, namely very clear instructions and the need to prepare some learners in advance for what is going to happen, which reflects the findings of Meijer (2007). Even where these conditions are met there are still some learners who respond less well, for example, those with Asperger's syndrome, because they find it hard to relate to others.

2.4.4 The *Storyline* Approach and the Young Language Learner

To conclude, a survey of the research into SLA from a sociocultural perspective, the literature on TBLT, and on young language learners has illuminated a number of factors considered to facilitate L2 acquisition: communicative practice in tasks which stimulate and which the learner finds to be meaningful, carried out in collaboration with others in mutually supportive pair or small group work. The role played by artefacts and other materials in mediating learning has also been highlighted. Effective learning has been linked to the learner's self-image as a language learner, which may be influenced by the socio-affective context of the classroom, and their engagement in the task. In addition, young learners are considered to benefit from the use of a multi-sensory approach in which meaning and holistic language use are prioritized and which utilizes their vivid

imaginations and their L1. Tasks are considered to benefit from being embedded in a narrative framework, namely the *Storyline* approach, in which learners take on a role in the developing story. Engagement with the character has the potential to stimulate both cognition and affect, and thus facilitate learning.

A word which recurs in the young learner literature, in *Storyline* literature and in the data of *Storyline* studies is *fun*. Evaluating the successful implementation of the approach in Danish schools, for instance, Falkenberg concludes that 'learning takes place when it is fun, when there is laughter and joy' (2007:52). The purpose of the present research is to investigate the impact of the *Storyline* approach on the second language learning of a class of 11-13 year olds. The questions (Qs) to which the research seeks answers are:

1. To what features of the *Storyline* topic do the learners respond more positively?
2. To what features of the *Storyline* topic do the learners respond less positively?
3. What changes in language use can be observed during the *Storyline*?
4. How do the learners mediate the task requirements for each other and to what extent do they use tools to mediate the tasks?
5. What do the learners think they learn through working with the *Storyline* topic?
6. How do the learners think they learn through working with the *Storyline* topic?

Qs1 and 2 are intended to explore the aspects of the *Storyline* approach which engage the learners to different degrees. The justification for these questions is the strong links in the young language learner literature between enjoyment, motivation and learning. Q3 addresses change in the learners' use of L2 during the study period; data relating to Q1 will be used to try to identify the features of the *Storyline* which may contribute to language development. The purpose of Q4 is to investigate the ways in which learners support each other when

working collaboratively, the role played in the learning process by tools (dictionaries, reference books, computers, the frieze, and L1), and the effect of the learner's engagement in collaboration, or lack of such engagement, on their L2 development. Data relating to Q3, the learners' language development, will be used here. Finally, Qs5 and 6 are intended to investigate language development from the learners' perspective. In this way it is intended that claims made will not be based solely on my own view as analyst or on those of the teachers, but will take into account the views of the learners themselves. The study designed to investigate these research questions, the data collection tools and methods of analysis are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN

My work with students and teachers, and observation of classes working with *Storyline* topics, has shown that both younger and older learners enjoy working in this way. The question to which I wished to find an answer with this study concerns the connection between the pleasure learners take in *Storyline* work and their learning; my aim was to identify the aspects of the *Storyline* approach to which learners respond more and less positively, to study how they collaborate and to what effect, and how working with the *Storyline* topic through a range of task types impacts on their language learning. This has not been done before.

3.1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The age group I chose to study was 11-13 (Y5 and 6): learners of this age have been identified as being prone to suffer loss of motivation and to be more resistant than younger children to dance, movement and song, all of which might facilitate their language acquisition. At the same time they may still learn holistically, while being in the process of developing their analytical capability. As Lightbown (2008) observes, children of this age are more efficient learners than younger children because they are literate in their L1 and have an understanding of what language is. This view is reflected in a more recent survey of young language learner research (Pinter, 2011).

With regard to choosing participants, there were a number of considerations. One was that both the school and the teachers would in principle be positive towards the study and that the teachers would in practice be prepared to devote time to adapting my planning to their classroom, to providing me with copies of learners' work and to making notes on their own thoughts and classroom observations throughout the study period. This was originally to be four weeks, but was extended to five when time-planning proved to be over-ambitious. A second aspect of equal importance was that the teachers involved would have already worked with the *Storyline* approach, ideally in the teaching of English, and that the learners themselves would have worked on a *Storyline* topic, though not necessarily in English. There were two reasons for this second concern: on the one hand, where a teacher tries any new pedagogical approach, there may be teething problems in organizing the class and facilitating the work, which may have a negative effect on the learners and consequently make objective analysis problematic. On the other hand, there is a possible novelty value where learners work with, and enjoy, a new approach, and a risk that this too may colour their assessment.

I approached my local school (approximately 500 pupils aged 6 to 16), which met the above requirements, and permission was granted by the school's head teacher in 2007. Classes at this school are composed of two year groups up to the start of secondary education in Y7, with four parallel classes in each two-year group. For example, pupils in Y1 and 2 are taught together as are pupils in Y3 and 4, and those in Y5 and 6. Teachers of the parallel classes in each two-year group plan their work together. Although the learners at the school are

taught in their mixed-age class for most subjects, in English they are taught in year groups, that is, the Y5s, for instance, together and the Y6s together; the subject is introduced in Y1. The teachers of the four parallel classes in Y5 and 6 agreed to do the *Storyline* topic with their learners. The study would focus on one class only but the others would complete questionnaires. Of the teachers, three had previously worked on *Storyline* topics in Swedish and English (one of each) following a local education authority seminar attended as part of in-service training; one had also attended a *Storyline* course in the teaching of English at Kristianstad University and was known to me from that time. I was known to all the teachers as a parent of children at the school. My son was, at the time of the pilot study, (see below) in Y6.

Following formal ethical approval from the University of Leicester's Research Ethics Review Committee, the study took place during January and February 2009, being preceded twelve months before by a pilot study (about a circus), involving the learners and teachers who would *not* be involved in the subsequent research. There were a number of differences between the pilot and research studies. In the former, the learners took part in the *Storyline* in their English classes according to the usual timetable. I studied the two groups of older learners, visited each class at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of the study, and on these occasions filmed a group of learners in one or other of the classes as they worked on a task. Evaluating the study with the teachers, it was agreed that lessons of 40 minutes were too short as *Storyline* sessions, particularly for practical work, and that the filming during my occasional visits was distracting for the learners at the same time as it failed to

provide me with any sense of process. It was therefore decided that the study class would remain intact (that is Y5 and 6 together) in order that more of the timetable could be spent on the *Storyline*. This would amount, on average, to two hours of English, four days a week, which was approximately twice as much as usual. I would study one class only, be present throughout but would not film (for reasons I go into in Chapter 3).

As before the pilot study, so-called *English Days* were held in which I worked with all four classes on separate occasions. On these days the emphasis was on using English communicatively, with the learners working in pairs and groups, and the purpose was that the learners and I would get to know each other a little. I would be able to form some impression of their personalities and their attitudes to and competence in English, and they would not then be disturbed by my presence in the classroom during the study periods. Working with the classes in this way also allowed me to experience for myself in what ways they were similar to or different from each other - in other words, how typical the learners in the study class were. (This was also the reason for having the non-study classes complete questionnaires).

However, severely delayed building work at the school meant that for the spring term of 2009 two classes had to be combined and re-housed in a new building, where the room they would use was not intended ultimately to be a classroom. The teachers were the one who had taken the *Storyline* evening course, and one of the teachers from the pilot study. Available to the extended class was a new art room and two group rooms. The study class now consisted of two

teachers and 32 learners, of whom 29 had Swedish as their L1, two as their L2, and one was a Swedish-English bilingual. The older learners normally had English together, taught by one of the teachers; the younger ones were taught by the other teacher. The teachers would both be present and did not anticipate any problems. About a third of learners in the combined classes were judged (by the teachers) to have varying degrees of reading and writing difficulties; two unproficient Y6 learners usually had English with the Y5 learners. The learners would be divided into groups of four with a balance of ages and sexes as far as possible.

Neither of the teachers is a language specialist. The learners were used to working with a textbook/workbook, with minimal pair and group work; the older children additionally read some literature and did more writing. While the teachers used mainly English in the classroom, the learners did not respond spontaneously in English. This is based on my visit to classes ahead of the pilot and research studies, what the teachers themselves say, and learner accounts (the journals which form part of the research study data). Since the teachers are not language specialists, the planning was to be provided by me and submitted by the end of the 2008 academic year; a meeting was scheduled during the autumn term to discuss and adjust this planning.

In choosing a topic and designing an outline, there were a number of considerations. One was the national syllabus for English in Y5 and the school's own syllabus for Y5 and 6. The national syllabus requires that pupils should be able to:

- understand the most important points of simple instructions and descriptions which are given clearly and at a steady pace on subjects which are familiar to the pupil
- take part in simple conversations about everyday and familiar subjects
- in a simple way say something about themselves and others
- read and understand the most important points of simple instructions and descriptions
- make themselves understood in a simple way in writing
- reflect on how they learn English
- carry out short, simple speaking and writing tasks individually and in cooperation with others
- know something about everyday life in an English-speaking country

Emphasis in the study was to be on the lexis and communicative use of structures which the learners had already been taught (as based on the textbooks used at the school in Y3 to 6, and the school's syllabi). Examples of lexical areas are *family, home, countries, dates* and *times*, and structures such as auxiliary *do*, modal verbs, aspects of the present tense, past tense, and ways of describing the future. In addition, the lexis of sustainability would be introduced.

The topic (based on a design by Bell and Harkness, 2006) concerned a number of families moving into a new street in the fictive town of *Danbury*. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, sustainability is a concern of the Swedish national curriculum, as is the perceived benefit of cross-curricular work. The *Storyline*, though conducted in English, would also include syllabus goals for other subjects, such as natural and social science (e.g. *understand the greenhouse effect and how mankind affects the environment, know about different family constellations*) and was inspired by McNaughton (2006) and Lundin (2008). Since both topics are designed for L1 contexts, in order to make this challenging subject accessible to the learners, the teachers worked with

concepts and terminology of sustainability (e.g. *carbon footprint*, *greenhouse effect* and *pollution*) in Swedish the week prior to the start of the study. The *Storyline* topic itself (*Our Sustainable Street*) was introduced in Week 1 in a number of ways, which took up approximately half the week: the learners in groups matched pictures of natural disasters with L2 texts and discussed (in L1) the vocabulary; the teachers read a story in L2 about man's abuse of the planet, which the learners completed individually (in writing) in L1 or L2; the learners read (in L2) and discussed (in L1) an extract from *The Road* (McCarthy, 2006). To locate the *Storyline* topic in Britain, the learners had to place a number of major cities on a map; Danbury was then located just outside Manchester. With closed eyes the learners had to imagine themselves in their new town, saying (in L2) what they could see, hear and smell.

The story in brief is this: the families are invited to take part in a national project to live in a more sustainable way. This involves them in examining their daily lives, considering the harm they may do to the environment and proposing changes that might improve the situation. They have to deal with the problem of rubbish being dumped on a piece of land adjacent to their street. As a result of complaining to the council, the residents are invited to design a small park to be created on this land. Another problem they face is when the one remaining house is sold to a family whose behaviour is anti-social in a number of ways; eventually this family is called to a meeting by the other residents to try to resolve the tensions. The story concludes with a party, celebrating the first anniversary of life in the street.

Once the learners donned their character accessory, which signalled the start of the *Storyline* session, they stayed in role throughout the session. The aim of the study was to consolidate their existing declarative knowledge in conditions which would facilitate automatization, and to incorporate meaningful use of numbers and the alphabet in the spoken language. To this end most tasks were naturalistic within the context of the story. However, brainstorming sessions before tasks were often used to elicit lexis, using L1 where necessary to mediate this (where a learner knew the word in L1 but not L2, it was included in the list). Eliciting and extending what the learners already know provides a linguistic resource to support all learners and may be especially beneficial for the less proficient; it is also important from a motivational perspective, showing learners that they are not starting from a blank slate. On occasion, a non-naturalistic task was used to remind them of the form and meaning of a language feature in readiness for a *Storyline* task. For example, prior to interviewing their new neighbours the learners read a text about the family; on the basis of this text they were given written *answers* for which they had to construct the *questions*.

At this point the role of the teachers can be considered. Based on my planning, the teachers wrote their own outline of the class's work, to include not only the information shown in my overview (see page 91) but also the materials needed for practical work and the product of each task. The teachers team-taught, taking turns to lead or support the class's work. For example, they introduced new developments, led brainstorming, structured the work of the class including keeping the learners on task and to time, answered questions, gave guidance

where necessary, and provided a framework for presentations, asking questions to encourage the learners to produce more language than in their initial attempts. One advantage of having two teachers was that for some language tasks, such as the description of the location of the street, the learners could be divided into groups based on proficiency levels and the input of the task adjusted accordingly. An illustration of how the teachers worked in the classroom, encouraging the learners to use the language in order to promote acquisition, can be seen in extract 1 of Appendix 4 (observation notes).

The view that *use* and *acquisition* co-occur underpins the sociocultural perspective on second language acquisition, which provides the theoretical framework for this study. In addition, sociocultural theory acknowledges the dynamic nature and importance of the socio-affective context of the classroom, integral to which is the interaction between individuals. In order to understand the efficiency of a teaching intervention it is, according to Allwright (2003), necessary to understand classroom life. As he notes in later work, 'productivity of learning opportunities may depend less on the quality of work that goes into them than the quality of life in which they arise' (2006:14). This is an interesting assertion as it underlines the role played by relationships and tasks in creating conditions in which learners can be motivated to make the most of learning opportunities. In this respect, *group work*, which is central to the *Storyline* approach, has a potentially significant role to play.

3.2 RATIONALE

The identification of a research problem, design of the study and interpretation of the data are determined by the world view of the researcher (Cohen et al, 2000). Research in SLA was and continues to be dominated by the post-positivist stance (Richards, 2009) in which hypotheses are tested objectively by experimentation and measurement, and result in numerical data displayed in graphs and tables. Much research with young language learners is of this kind (Pinter, 2011). Critics of the paradigm argue, however, that quantitative research methods emphasize outcome at the expense of process and that since the researcher chooses what to focus on and how to analyze and interpret it, there is researcher subjectivity (Cohen et al, 2000). Furthermore, as Silverman (2006) referring to Mehan (1979) observes, once the results are in tabular form they are difficult to interpret in other ways.

An alternative paradigm is interpretivist, in which quantitative and qualitative data can each make contributions. Advocates of this approach acknowledge the existence of empirical reality - for example, learners are instructed according to a timetable – but, at the same time, argue for the existence of a co-constructed classroom reality. This can vary from one day to another, from one time of day to another and is influenced by the mix of learners, events outside the classroom, and even by the weather.

Although the conflicts described above are not completely resolved (St Pierre and Roulston, 2006), there is now more acceptance of qualitative methods (Bryman, 2006a) and a solid, if small, representation in leading journals

(Benson et al in Lazaraton, 2009). The focus seems to have shifted from debating conceptual matters (Richards, 2009) to placing an emphasis on the importance of dealing pragmatically with the research questions. For example, in his survey of qualitative research in language teaching since the millennium shift Richards identifies as trends approaches to teaching, identity and socialization, and narrative/lives, all of which call for some qualitative methodology. An approach combining quantitative and qualitative methodologies has gradually become established as a third way (Bryman, 2006b) and it is this third way which was chosen as the design for the current study for reasons which I shall discuss.

Mixed method (e.g. Teddlie and Tashkkori, 2009) or *multi-strategy* (Bryman, 2004) research is particularly appropriate for research situated in a sociocultural theory of SLA, the conceptual framework of this study. A sociocultural theoretical perspective does not distinguish between language acquisition and use (e.g. Lantolf and Thorne, 2006), maintains that learning or acquisition cannot be divorced from the context in which it occurs (Lantolf, 2000b) and asserts that this occurs through learner interaction. As Lightbown and Spada observe, 'sociocultural theory holds that people gain control of and reorganize their cognitive processes during mediation as knowledge is internalized during social activity' (2006:47). In other words, it is through mediation - learners working together to carry out a task which necessitates them using the target language - that acquisition takes place.

Sociocultural theory is about the study of change, a process in which a difference occurs. The change which is the focus of the current study is that which occurs in an individual learner within the physical and socio-affective context of the classroom during the course of the study. The focus is the learning of English: the language skills and the competences of grammar and vocabulary across both speech and writing, in the context of a *Storyline* about sustainable development. Process is considered to be one strength of an interpretivist paradigm (Silverman, 2006); it is in the co-constructed reality of the classroom that the learning process occurs. To capture as full a picture as possible I therefore chose as the design for the research a multi-strategy case study. I use the term *multi-strategy* as I believe the word *strategy* better emphasizes the concept of approach to the research problem.

The advantages of this approach are that the various strategies foster 'completeness' (Bryman, 2006b:106). In reality the researcher can strive to obtain different parts of the picture yet still the whole picture may not be seen. For example, we can never know why people act as they do or say what they do unless they choose to tell us, which in turn depends upon the question being asked in the first place. However, accepting this reservation, it is nonetheless possible to illuminate the subject from different angles. The rich description resulting from this illumination provides the triangulation which strengthens the validity of the research.

3.2.1 Credibility and Trustworthiness of a Case Study Design

Before outlining the strategies applied in the study, the data collection tools, their limitations and links to the research questions, I will address the issues of

credibility and trustworthiness, terms often preferred to *validity* and *reliability* in the literature on qualitative research, and which are sometimes seen as weaknesses inherent in a case study approach. The main criticism is that the findings are specific to the particular case and cannot therefore be generalized (Bailey, 1991). With its emphasis on the importance of context (Mason, 2006) the findings of a case study conducted in an interpretivist paradigm might appear to be even less applicable beyond the particular study. However, proponents of the approach argue that a case study has credibility when it can demonstrate practical and theoretical significance (Yin, 2003; Silverman, 2006). The strength of the case study approach is that by combining quantitative and qualitative methodology, it can capture ‘the complexity and situatedness of behaviour’ (Cohen et al, 2000:79), reveal insights that might otherwise be missed or interpreted differently (Moran-Ellis et al, 2006) and provide depth which extends understanding (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004).

Issues of credibility and trustworthiness are important and also problematic. As Nash (2002) points out with regard to social science research, it is almost impossible to identify all the variables involved. This is also true of classroom research (Pinter, 2011); one such variable concerns learner differences and the extent to which learners are willing and able to document their learning during the process, to talk about it later, and to do so honestly. It was with an awareness of this variable that through my choice of strategies I strove to create conditions for capturing the fullest picture of the impact of *Storyline, Our Sustainable Street* on this young language learner classroom. The questions to which I sought answers, as outlined at the end of Chapter 2, were:

1. To what features of the *Storyline* topic do the learners respond more positively?
2. To what features of the *Storyline* topic do the learners respond less positively?
3. What changes in language use can be observed during the *Storyline*?
4. How do the learners mediate the task requirements for each other and to what extent do they use tools to mediate the tasks?
5. What do the learners think they learn through working with the *Storyline* topic?
6. How do the learners think they learn through working with the *Storyline* topic?

3.3 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

The strategies employed to address the research questions were: the use of questionnaires, classroom observation, learner journals, interviews with both teachers and some learners, audio and video recording. In addition, the teachers provided copies of the evaluations which the learners wrote after the *Storyline* had finished, and copies of the three extended pieces of writing they produced in the course of the *Storyline*. As an aid to memory I took digital photographs throughout the study. I will now describe the features of the data collection tools, consider their limitations and link them to the research questions.

3.3.1 Pre-*Storyline* Questionnaire

The learners completed this the week before the start of the study. The questionnaire was written in Swedish and responses given in Swedish, as with all data relating to both learners and teachers. The learners underlined *five* things they liked to do in their English lessons from a list which included *playing games, talking in pairs, writing* and *using a textbook/workbook*. They were asked to write *what they did not like doing, how they learnt English best* and *whether they used the language in their spare time*. They were also asked to rate their ability in the language skills (see below), and to underline one of three

options concerning respectively *how much they liked English at school*, working with a *textbook/workbook* and *knowing what they were going to do in a particular lesson*: for example, *I like working with a textbook*, *I like working with a textbook sometimes*, *I don't like working with a textbook*.

The learners rated their ability in the language skills on a Likert scale. This consisted of four points rather than five to prevent them taking the middle ground for convenience (Dörnyei, 2003). An example was provided: *If you think it is quite easy to write in English, write as I have done here*:

Easy					Hard
-----	--X----	-----			-----

There are two problems with such questions, one of which is that some learners might genuinely want to choose the middle ground. Another is the uncertainty of knowledge, as highlighted by Ellis (2004). Had the questionnaire been completed on another occasion, a learner's responses may have been different, perhaps buoyed up or deflated by their performance in a recent test, or influenced by feelings of well-being or depression which might have nothing to do with school. Question 5, the learner's attitude to English at school, could be similarly affected. The same can, of course, be said for the journal entries, post-*Storyline* questionnaire and the interviews.

The data from this questionnaire (linked to research questions 1, 2, 5 and 6) were intended to provide supplementary information which might shed light on

the study data, for instance, a learner's dislike of drama might explain a negative response to role play in the *Storyline*.

The data were entered into a learner profile, into which all subsequent relevant data were entered and which would ultimately facilitate a consideration of an individual learner's development.

3.3.2 Classroom Observation

Observation was carried out during every class of the study. The *Storyline* sessions were timetabled mostly in the mornings and, with the exception of Monday, which began with class planning for the week, from the start of the school day at 8 a.m: Monday (80 minutes), Tuesday (105 minutes) Wednesday and Thursday (135 minutes with a 15 minute break). There were additionally two afternoon sessions, one a lecture and the other the anniversary party. This resulted in approximately 35 hours of observation notes.

Classroom observation is problematic for a number of reasons: the researcher must choose what to observe, how to record and analyze it (Brown and Rodgers, 2002); interpretation relies on having the fullest notes available (e.g. Silverman, 2006). Yet one cannot observe everything that is happening at any one time and there is always the concern that more interesting things are happening in another part of the room, what Woods (1986) calls the 'elsewhere syndrome' (Hatch, 2002: 78). The number of learners in the class – 32 – meant that there was no one place I could sit where I could see everything. This was made harder still by the design of the room, which was not intended ultimately to function as a classroom. The room was long and thin, with six groups aligned

down the length of the room and with two groups in the two bay windows. Additional factors which are considered to influence classroom observation are the presence of the researcher (Hatch, 2002), his or her prior knowledge of the class (Delamont and Hamilton, 1993), the risk that the subjects, knowing the purpose of the study, try to behave in accordance with what they think the researcher wants - the so-called Hawthorne effect (Brown, 1988; Greig, Taylor and Mackay, 2007) - and the influence on behaviour of the use of a video camera (Marshall and Rossman, 1995).

My response here is that firstly, I was known to the learners partly as a parent at the school, partly through their *English Day*, as mentioned earlier. I believe they were comfortable with my presence as evidenced by the way they got on with their tasks and came to me when they had questions about vocabulary or British everyday life. There were occasions when the teachers would also ask questions or direct learners to me, especially on the subject of daily life. Secondly, I disregarded anything I knew about a particular learner's family situation (McIntyre and Macleod, 1993) and used only what I observed, heard and read in their work. Thirdly, the learners knew I was studying their *Storyline* but not what I was looking at.

Given the limitations of observation, I am nevertheless satisfied that I was able to record with reasonable accuracy the interaction of the group I was observing at any particular time: significant words and phrases in L2 or L1, how these were said, the contributions made by each member of the group, how well the individuals in the group cooperated. I varied my position in the room sitting

close to one group at a time as they worked on a task. Sometimes the teachers would divide the class and take a number of the more, or the less, proficient into a group room. I tried to ensure that sometimes I observed the one and sometimes the other. I kept an observation log of ideas or questions which occurred during the course of the observation. For example, one morning I overheard two girls complaining about two others, who had not offered them a lift the evening before to a new exercise class just outside the village, and made a note to watch if this bad feeling was carried over into the classroom. Other notes include remarks by the teachers about specific learners' difficulties. Data from the log were incorporated into the observation notes, which I wrote up each afternoon, and which on completion of the study, were read and coded by a colleague (a native-speaker teacher of English working with primary-age, non-English-speaking learners at an international school) using the same coding system (explained in the section on Data Analysis later in this chapter). Where there was a difference in interpretation this was discussed.

The classroom observation data are linked to research questions 1, 2, 3 and 4 (the features of the *Storyline*, language use, and mediation).

3.3.3 Learner Journals

The learners used a lined exercise book to record, in one half, words with which they worked in class under the respective headings, such as *people* (for adjectives of description, jobs, hobbies, family), *home* (words to do with house types, building materials, rooms, furniture), *rubbish* (apple cores, cans, paper bags etc); the other half of the book functioned as a reflective journal. With the exception of the first week, when the reflection session followed Thursday's

Storyline work and lasted about half an hour, subsequent sessions took place on Fridays during the class's usual weekly evaluation period and lasted for about the same length of time. The change in day was made to allow more time for the *Storyline* on the Thursday though it also meant that I was not present during the reflection times as I was not at the school on non-*Storyline* days. The teachers read the journals every week and gave feedback in the form of encouraging comments relating to what the learner had written or the teacher had observed, responding to a learner's concerns about their group or a piece of work, or instructing the learner to evaluate, not describe, what they had done that week. I did not read the journals until the end.

The learners began their journals by setting personal goals. I was not present when they did this, but it seems from the similarities in wording that the teachers first discussed with them the school's goals, based on national ones, made suggestions in accordance with what the learners had covered in their English lessons and asked them to decide which aspects they wanted to improve. Two common goals were: to use the past, present and future, and ordinal numbers. How far the learners had come with their goals was assessed preliminarily at the end of the second week and again at the end of the *Storyline*.

Although the Swedish curriculum places emphasis on the need for learners to be aware of how they learn best and to be able to evaluate their work, in practice some find the latter difficult to do and almost all seem to find it a chore. The quality of the journals as data depends on the effort which a learner is prepared to expend on the task, the ability they have in their own language to

do this and not least their affective state at the time, which might not be the same as when they did a particular task. Learner differences are also an important variable with regard to how individuals experience tasks. For example, let us assume that two learners find a task equally difficult. For one this might be evaluated as *very hard* while for the other it could be evaluated as *quite easy*. These differences might be accounted for partly in terms of learner personality, or, in the case of *quite easy*, it might be that the learner wishes to convey a better impression of himself or herself.

The journals were completed as follows. On the Thursday of Week 1 the teachers asked the learners to recall all that they had done in the *Storyline*, and wrote the responses on the whiteboard, not in chronological order but as the learners remembered them. The learners were then asked to write for each one what they had learnt, and what they had liked/not liked. The reflection procedure for subsequent weeks varied slightly. At the end of Week 2, for example, written instructions were provided. (See Appendix 5 for a journal extract):

1. Think about the goals you set before you started *Storyline*. Have you reached them? If not how are you going to do this?
2. What part of *Storyline* have you liked most this week?
3. What have you not liked?
4. Do you think you have got better at any part of English since you started *Our Street*. If so, why do you think this is?
5. When you get ready for school in the morning and you know you are going to do *Storyline*, how do you feel?
6. How do you think the story will go on?

At the end of Week 4 the learners were given a list of the week's tasks and asked to write what was easy or hard, what they had learnt, and how they had worked on learning their words. Some were later told to re-write their evaluation

as it was descriptive, not reflective. At the end of Week 5 the learners wrote freely on what they remembered about the week, what they had liked, or not, and what they had learnt. Their last reflection was written on 27 February 2009.

The purpose of the journals was to provide direct insight into the impact of this *Storyline* on the subjects' learning from their own perspective. Journal data are specifically linked to research questions 1, 2, 3, 5 and 6 (the features of the *Storyline*, language use and learning gains from the learners' perspective).

3.3.4 Learner Evaluations for their Teachers

On 2 March, the beginning of the week after the end of the *Storyline*, the learners wrote an evaluation for their teachers in which they reflected on any changes in their language skills – *speaking, reading, writing*; examples of *Storyline* tasks were given as reminders. *Listening* does not appear in this evaluation, possibly because the teachers thought only of the two explicit listening tasks in the study and not the impact of listening to English as the classroom language for five weeks. (This was a misjudgment on my part too in the sense that *listening* was not included in the list of *Storyline* features on the post-*Storyline* questionnaire). In addition to the language skills the learners had to comment for their teachers on the cooperation in the *Storyline* family, including their own contribution. They then had to comment on the homework during this time, *my biggest step forward* and *advice to myself for the future*.

The data here complement the post-*Storyline* questionnaire, observation notes, learner journals, teacher interviews and learner interviews. They are linked specifically to research questions 5 and 6 concerning the learners' own view of

what and how they have learnt, though they may also illuminate questions 1, 2, and 3 (the *Storyline* features and language use).

3.3.5 Post-*Storyline* Questionnaire

The questionnaires were completed on 5 March. I administered them myself and was therefore able to check that all parts had been completed. The learners were allowed as much time as they needed and this variously took between five minutes and twenty. As Ellis (2004) points out in his study of grammaticality judgment tests, there is no guarantee that all respondents will make full use of available time. However, it is possible that the learners' thoughts were focused, having written an evaluation for their teachers only three days before, and this might explain why some took relatively little time.

The questionnaire (see Appendix 1 for the layout), as with the pre-*Storyline* questionnaire, comprised one closed question in which the learners had to choose the five features of the *Storyline* they liked best, and open questions. These questions appear below. One change had been made as a result of the pilot study, in which the learners had been asked to rank their preferences in question 1. Some did not do this, while others ranked several features together, either because they found it too difficult, or because they genuinely liked the features equally. The value of the data for individual learners in this first question was therefore limited and in the study questionnaire they were asked only to choose the five they liked best without ranking them:

1. Here are some things you worked with in *Storyline*. Underline the 5 you liked best (*group work, speaking English, art work, drama, writing in English, doing different things every time, working alone, using imagination, reading, writing a diary, not working with the textbook/workbook*).
2. Have I forgotten anything? Write it here
3. What did you like most about working with *Storyline*? Say why.

4. What did you not like about working with *Storyline*? Say why
5. In what way has *Storyline* helped you to learn English?
6. In what way has *Storyline* not helped you learn English?
7. Write here anything else you would like to say about your *Storyline* experience.

I also asked for two additional pieces of information to be written on the back of the questionnaire: how much the learners had liked being in one big class, compared with their own smaller class, and (the older children), whether they had preferred this topic or the pilot study *The Circus*, and why.

Question 1 was intended to show the learners' preferences for the different types of *Storyline* task and any differences between boys and girls. However, the data do not reveal why certain types of task were preferred to others. As Dörnyei points out, questionnaires alone cannot do justice to 'the subjective variety of an individual life' (2003:131). The questionnaire data were one source of data on the learners' preferences, others were the journals, evaluations for the teachers, interviews, and my classroom observation notes; in other words the quantitative and qualitative data were intended to complement each other (Boaler, 1997; Nash, 2002). The data from this questionnaire are linked to the research questions 1, 2, 5 and 6 (the *Storyline* features and the learners' perspective on learning gains).

3.3.6 Teacher Interviews

Throughout the *Storyline* the teachers were asked to observe how positively the learners worked with the various tasks, how well they worked together, and any developments in their use of English. The interview questions, based on what I had asked them to observe and also on issues arising from my own observations, were given some days in advance of the interview, which took

place on 10 March, lasting 40 minutes. The interview was digitally recorded, transcribed in Swedish and translated into English. Here follow the questions (in which the word *Storyline* is abbreviated to SL):

- Why do girls like to work best with other girls?
- Which pupils benefitted most and least from working with this SL? Did this surprise you in any way?
- Did any groups not perform as well as you expected or conversely perform better than you expected? Why do you think this was?
- What difference did it make for you doing this SL in one big class? What difference do you think it made for the pupils?
- Previously you have done SL in English with either the year 5s or year 6s but not both together. What difference has it made having the two together?
- The map drawers (the more proficient) were disappointed with their version and wanted the original as it was better. This is consistent with the effort they put into their drawings of various kinds but it contrasts with how easily they gave up on the reading task (mobile phone). Why do you think this might be?
- What can make language learning in SL harder for those with reading and writing difficulties? How can SL help them?
- Which parts do you think they responded best/least to as a class and why?
- Was any child more willing than usual to speak English?
- Was any child more active or less active during the SL than during normal English classes?
- Have you noticed change in any child's written work during the SL?
- This is a very general question, but what do you think they have learnt?
- This is the third time you have worked with SL in English. What do you see as its strengths and weaknesses?
- Are there any activities which work better in a group or is everything done better in a pair?

The value of teacher observations lies in the fact that only a teacher can compare a learner's level of active participation and language use in the *Storyline* with that in the normal English class. An outsider might notice change during the course of a *Storyline* topic but that is not enough to answer the question of the impact of this approach on the young language learner classroom. The teachers' observations are limited in that they cannot be everywhere and see everything, particularly as at the same time they have to help the learners with their tasks. However, having two teachers meant that

while one was leading the class the other could observe, with the benefit of their insider knowledge. Ideally the teachers would at the end of every day, if not during it, note their observations. In practice they might sometimes have neither time nor energy to do this and so rely on memory. This is an important limitation because it could mean that details are not remembered accurately or that smaller details are forgotten.

It is also true to say that teacher observations may be subjective; teachers have a vested interest in seeing a positive result in their own teaching even though, in this case, the *Storyline* design was mine. However, I believe the drawbacks are outweighed by the advantages, namely that it is the teacher who, through knowing the competences and personalities of her learners, is best able to notice and exemplify change in these areas in the context of the *Storyline*. The interview, while illuminating research questions 1 and 2 (the *Storyline* features) is a key source of data for questions 3 and 4 regarding language use and mediation.

3.3.7 Learner Interviews

The purpose of these interviews was to follow up responses on the post-*Storyline* questionnaires. It was not practicable to interview all 32 learners and so a selection was made in which a balance was attempted between boys and girls, younger and older, more and less proficient learners of English. A preliminary analysis of the first item on the questionnaire had shown that boys and girls had different preferences, which was borne out by classroom notes and the interview with the teachers. Consequently, four boys and four girls were chosen. It was also taken into consideration which learners would not be

apprehensive about being interviewed. The period immediately following the end of the study coincided with the absence of many learners due to illness. Six interviews were conducted on 11 March and the remaining two postponed, finally taking place on 19 March. At this time the learners initially chosen for interview were still absent and so were replaced. In the event, only two of the eight, one boy, one girl, were younger learners.

Since the interviews were based on the questionnaires, they were conducted individually (Watts and Ebbutt, 1987 in Cohen et al, 2000), in a group room next to the classroom. They lasted from five to ten minutes, depending on the length of responses, and were digitally recorded. The learners were not told the questions in advance, only that they would be asked about their questionnaire answers. For instance, where the learner had written that they most liked drawing in the *Storyline*, I drew their attention to this and then asked, *can you learn English when you draw?* Where the answer was affirmative the next question was *how is that?* Where they had written that *Storyline* helped them learn English *because you learn in a different way*, they were asked, *what do you mean by 'in a different way'?* The technique of referring to what the learner had written and then asking a closed followed by an open question was intended to keep the questions linguistically and intellectually at an appropriate level, which is identified by Cohen et al (2000) as being an important consideration in the interviewing of children. It was expected that some learners would be more responsive than others, and so extra questions on each subject were prepared to elicit more information if required. When all interviews were

completed they were transcribed and notes about paralinguistic features such as hesitation and laughter were added.

The interviews provided useful data concerning the way in which the *Storyline* had helped the learner learn English. As a result, I asked the teachers to put three questions (referred to in the study findings and the discussion which follows as *extra questions*) to the learners, to be answered in their journals. The first two questions are the same as those on the questionnaire: *In what way has Storyline helped you learn English* and *in what way has Storyline not helped you learn English?* The third question was *in what way is learning English through Storyline different from learning English in a normal class?* The interview data are particularly linked to research questions 1, 2, (the *Storyline* features), 5 and 6 (the learners' perspectives).

3.3.8 Learner Texts

For each learner I was to have copies of the three extended texts written in the course of the *Storyline*: character description (Week 2), email to a friend (Week 3) and letter to a friend (Week 5). The texts were designed to promote use of the grammatical structures the learners work with in Y5 and 6, and the lexical areas that were included in the *Storyline* as well as those with which the learners were expected to be already familiar (e.g. *clothes, family, food*). The objective was to identify instances of learning by comparing the texts which a learner wrote at these times. As such, the data are directly linked to research question 3, change in language use.

3.3.9 Video and Audio Recordings of Illustrative *Storyline* Tasks

The recordings were made on 19 March. It was decided to use both video and audio in order to obtain optimal sound quality and aid transcription. Hesitation may be the result of a number of emotions on the part of the speaker, such as uncertainty or courtesy in allowing someone else to speak. By allowing the physical context and the participants' body language to be seen, video can assist interpretation.

The scenario created for the recordings was one which could have been taken up in the *Storyline*: Danbury is suffering a crime wave, which includes burglaries in Manchester Street, where the families live. In the first part, a pair (boy and girl), were given an article from the local newspaper about this crime wave. At the end of the article readers are invited to send in suggestions for how people can make their homes more secure. The learners were filmed as they discussed their suggestions. I then interviewed them as a television reporter about these suggestions and about their experiences of living in Manchester Street, for which they had to improvise their answers.

It is impossible to say whether or not the learners behaved differently knowing they were being recorded. Equally, it is impossible to say whether recordings would have provided different data had they been made during the *Storyline*, when the learners were living through the story. Even though I spent 10 minutes taking them back into the story (in English), asking about their character, street and neighbours, there was still a mental distance between the story and the recordings. However, as said before, these recordings were intended to

illustrate the learners' use of language and interaction in a *Storyline* task. As such they further illuminate research questions 3 and 4.

Table 1 below provides a summary of the research questions and the strategies used to investigate them. For the data collection timetable see Appendix 2.

Table 1 : Overview of research questions and strategies

Research Question	Main Strategy	Supporting Strategy
To what features of the <i>Storyline</i> do the learners respond more positively and less positively respectively?	Post- <i>Storyline</i> questionnaire Observation field notes Learner journals Interview with teachers	Interviews with learners Learner evaluations for the teachers Pre- <i>Storyline</i> questionnaire
What changes in language use can be observed during the course of the <i>Storyline</i> ?	Observation field notes Interview with teachers Content analysis of samples of the learners' writing	Video recordings
How do the learners mediate the <i>Storyline</i> task requirements for each other and to what extent do the learners use tools to mediate the <i>Storyline</i> tasks?	Observation field notes Interview with teachers	Video recordings
What and how do the learners think they learn through working with the <i>Storyline</i> ?	Post- <i>Storyline</i> questionnaire Learner journals	Learner evaluations for the teachers Interviews with learners Pre- <i>Storyline</i> questionnaire

3.4 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Written permission for the study was granted by the head teacher and the two teachers who took part in it. Written parental permission was sought for the learners to be photographed and interviewed (Appendix 3). The learners themselves had no choice whether or not to take part in the study, or to give up their journals. There were two instances where parental permission was withheld, and in both cases the teachers believed it was because the learners

themselves did not want to be interviewed. Care was therefore taken not to include them in any photographs.

During the course of the study I acquired information from the teachers about the backgrounds of various learners. Whether this was more or less than I would have received as a complete outsider (as discussed in 1.3) is impossible to tell. Furthermore, as a parent of pupils at the school I also have insider information about some, but not all, of the learners, even though my own children were neither in the study class nor the year group. This knowledge was disregarded and judgment based on observable behaviour only. However, what is observed in class and noticed in a learner's writing takes on a particular significance when compared with the individual learner's observable behaviour and performance in normal English classes. Those judgments can only be made by the teachers and may not always be objective or consistent. For instance, at one or another time in the study various learners were mentioned as being dyslexic or having difficulties in reading and writing. At the end when I asked (via email) for confirmation of which learners had been diagnosed as dyslexic only one name was given, and this reluctantly, as the teachers saw it as a sensitive issue. Since dyslexia can take different forms and affect learners to different degrees (Schneider and Crombie, 2003), I have referred throughout only to *less proficient learners*, a term used to encompass all those who have difficulty with English.

3.5 METHODS OF ANALYSIS

Research conducted in a sociocultural theoretical framework is concerned with change. The change which was the focus of this study concerns the language development of 32 learners aged 11-13 as they took part in *Storyline, Our Sustainable Street* over a five-week period. In order to produce the fullest possible picture of this development and to try to account for whatever changes might occur, the study was designed to draw on the perspectives of the learners, their teachers and myself. In the findings which resulted from analysis of the raw data, the learners' own words are used wherever possible to illustrate points made. Throughout the process of analysis the learners' initials stood alongside each quotation. This facilitated comparison in a number of ways: the responses of an individual learner at various stages in the study, of boys and girls, and of younger and older learners. Although all data (except the journals in their entirety) have been translated into English, analysis was based on the Swedish original.

The first data set to be analyzed while the study was ongoing, were the pre-*Storyline* questionnaires, which provided information on learner preferences regarding task types, use of textbook, predictability of lessons, how they learn English best, attitude to English, whether or not they use English outside school and the learner's assessment of their language skills. These data were entered into the learner profiles, in which the learners are identified by initials, as they are in all raw data and summaries of these data. In the thesis the learners are identified by a number which was allocated on the basis of where they were sitting in the classroom in their *Storyline* groups.

3.5.1 Post-*Storyline* Questionnaire

The starting point for the analysis after the study was the post-*Storyline* questionnaire. In this the learners indicated the five features of the *Storyline* tasks which they liked best: for instance, *art work*, *group work*, *imagination*, *speaking*, *reading* and *writing*. The number of times each feature was chosen resulted in a bar chart showing respective popularity. The choices of individual learners - boys, girls and the total group – were also counted and displayed in tabular form. These features provided the structure for subsequent analysis for the following reason: the research problem concerns the impact of the *Storyline* approach on these young learners. *Storyline* tasks are characterized by the features above. It is therefore central to the analysis that findings from the data sources can be linked to these features.

However, knowing which are the most and least popular features does not explain their relative popularity. To this end, interpretive analysis was applied to the open questions (regarding what the learners liked best and why, and what they did not like and why). Responses for each learner to each question were written out and analyzed for content. Colour was used to highlight key words: for instance, pink underlined use of the words *fun* or *like*, red was used for skills-work such as *reading*, yellow for *group*. This provided information about the number of boys and girls respectively as well as the learners collectively. The comments were collated and summarized on the basis of what they had in common and also what stood out as different. They were then linked to the features of the *Storyline*. Sheets of paper were headed each with a *Storyline* feature, and learner comments relating to that feature were written on these

sheets. For instance, where a learner had used the word *fun* about drawing their character, the sentence was written on the *art work* sheet. Any aspects of *Storyline* which had not been accounted for and which a learner included (e.g. in answer to the question, have I forgotten *anything*?) provided new headings. Such examples were the party and the long letter to a friend.

Regarding the questions how *Storyline* had helped/not helped the learners learn English, answers were very brief. When the same questions (referred to as the *extra questions*) were answered in the journals during class evaluation time two weeks after the end of the *Storyline*, responses were fuller. This could be that the questions were isolated from the questionnaire and could have the learners' full attention, or that the learners were better able to make an assessment of the *Storyline*'s contribution to their learning, not least because they had returned to normal English classes and were able to compare what and how they learnt in those classes with the way they had worked in the *Storyline*. The content of the responses was analyzed in the same way as that of the questionnaire and summarized. The headed sheets (the *Storyline* features) were then collated and labelled *findings, post-Storyline questionnaire*. The responses for each learner were added to their learner profile.

3.5.2 Classroom Observation Notes

Classroom observation notes were expanded each day with the help of the observation log. For example, on the last morning during a snowy playtime a group of girls spontaneously started to play the game *hangman* in English on the whiteboard, a detail which I interpret as showing a positive interest in English. In addition to the log, separate accounts were kept of the tasks on

which the learners worked in their *family* groups and also in different formations: in pairs, sitting in rows for the lecture, working in a smaller group when the class was divided. This was intended to provide a sharper focus on possible differences between the effects of these ways of working on the learners, in the context of the particular task. For a sample of expanded observation notes see Appendix 4 (extract 1). The learners' initials, which were used in the original notes are here replaced by their numbers as used in the Findings and Discussion. English translations of what learners said in Swedish have also been added.

A preliminary analysis of classroom observation notes was ongoing throughout the study. There are advantages and disadvantages to this. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that an early and ongoing analysis reduces the danger of data overload and that a preliminary coding frame creates a sharper focus on the data and illuminates that which might otherwise be overlooked. Leaving analysis to a later date, in their view, compromises 'the robustness of the data and the quality of the analysis' (1994:65). Conversely, it can be said that once category codings are established it is possible for the researcher to overlook data which falls outside those categories, leading to what Cohen et al (2000) see as a risk of bias. Nevertheless, the position I adopted at the outset was based on the view that analysis is a 'systematic search for meaning' (Hatch, 2002:148). My approach was to categorize the observation notes with the research questions in mind and to provide an overview, keeping those questions in focus. To provide extra clarity a different colour was used for each letter: P for a learner's positive response to a task, NP for a non-positive

response, LU for language use, M for mediation and T for tools. There is inevitably some overlap between these categories, for example between LU, M and T, and between L and P/NP.

The intention was to capture the more nuanced reactions as well as the more obvious. Sheets of paper were headed with the codes P, NP, LU, M and T and examples from the observation notes written on the sheets. Where there was overlap the extract from the classroom notes was written on all the relevant sheets: for example LU and M are commonly found together where learners assist each other during a task. Learner interactions were first analyzed in terms of L1/L2 usage. Where they occurred in English they were analyzed as language-related episodes or LREs (Swain, 1998), that is, interaction in which learners provide words for each other, correct each other or talk about language use. The analysis was categorized in terms of lexis (choice of word or expression, word form, preposition, pronunciation and spelling), and morphosyntax (grammatical features, morphology and syntax).

Each set of notes was summarized; data pertaining to each *Storyline* feature was written as above on sheets of paper with the feature headings. Once again, if there was no relevant heading a new category was created.

3.5.3 Learner Journals

Each learner's journal entries were entered into the computer on a weekly basis. A copy of these data was then added to each learner's profile. The features of the *Storyline* and any additional categories which had not been accounted for in the post-*Storyline* questionnaire were then written, one to a

page, with the feature as the centre of a wheel. Around this wheel spokes were drawn and next to each spoke every learner's comment regarding the feature was written. For instance, where a learner had written that they had enjoyed writing about their character this would be added to the sheet where *writing* was the key word at the hub of the wheel. Where different learners wrote similar things these were written by the same spoke. This simplified subsequent analysis. In addition to analyses for each week I also analyzed the aspects of English which the learners chose as their goals, their mid-study evaluation of these goals and final assessment of how well they had achieved them. Finally, I included a study of four of the least proficient learners with regard to what they thought was easy or difficult and what they thought they had learnt, or not. The information on each sheet was then summarized, keeping the learners' own words as illustration of the conclusions I came to. As before, the sheets were collated and headed *findings, learner journals*. A sample of a learner journal is provided (Appendix 5).

3.5.4 The Evaluations for the Teachers

The same technique was applied to the evaluations which the learners wrote for their teachers using the categories on the evaluation: *speaking, reading, writing, group cooperation, homework, biggest step forward and advice*. Rather than spokes of a wheel, headed sheets were used as in the post-*Storyline* questionnaire. The last two categories were analyzed with colour coding to highlight references to the language skills, vocabulary and also words describing a learner's attitude, for example, giving themselves advice *to dare* to speak more in class. The responses were written on sheets headed with the

Storyline features and summarized under the heading *findings, evaluations for the teachers*. Data were entered into each learner profile.

3.5.5 Teacher Interviews

The interviews were transcribed and answers to each question summarized. The responses were then analyzed with regard to the features of *Storyline* and written on separate sheets for each feature. I wrote comments in the margin of the transcription linking what was said here to other data (observation notes, journals and questionnaires) and added these comments to the headed sheets. As elsewhere, if there was no heading to cover a particular point, a new sheet was begun. An extract from the translated transcription of the interview is provided (Appendix 6).

3.5.6 Learner Interviews

Learner interviews are more problematic than interviewing articulate teachers who, in this study, had also had time to consider their answers. Where the learners responded with one or two words I used follow up questions to try to get them to say more, but some proved resistant nevertheless. I experienced what Kvale (1996) regards as a fine line between leading out what the interviewer believes the interviewee wishes to say and putting words into their mouths. To prevent this happening, where the interviewee did not expand on their answer although given the opportunity to do so, I went on to another question, and this is why some interviews are shorter than others. Although I do not believe any researcher can be completely sure they did not influence their interviewee, in a multi-strategy study there are further data to support or refute what a subject said. The interviews were analyzed with regard to the feature

headings. The only questions common to all interviews were: *How did Storyline help/not help you to learn English and how is learning English in Storyline different from learning English in normal classes?* These were analyzed for similarities and differences, added to the respective feature sheets and also to the sheets created specifically for these *extra questions*. (All the learners provided this information in their journals as described in 4.4.3).

3.5.7 Learner Texts

The final data, examples of learner writing, were studied for signs of change based on these questions: does the learner show more control over basic grammar when the latter piece of work, the *long letter* is compared with the earlier *email*; is there an attempt to write more complex sentences, are there fewer spelling mistakes in common words, are new words included?

3.5.8 Video and Audio Recordings

The transcriptions of the recordings were analyzed with regard to language use, as described in 3.4.2, mediation and tools. Findings from this analysis were written under the headings *speaking* and *listening*. Here I looked at the respective use of L1/L2, how the learners mediated the task for each other and the extent to which they made use of a dictionary.

3.5.9 Collating the Data

The findings from each data set were then synthesized with regard to the research questions: respective popularity of the *Storyline* features, observable language change, mediation and use of tools, and learner beliefs about the extent to which and for what reason the *Storyline* work had contributed to their

language development. The findings from this synthesis of the analyzed data sets are presented in the next chapter.

I conclude here with an overview of the *Storyline* topic (Table 2). The overview does not show the various warm ups which the learners did each day, during which they interacted with each other in role in a variety of situations nor does it show the brainstorming which preceded the tasks.

Table 2: Overview of *Our Sustainable Street*

KEY QUESTION	TASKS	CONSTELLATION	LANGUAGE SKILL	LEXIS
Who are you?	Create a character	Group, Individual	Writing	Personal description
	Introduce family	Group	Speaking, Listening	Family relationships
What is your house like?	Design family car and home; create advertisement	Pairs	Writing	Cars, houses, rooms
	Furnish room and present poster to class	Groups	Reading (letter), Speaking, Listening	Furniture, soft furnishings, money
How do you harm the environment?	Act on letter from council	Individual	Reading	Pollution, climate change, sustainability
	Attend climate lecture	Whole class/Individual	Listening, Speaking	As above
	Fill in then analyze diary for a typical day	Individual	Reading, Writing	Daily habits
	Produce and present poster (how you harm the environment)	Mixed group	Writing, Speaking Listening	Daily habits, sustainability
What can we do about the waste ground?	Mime and discuss dumping of rubbish	Whole class	Speaking, Listening	Waste, household equipment, recycling
	Produce and present poster to show sorting of waste	Groups	Speaking, Listening	As above
	Create a feelings tree	Pairs	Writing	Adjectives for sadness, anger, happiness
	Understand letter of complaint	Groups	Reading, speaking	Mobile phone parts and production
	Complain to council	One group	Writing	Waste, feelings
	Design the park	One group (A)	Writing	Park amenities and features
	Describe the park	Group A and Group B	Speaking, Listening	Parks
	Recall the park tour	Group B	Speaking, Listening, Writing	Parks
What can we do about our neighbours?	Find out about the new neighbours	Individual and group	Reading	Social problems,
	Prepare and conduct interview	Groups then whole class	Writing, speaking and listening	
	Prepare the party	Groups, pairs	Speaking, listening, writing	Words and facts from the <i>Storyline</i> , recipes for English cakes

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

In this chapter I discuss the findings from the analysis. The organizing principle of the chapter is a consideration of each research question in light of relevant data from each data set. The aim is to illuminate each question from the perspectives of the learners, teachers and myself as participant observer, and thereby provide the fullest picture possible. The research questions are:

- 1.To what features of the *Storyline* do the learners respond more positively?
- 2.To what features of the *Storyline* do the learners respond less positively?
- 3.What changes in language use can be observed during the *Storyline*?
- 4.How do the learners mediate the group task requirements for each other and to what extent do they use tools to mediate the tasks?
- 5.What do the learners think they learn by working with the *Storyline*?
- 6.How do they think they learn by working with the *Storyline*?

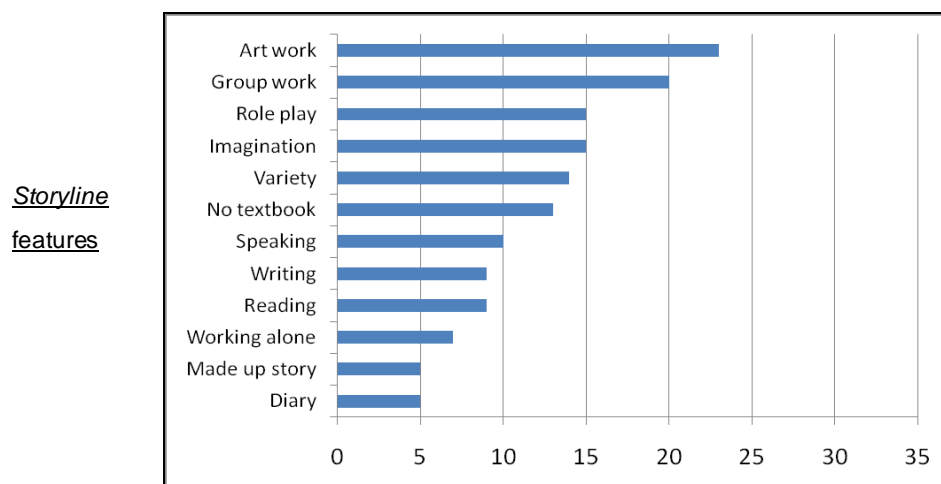
In this and the following chapter I refer to specific learners with the abbreviation Lr, and to the teachers as T1 and T2.

4.1 MORE POSITIVE LEARNER RESPONSE TO FEATURES OF THE STORYLINE

4.1.1 Post-*Storyline* Questionnaire

31 out of 32 learners completed the questionnaire (one learner was absent). Table 3 shows the most popular features are *art work* (74%) and *group work* (65%). Approximately half of all learners named *role play*, *imagination* and *variety*. (On the questionnaire the phrase *doing different things every day* was used to make the item clear to the learners).

Table 3: The number of learners who placed each *Storyline* feature in their top five



Number of respondents: 31

Differences between the preferences of boys and girls are seen in Table 4. Of the boys, all but two name *art work*; the language skill ranked highest is *speaking* (46%). The girls' preferences are *group work* (72%), *art work* and *imagination* (both 67%); *reading* and *writing* (both 39%) rank higher than *speaking* (22%).

Table 4: The number of boys and girls respectively who included each *Storyline* feature in their top five

Features	Boys (13)	Girls (18)	Total (31)
Art work	11	12	23 (74%)
Group	7	13	20 (65%)
Roleplay	8	7	15 (48%)
Imagination	3	12	15 (48%)
Variety	7	7	14 (45%)
No textbook	9	4	13 (42%)
Speaking	6	4	10 (32%)
Writing	2	7	9 (29%)
Reading	2	7	9 (29%)
Working alone	4	3	7 (23%)
Made up story	2	3	5 (16%)
Diary	1	4	5 (16%)

In responding to the question about what they liked most, 69% of the boys use the Swedish words *kul* or *roligt*, which convey the English word *fun*, or *gillar* (*I like*). *Speaking* is named by Lr24 *because I learn more*; *reading*, by Lr27, *because it is quiet*. Two refer to doing different things. Three mention *role play*: *I was with friends* (Lr18), *I'm good at it* (Lr8); *it was fun that you couldn't speak* (Lr7 referring to mime). Three name *group work*: *writing in a group is more fun* (Lr28); *it is easier working in a group* (Lr4); *you can ask if you don't understand* (Lr22). However, Lr1 prefers working alone *because I like a challenge and if I work on my own I don't have to discuss what I'm going to do*.

Of the girls 61% use the words *fun* or *like*. While only Lr20 mentions *speaking* (*I learn best*), six name *writing* as their favourite (e.g. *it's fun*, Lr32; *you learn how*

to spell, Lr19). Two make a link with imagination: *what I liked best was that we wrote a lot and all the imagination* (Lr23); *writing so much and all the imagination because I really like it* (Lr25). Three name role play: *my group was fun to be with* (Lr6), *I like role play* (Lrs2 and 12). Eight mention art work and for some at least this is connected with creating the character: *painting the character because you are that person then* (Lr5); *painting and writing about the person* (Lr3).

4.1.2 Classroom Observation Notes

Classroom observations support and extend the above in a number of ways. *Art work* was consistently popular as seen in that all learners were keen to draw. When only one of something (e.g. the family car) was drawn, some groups found it easier than others to agree who should do it.

For some, the chance to work in other groups was welcome. It was particularly apparent that the girls liked to work in all-female groups; a typical response to this news would be *Yes!* (the word is occasionally used in Swedish in this way). Although groups did not always work well, there were many instances of solidarity. One is the way some learners praised the drawing of a group member or took their opinion into consideration. For instance, in Group 8 when Lr29 was to continue colouring the family car, she consulted Lr31, who had started it. Another is the way less proficient learners urged on the more proficient during class brainstorming. A further example is how linguistically stronger but less proactive learners would sometimes take a supporting role, such as when Lr23 reported from the front of the class on a country the family wanted to visit, Italy. She could not answer the teacher's follow up question,

why? Lr21, sitting at the desk with his head propped up on his hand, supplied *because we want to taste real pizza and pasta*. The pronoun *we* here suggests group solidarity. Where a group worked well they would divide up a presentation between them and help the less proficient members prepare. Group 8 was a good example of this.

It could be seen that some learners found it easier than others to use their imagination regarding their characters. Wearing the accessory which identified the character was popular, especially in the beginning. Making use of the character can be seen as the learners prepare in groups to interview the new neighbour, Sandra Grimshaw (T2), who works in a supermarket. Based on written information about the family – rather anti-social with unruly children and an overgrown garden - the learners discussed the effects of the family's arrival on their own family. Lr1 decided that Sandra would work in the supermarket of which he was manager. During the interview Lr8 (male), in role as a grandmother, referred to an imagined incident in which Sandra's children had taken 'her' walking frame:

Sandra: is there anyone who likes working in the garden?

Lr8: yes

Sandra: I've seen your roses. [Lr8 acknowledges the compliment with a wave of his hand]. It bothers me that my children play football in the road, it's so dangerous. Is there anywhere they can play?

Lr14: in the park

Lr1: no!

Lr6: there's grass

Lr23: you have fix your garden they can play there

Sandra: Thank you, I'll see what I can do

Lr8: if I help you in your garden can I have back my rullator? (walking frame)

This extract is interesting also in that it is one of very few occasions when Lr23, proficient but insecure, made a voluntary contribution in whole class work.

Other positive features concern movement, one example being the park-design task during which the designers led a partner (who was blindfolded) around the new park (the playground). During the excitement of practising for the tour, Lr19 joked in English, *there's a moose I have to take away, just a minute!* Movement is one example of variety in task-type, another is changing the way the learners sit: the arrangement of chairs in rows for the climate lecture, and particularly the appearance of refreshments (English fruit cordial, biscuits and wine gums) created a sense of anticipation.

The learners also responded well to challenge: placing cities on a map of Britain, and listing words to do with cars (both in groups), brainstorming, and raising their hands to provide L1 or L2 words in an oral vocabulary test (in whole class), being the first to finish (group or individual), or furnishing a room on a budget. This last example, in which the family had inherited one thousand pounds and had to spend that and no more on one particular room with furniture bought from IKEA, was the task which resulted in the most intensive period of work. So involved in this were the learners that no one noticed it was break time and when reminded, some chose to continue working. All the groups were eager to show what they had chosen. When time was running out, Lr21, proficient but not proactive, asked in English if there would be time the next day for everybody to show their work.

Similarly, competition and uncertain outcomes were popular. An example of the former is a quiz about Manchester Street; the class demanded that the winning group explain how they had arrived at the number of residents (one of the questions). An example of uncertain outcome is when the class had brainstormed things mankind needs for a good life (part of the work on sustainable living). This list then had to be reduced to five. The learners made their own five choices and one from each group marked these on the board. All but the top five items were then removed, with palpable tension in the room as the 'losers' disappeared.

With regard to the language skills, while *writing* was difficult for the less proficient, who required considerable help from the teachers, it was popular with many and all writing tasks prompted questions about lexis and British daily life. The long letter to a friend (after a year in the street), was allocated an hour, during which time concentrated application allowed many to produce more than a page of A4. *Speaking*, on the other hand, was a source of embarrassment for many and they seemed reluctant to do it. However, all *groups* were always willing to come to the front of the classroom and talk about the outcome of their task.

4.1.3 Learner Journals

There are two problems with the journals as data: firstly, four journals were missing, secondly, some learners tend simply to describe what they have done and, especially, although not only, in the case of the less proficient, to write that they learnt a little or a lot, that things were easy or hard, fun or not without giving detail. However, the journals shed light on what is less obvious in the

classroom, such as the pleasure felt by some in applying existing knowledge. For example, referring to the task in which the groups had to place some British cities on a map, Lr19 wrote that this was *easy because we did it a few weeks ago*. There is also a sense of pleasure in meeting a challenge successfully, as is the case with the learners who took part in the park-design task, either as designers who had to describe the park as they led their blindfolded partner around or as those who listened and then, collectively, attempted to draw a plan based on what they had heard (e.g. *it was good fun because I managed to understand everything*, Lr18).

The journals also support classroom observations concerning the learners' attitude to working with the *Storyline*. In Week 3 they were asked to state how they felt about this: 13 girls express themselves with words such as *fun, feeling good, looking forward, yes, we're going to be working with English!* The two boys who express an opinion write *there's always something new*.

Other areas of comment include *group work*, its rewards and frustrations. For example, Lr13: *[the house] was fun because everybody helped!!* and Lr15 *drew the car, it was really good*; Lr21: *I didn't draw but I helped decide*, which contrasts with Lr2's experience of the same task: *Lr1 drew and coloured, I can't decide anything. Lr1 and 4 decided everything*.

That *writing* receives positive mentions also supports the other data. In Week 1, seven write positively about creating their character in words. For example, *something I've been looking forward to* (Lr13); *SUCH FUN* (Lr32). In Week 4, 8

out of 11 who mention the *email* do so as *fun*. Similarly, there are positive references to the creating of the posters, not least by two very proficient learners, which support the observations of general enthusiasm for practical work. Twelve liked creating the *feelings* tree (adjectives of sadness and anger about the mess in the street, and happiness once the park is created, written in L1 and L2 on leaf-shaped pieces of paper), though not all felt they learnt from it.

4.4.2 Teacher Interviews

The teachers considered that how well a group worked depended on the personalities involved. Groups 3, 7 and 8 were thought to function well, though Lr10 in Group 3 was seen to resent having to do more of the work. This is supported by observation notes, learner journal and interview, but at the same time this learner, when interviewed, stated that she liked being the one to decide. Regarding the clear preference of some girls for all-female groups, the teachers explained that whereas many boys do not take collective responsibility, *Girls don't need a project leader, they're all project leaders suddenly* (T2). Group work is seen by the teachers to generate more ideas and support those learners who might otherwise give up, but they also point out that some few prefer to work alone and also that some, such as Lrs2 and 28, respond better to a tighter structure where everybody does the same thing.

4.1.5 Supporting Strategies

In the teachers' evaluation (completed in English) all but two boys comment favourably on *group work* while the girls are more ambivalent. This could be because some girls felt they had shouldered the burden of work in their group. This is indicated here by Lr19, who did not think her group worked well, but *I did*

my best, for example, if the group was going to write something I said I could do it. (Classroom observations show that most learners were reluctant to take on the writing during a group task).

Reading and *writing* appear more popular on the basis of this evaluation, mentioned favourably by 37% and 54% respectively, with an even split between boys and girls, than the post-*Storyline* questionnaire. However, the questionnaire asked for the learners' five favourite features whereas the teachers asked for comment on all aspects of the *Storyline* work. So, for instance, Lr22 did not include *reading* as a questionnaire favourite but on his evaluation comments *I have started to try more now in Storyline*. As concerns *writing*, data from the learner interviews support those from the post-*Storyline* questionnaire and journals: Lr23 describes *writing* as *fun* and *you get it [spelling] into your head* while for Lr28 it is *fun in the group*.

In one important respect data from the learner interviews differs from those of the teachers' interview: whereas the teachers felt that Lrs2 and 28 were better suited to a traditional lesson, the learners themselves were positive to *Storyline* as a way of working. For instance, Lr28 sees advantages in group work for providing support (when writing) if the group is a good one; Lr2 thinks speaking is difficult but *it's fun anyway*. The fun of *speaking* is mentioned also by Lrs7 (*if it doesn't go on too long*) and 8, especially in drama. While Lr1 prefers to work alone, he is positive to group work *because more heads are better than one and others can do things I can't*. The variety of the *Storyline* work is mentioned by five of the learners, contrasting with the work of their normal lessons (which

they see as textbook-based with translation and vocabulary exercises). Four of these are girls, which suggests that although the boys' questionnaire data show *variety* to be particularly important to them (more than 50% placed it in their top five), it was nevertheless a positive feature for the girls too.

As regards the pre-*Storyline* questionnaire, learner preferences are, on the whole, reflected in their choices on the post-*Storyline* questionnaire. One difference is that while 38% of all learners chose *talking in a group* on the first questionnaire, 65% selected *group work* on the second. It is also interesting to note that two less proficient learners, who did not include any language skill among their preferences on the first questionnaire did so on the second: Lr9 *writing*; Lr24, *speaking* and *reading*.

4.1 LESS POSITIVE LEARNER RESPONSE TO FEATURES OF THE STORYLINE

4.2.1 Post-*Storyline* Questionnaire

As Table 3 shows, the features of the *Storyline* which were less popular with the learners include the language skills, *working alone*, and last of all, *working with a made up story* and *writing a diary*. For the girls, *speaking* was less popular than *reading* or *writing*, a situation which is reversed for the boys and which is reflected in the number of boys and girls respectively who included *diary* in their top five. There are also differences in the way boys and girls respectively express themselves. Boys describe their dislikes as *jobbigt* (*hard going, tough*) and *tråkigt*. This can be problematic. *Jag gillar inte att skriva för att det är tråkigt* (Lr8) is straightforward: *I don't like writing because it's boring* (Lr8), while *Det är tråkigt att läsa* (Lr15) can mean that reading (*läsa*) is boring but also that the

learner does not like reading for some unspecified reason. However, in both cases the use of this adjective indicates a non-positive response. Another dislike, named by only one (proficient) boy, is *doing presentations because it's tough that everybody looks when you make a mistake* (Lr17). Finally, regarding *group work* the following comments highlight both the importance of group composition and the need for individual work: *there was nobody I like to work with* (Lr7); *the group I was in decided all the time and I didn't like that but Lr17 was fun* (Lr18); *I like to work alone because I like to give myself a challenge and if I work alone I don't have to discuss what I'm going to do* (Lr1).

Of the girls only one, Lr30, uses the word *tråkigt*, her opinion of doing so much group work, which she also describes as *hard*. This is the word used by the girls to express a negative response: *reading texts was the hardest because they were so hard* (Lr14); *speaking English is hard* (Lr32); *speaking and writing in English because I think it's hard and then it's not such fun* (Lr12). One third of all girls mention a dislike of *speaking*: they are shy or afraid of making mistakes. Two girls (the friends from Group 2) dislike *working alone* (Lr5: *it's more fun in groups*; Lr6 *you can't discuss*). Only Lr11 mentions *art work* (she is poor at it). That *working with a made up story* was not ranked highly by the girls, although *imagination* was, appears to be an anomaly and will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.2.1 Classroom Observations

Many tasks had strict time limits. When no limit was set some learners, irrespective of proficiency, displayed a lack of focus; where some finished before others they would wander around the room distracting those still working.

Loss of concentration also occurred where a task went on for some time, for example, two class sessions of brainstorming. Some learners seemed aware of this: as T2 elicited from each group their suggestions for things necessary for a good life, Lr1 said aloud in English *this could go on forever*. Similarly, in brainstorming words to do with *rubbish* Lr25 commented after a while *allt är möjligt (anything is possible)*. Loss of concentration was also observed where a task was timed but directly followed by another which required equal mental effort. For example, after writing about their (the character's) typical day for the climate project, the learners had to analyze it for ways in which they harmed the environment.

Regarding effectiveness of group work, observation data support the teachers' view that this depended on the personalities involved. For instance, Lrs5 and 6 (Group 2) were easily distracted; the group worked better when one of them was absent. How the groups behaved varied from one occasion to another as did the extent of agreement. Where there was dissension it could begin the minute the teachers delivered the 'post' containing news of a development (such as the inheritance, which led into the room-furnishing task). For example, one might read it silently and pass it to the next person. Where the receiver was a less proficient learner they might push it on again without reading it. On other occasions the more proficient learner might read the news aloud. In Group 1, which almost always failed to agree, Lr1, older and more proficient, dominated, deciding without consultation what he and everyone else should do. Occasionally he appropriated the paper directly and started work on his own. Conversely, Lr10, the most proficient in her group, seemed to resent having to

do most work. On one occasion, having copied a list of words from the whiteboard, she was asked by the less proficient Lr9, sitting beside her and further from the board, if she could copy the words. With poor grace Lr10 thrust her book towards Lr9 but not sufficiently that it could be seen. Lr9 silently returned to copying from the board.

The learners' reluctance to speak English is clear from the observation notes; Lr1 was the only one to consistently speak English to the teachers. During the warm ups, when the learners were supposed to walk around the room, stop on a signal and talk to the person nearest to them, it was apparent that many had strategies to avoid this – either by keeping to the periphery of the room or by placing themselves close to a friend.

4.2.3 Learner Journals

The learners' comments on specific *listening* and *reading* tasks (climate lecture and the letter about the mobile phone waste) are similar. The lecture was: *boring after a while* (Lr21), *you hardly got to do anything* (Lr1); the letter was *hard* and *boring*. With regard to *writing* and *speaking* a recurring theme is not knowing what to write (the house advertisement, email, letter to the council) or say (the warm ups). Lr19 had a specific problem: *When I talked to people I asked questions. But they didn't ask me*. A week later she writes *no one came up to me*.

Other dislikes were being absent through illness, mentioned by three learners (e.g Lr10, *now it's not as much fun. I'd missed a lot when I came back*), being

only with younger learners (Lr1), working with the *Storyline* all day and not liking it (Lr30).

4.2.4 Teacher Interviews

In forming the groups the teachers had taken into consideration who would work well together, and a balance of age, sex and skills. They recognized Group 1 as the group which most often failed to work. One reason for this was that Lr3, a proficient but quiet girl, confronted with the dominance of Lr1, became more reserved and withdrew from conflict. Group 2 was also seen to have difficulties and to be divided into two, with the two girls preferring to work together; the group functioned better when one was absent (the conclusion from the observation data).

The teachers were asked to comment on my observation that the learners seemed prepared to put more time and effort into their art work than their writing. T2 believes the lack of attention to paper work is part of a wider problem, namely that paper seems to have lost its importance. For example, the learners are often given worksheets, which they treat carelessly and are reluctant to file. However, the teachers noticed that when the learners wrote on the template of an email they took more care than when writing on an ordinary sheet of paper. T2 also suggested that the learners put more effort into their art work because it was going to be displayed on the frieze.

4.2.5 Supporting Strategies

These examples from the evaluations for the teachers indicate why some learners are often reluctant to speak:

- *I tried to speak as much as I could in the group. But when I speak in class I don't speak as much because I don't want to be corrected.* (Lr19)
- *We spoke mostly Swedish in the family but there it wasn't so embarrassing because most of them were not so good – I helped the group a lot I think.* (Lr10)
- *I hate to talk English. Because I'm afraid to say wrong. But I have been better to talk in class.* (Lr23)

Those who express negative feelings about *speaking* do so either because, regardless of proficiency, they feel embarrassed or are afraid of making a mistake and being publicly corrected. The data reflect and expand on the negative responses to *speaking* found in the questionnaires, observation data, journals and interviews. Examples from the learner interviews are: (Lr2) not knowing what to say in warm ups and also the fear of not understanding her interlocutor; (Lr7) the search for words becomes tiring if it goes on too long, but this did get easier; (Lr10) willingness to speak English in the group decreased when the others spoke Swedish.

The learner interviews also illuminate why certain groups failed to work. Asked how well the group worked, only Lrs23 and 29 claimed that their groups never disagreed but made joint decisions, while Lr7 admitted there were clashes between the boys and girls in his group (Group 2). Lrs1 and 2 (Group 1) had contrasting views. For Lr1 the group made joint decisions, even voted where there was a clash of opinion, but for Lr2, the boys decided everything. Lr2's view is that girls work better together and are *nicer* to each other. This is also indicated in Lr23's initial concern when told she would be working with three boys, *but it wasn't so hard*. For Lr10, in an all-female group, the problem was the reticence and insecurity of the less proficient Lrs9 and 12, which she interpreted as lack of interest: *they didn't want to write, just sat and said a few*

things. We had to spell and look things up and so I thought it was right that we decided.

Finally, it is interesting to note that although more learners appear to favour group work after the *Storyline* (based on a comparison between the pre- and post-*Storyline* questionnaires) two learners who selected this on their first questionnaire do not do so on the second.

4.3 LANGUAGE CHANGE, MEDIATION AND USE OF TOOLS

Much of the learners' work in the *Storyline* takes place in the group, where they have the opportunities to seek and provide help in preparing what to say and write both individually and collaboratively in English, making use of tools such as printed materials, computers and their L1. Language change may therefore be observed in the group as the learners mediate the task for each other. For this reason these questions will be considered together.

4.3.1 Observation Notes

It is difficult to separate *speaking* and *listening*. Although there were just two explicit *listening* tasks for the whole class – the map of Danbury and the climate lecture, the learners listened to English throughout the five weeks. The teachers gave instructions and information, and answered questions consistently in L2, supplemented where necessary by L1. Where the more proficient failed to understand, it could be seen that in many cases if the teacher provided just one word in L1 the message became clear. Besides listening to their teachers, the learners listened to their peers answering questions, or presenting their characters, homes, cars, posters of furniture or on climate issues. On these

occasions the learners had to listen actively by asking questions or answering those prepared by the group giving the presentation. In the regular warm ups they had to both ask and answer questions. It is clear from the notes that by the end of Week 3 the learners were better able to understand what they had to do; they did not need translation nor did they ask questions which showed they had not understood. Where the less proficient were unsure, this was dealt with in the group.

Reluctance to speak English spontaneously remained largely unchanged, and L1 was used whenever the task did not require L2 to be spoken. It did, however, seem to become easier for some to find the words they needed (a point made in interview by Lr7). There are also some notable examples of individuals making a determined effort to use L2. One is Lr20, who stayed inside one break and practised her presentation of the group's rubbish-sorting poster. Another instance is during the climate change lecture when two less proficient learners were the first to raise their hands to suggest how they endangered the climate: *Drive a car?* (Lr12) *Buy new things* (Lr19) while Lr17, one of the most proficient, offered *andas ut koldioxid (breathe out carbon dioxide)*. Only later, after Lr19 had made three more contributions and the teacher had given the class a few minutes to talk to a partner to generate ideas did Lr17 suggest *if you need a car you can drive on electricity not gas*. The contributions of less proficient but determined learners occurred occasionally beyond sentence level as here in Week 2 where Lr5, having said which country the family would like to visit, answered the teacher's question *why* with *it's a very nice ocean, all my life I want to go, and they also, and there's a very nice beach, we can do*

sandcastles. In Week 4 she volunteered to tell the rest of the class what happened when some of them were led around the 'park': *First they take us out and we got --- and then we got out and they visade (showed) trees and bridge and park. Then we draw a teckning (drawing) of what we saw outside.*

It was in the group writing tasks where the learners appeared to give most attention to word choice and could be seen to be supporting each other using L1. For instance, the advertisement for the house proved to be difficult, though the learners had worked pre-task with examples in L1 and L2, had brainstormed words for different types of houses and the parts of a house, and were given the framework in the form of a gapped text. In the following example (Week 5), a mixed group consisting of four learners of average proficiency, two younger, (male Lr 27 and female Lr3) and two older (male Lr 7 and female Lr11) had to write the advertisement for the new family's house. The use of L1 is seen to serve a number of functions. It:

- is the natural language of communication (lines 1, 10, 19)
- conveys or completes a message where the learner lacks the L2 resource (line 2)
- provides explanation where a peer lacks the resource to understand (lines 8, 9)
- mediates understanding of L2 lexis (line 13)
- develops the task (lines 6,14,18)
- is used to discuss language correctness (lines 5, 11, 15, 20)

1. Lr7: *vet inte hur kitchen stavas men jag bryr mig inte (don't know how to spell 'kitchen' but I'm not bothered)*
2. Lr3: *and one living room eller? (and one living room, right?)*
3. Lr7: *and a living room*
4. Lr3: *and a hall*

5. Lr7: *alla har en hall – det är för många `and` (everybody has a hall – there are too many `ands`)*
6. Lr3: *vi glömde WCet (we forgot the WC)*
7. Lr11: *vad betyder det? (what does that mean?)*
8. Lr27: *WC är toilet (WC is toilet)*
9. Lr3: *and a closet* [the first vowel pronounced as in `nose`] *alltså garderobe (so `garderobe`)* [here she provides the L1 translation]
10. Lr3: *kolla här hur jag har skrivit (see what I've written)*
11. Lr7: *det är för många `and` (there are too many `ands`)*
12. Lr3: *nu har jag skrivit (now I've written)* [she takes out the `ands` and puts in commas as she lists the rooms]
13. Lr3: *en fin utsikt över (a lovely view of)* [this phrase was provided]
14. Lr11: *nu ska vi skriva om tomten (now let's write about the garden)*
15. Lr3: *hur stavar man beautiful (how do you spell beautiful?)*
16. Lr7: *b e u*
17. Lr3: *med utsikt över många blommor (with a view of ---- lots of flowers)*
18. Lr3: *with utsikt över (with a view of). Vad ska vi skriva? (what shall we write?)*
19. [Lr7 thinks they have written enough and goes to show the teacher. He returns in a few minutes].
20. Lr7: *det räcker inte med en toalett till åtta personer (one toilet isn't enough for eight people)*
21. [Lr3 makes a change on the paper]
22. Lr3: *Four bedrooms and two WCs. Nu ska vi visa den igen. Hur stavar man tegel? (now let's show it again. How do you spell tegel?)*
23. Lr27: *brick stavas b r i c k (brick is spelt b r i c k)*

As regards *writing* the above extract illustrates a number of points. It demonstrates a lack of patience: the learners make no effort to get a dictionary, write the minimum and add only one more thing when told to revise their advertisement. However, there are instances of attention to detail in particular in the interaction and cooperation between Lrs3 and 7 (*a living room, too many ands*, the spelling of the word *beautiful*, and the way in which Lr3 re-reads her sentence once the *ands* have been removed. Lr11 has a passive role although she appears to be taking an interest. In line 14 she attempts to move the task

on to consideration of the garden, which Lr3 ignores, still concentrating on a *lovely view of* (lines 17 and 18), for which they had to find a noun phrase. Her repetition of the phrase in L1 supports her (unsuccessful) attempt to produce a collocation. Her request for help is ignored as Lr7 believes they have written enough. Lr27, who speaks only twice, supplies two words in English and spells one.

A similar lack of patience is seen in the following example where a group of six proficient learners are reading and answering questions on a letter of complaint from an elderly resident to the local paper about rubbish in her garden. Here too the L1 is used for communication and explanation.

Lr29: her name is Doris Rant

Lr30: hur vet du det? (how do you know?)

Lr29: det står här (it says here)

Lr30: hur gammal är hon? (how old is she?)

Lr29: åttiosex (86)

Lr30: hur vet du det? (how do you know?)

Lr29: det står det är inte lätt när man är åttiosex (it says it's not easy when you're 86)

Lr29, who demonstrates an ability to interact with the text – for example, looking at the end of the letter to find the writer's name - is the most active in the group. In reply to Lr30, she indicates the parts of the letter which provide answers to the first two questions. At no time does any group member attempt to use a dictionary. Where they do not understand or fail to find an answer quickly they move to the next question. This lack of perseverance is seen in the *writing* and *reading* tasks. Throughout the *Storyline*, when faced with a knowledge gap, the learners would usually ask their teachers or me for help, despite a plentiful

supply of dictionaries in the room. Over time some individuals became better at taking a dictionary, but by no means all. Dictionaries were used more willingly when a task had a time limit – for example, brainstorming words to do with houses.

4.3.2 Teacher Interviews

T1, who taught the Y5s English, identified Lrs5, 12,14,16 and 24 as being more willing to speak than in normal English lessons. Three of these, Lrs5, 12 and 16 are less proficient. T2 identified Y6 Lrs7,8,17, 22, 25 and 29 as speaking more, with Lr7, a less proficient learner, and Lr22 showing the biggest difference. T2 also pointed out that Lr17, a proficient but less proactive learner, made more effort than usual, which is supported by this learner's own claim in the questionnaire's *extra question* about learning through *Storyline* compared to learning in a normal lesson. Because things were mostly interesting he *put more in*. T2 suggested that the speaking done in the *Storyline* was not dependent on a written text; the learners were able to speak freely, which benefitted the less proficient readers, as did the fact that they used the language of subjects that were close to them – *home* and *family*. After the *Storyline*, the learners were tested in writing on 124 words they had encountered in that time. They were given the L2 word and had to provide the L1. T2's explanation for why the results were so positive for all the learners was: *they've lived with these words*.

Concerning *writing*, T2 saw *great strides with regard to both quantity of text and grammar*. This was most apparent in the *long letter* where there was no lower limit: *I've never seen that amount of text before* (T2). With regard to the effects

of group work, T2 believed that the younger learners *benefit from the older ones' knowledge and are pushed to perform at a higher level*. At the same time, the more proficient learners were stretched by the subject of sustainable development. This pushed them, providing the challenge they rarely get: *in reality you spend your time and energy on the very weak ones* (T2). Regarding metacognition, both teachers considered that all learners have difficulty judging their learning.

4.3.3 Learner Texts

The data were intended to comprise three texts per person: a short character description, an email and letter to a friend. These data are unsatisfactory for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are no sets for two learners and incomplete sets for eleven others; in two cases two pieces of work are missing. The absence of texts may possibly be due to a learner's illness. Secondly, I received copies of each learner's work collated by the teachers at the end of the study, and after it had been marked. In the best case, as far as the study is concerned, the learner had not made the corrections; in the next best case the learner had made some but not all corrections; in the worst case the learner had made corrections. Thirdly, two of the least proficient (Lrs2 and 31) did most of their writing in L1. Lastly, while the writing was done in class there were occasions when those who did not finish a task would do so for homework. In this case there is no guarantee that the work is the learner's alone and not completed with the help of a parent or older sibling.

Despite these limitations, I believe that the texts provide some useful insights into the impact of the *Storyline* approach on the learners' writing, particularly

when considered together with the teachers' views and those of the learners themselves. These insights should be situated in the framework of both the national syllabus targets for English and the school's own objectives for Ys5 and 6. All but two of the learners were considered to have reached the syllabus targets. Many were seen to be well on their way to reaching some of the school's targets for Y7: correct use of question words, producing a longer continuous text with a clear message, writing half an A4 page of personal description and writing a short narrative.

The first task, describing the character, elicited use of the present tense and familiar vocabulary. In the email, the subject box of the template given to the learners contained the phrase '*new house, new neighbourhood*'. The email had to include at least six words they had been working with. Both tasks were to be a minimum of half a page (A4) long. Only three learners, all Y5, failed to write this amount. For the letter, the teachers provided: *Dear -----, I can't believe almost a year has passed since we moved here to Danbury. So much has happened. It all started with -----* . Here the learners were supported by a written list of the events in the story to be included. There was no minimum length. All except five (two of whom were from Y6) wrote a page or more of A4. The email and letter called for use of mainly the past simple, though there are instances of use of past continuous (Lr29: *We got a letter from Mrs Rant and she was complaining about mobile phones*), the present perfect, and *going to* (Lr17: *And to celebrate that we have lived here in one year we are gonna have a party*). The preposition in the opening phrase caused a problem for almost everyone.

4.3.4 Learner Errors in Writing

Although the learners range in age from 11 to 13, there are similarities in the errors they make. Some are not L2-specific (e.g. run-on sentences and an indiscriminate use of capital letters), others are instances of L1 interference, notably prepositions, as underlined in this example from Lr25's character description: *I hav live here in Danbury in my hole live*. L2 mistakes include:

- inconsistent use of tenses
- incorrect negation of verbs requiring the *do* auxiliary
- lack of concord
- omission/ incorrect use of apostrophes for possession or contraction, generally poor spelling including confusion of *were/where*, and incorrect spelling of *with* (*whit*)
- writing the pronoun *I* in lower case
- incorrect use or spelling of personal pronouns including confusion between the possessive adjectives and pronouns (e.g. Lr20, a non-native speaker of Swedish, Y5: *I have a big sister. Shis name is Angela. Hi is 15 years old*; Lr10 Y6: *After the storm hers garden whas just like the dump*).

The following examples from Lr28 (Y5) and Lr7 (Y6), respectively show the similarities between the age groups:

It all started with a house advertise last year in Februari. My dad founded the house and Bought it. (Lr28)

First we didnt found anyfing. But now we found everywer. When we moved in we had to bought fings from IKEA (Lr28).

It all started with *that I saw the house advertise to this house, they was god so I bought it.* (Lr7)

At the first we don't found our way around in Danbury, but it was not so hard in the end. (Lr7)

Both use discourse markers (*first, at the first*), both have some control of the past simple though not the negative (correct use of auxiliary *do* is not a syllabus target before Y8). The older learner attempts, unsuccessfully, to incorporate language from the instructions (*how you found your way in Danbury*) and demonstrates a wider syntactical and lexical range, as seen in the second coordinated sentence including the phrase *in the end*.

4.3.5. Learner Differences in Approach to the Writing Tasks and their Use of Language

I found three approaches to the tasks. One was to give the minimum of information; in the case of the letter, a learner would rewrite the points provided by the teachers as complete sentences but with no attempt at cohesion. Five learners, of whom four are less proficient Y5s, took this approach. The rest included knowledge of their family and neighbours in the account. This was also the case with the email; for instance, Lrs5 and 6, both Y5 and sisters in the story, write respectively: *My grandma is always strange. I'm worried about her* and *Grandma is crazy like always*. This use of knowledge sometimes included the character's own interaction with the neighbours (Lr23, Y6: *Me and my twin brother made cookie for the new neighbours*). Many went further and interacted with their imagined reader, as in these emails:

How are you, I'm fine. It is so boring without you. Our new neighbour is a little bit strange but the Kerry family and the Weston family is all right. This concludes: We must meet some time and play! I miss you so much! (Lr25, Y6)

How is it in Lincoln? and at the end Just look after you. Beacuse you are my best friend. (Lr23, Y 6)

How is your younger sister Molly? When describing a new friend she adds Don't worry you are still my Best friend to (Lr29, Y6)

Keep in touch! (Lr10, Y6)

PS Send my regards to your family (Lr3, Y6)

Although interaction with an assumed reader was most evident in the girls' writing (reflecting their choice of *imagination* as a favourite feature of *Storyline* in the questionnaire data), it is also seen in the writing of some of the boys. Lr7, a less proficient Y6, and part of the same group as Lrs5 and 6 (see above) writes in his character description: *I have two daughters and my mum is crazy and wierd. She lives with us (unlucky us).*

Where learners do more than mechanically recount detail their writing is affected in a number of ways. One is that they use vocabulary beyond the minimum required for the task or, in the case of the letter, supplied in the points given. This vocabulary might include words from their *Storyline* word book, words remembered or known already, looked up in the dictionary, asked for, or used in texts they have read. For example, in the email of Lr30: *there is a new family in our street but they are very loud and anti-social*. The word *anti-social* appears in the written description of the Grimshaw family and was unknown at least to the group of less proficient learners I was observing on that occasion. The same is true of the word *mongrel*, which appears in the same text and is used by Lr10 in her email: *They [the Grimshaws] got a dog is a mongrel*. Lr5 tells her friend: *I have a new TV game and I want to have a dog. But grandma is allergic so I can forget it*. The word *allergic* was asked for during initial work on adjectives describing people prior to the character creation. The same is true of *considerate* which Lrs23 and 30, both Y6, use in their character descriptions.

Another effect is that syntax becomes more complex, with attempts at relative clauses. For instance *One day wi read in the now's paper that a lady she name is Doris Rant, that she found mobile phones in hers garden* (Lr10) and the use of adverbials, especially of time: *After my great-grandmother died we came into money* (Lr23); *A week later we heard that our aunt hade died and we inherited £1000* (Lr29), and *I moved to Danbury in Manchester Street awihle ago* (Lr19) Meanwhile Lr1, one of the most proficient in the class, uses *then* seven times in his letter to link the given points together. This can be contrasted with the varied sentence openers of Lr9, a less proficient Y5: *And then/When/One day/And*

now, and Lr24, a weak Y6 who normally has English with the Y5s: *After we have come home so have our neighbors knock on whear door they giv us a cake.*

With regard to differences between the older and younger learners it is hard to generalize. While the proficient Lrs1 and 17 appear content to remain within their comfort zone, the less proficient can be seen to be pushing their boundaries lexically, grammatically or syntactically, or a combination of these.

This is particularly apparent in the letter:

Then we moved in to the new house, it was not so god as I tought. But lucky was my father Died, so I got mony to by new fings in IKEA. And referring to the new neighbours writes then the grimshaw's moved in, I got never calm becuse they play to laud music (Lr7, Y6)

The following examples show varied control of relative clauses which the Y6s had only met recently in their textbook:

*One day wi met a old nice litel lady shes name is Mrs Brown (Lr10 email)
I live in Danbury with my dad Robert whitch is 31 years old (Lr25, character description)
And we heard about a dump who has been started in the town (Lr17, letter)*

While most Y5s lack the range of the older learners, the writing of some individuals shows a development in range and towards control of structures which are unstable or which they have not yet met in the classroom:

Lr5 (less proficient): *Then we meat a old women she's name is mrs brown and she was very angry bicus she has a Damp in her gaden.* (Learners in Y5 have not yet met relative pronouns in their course book)

Lr14 (more proficient): *we met mrs Brown she talking about the dump all the time and to the end we desided to right a letter to the consul.* (The past continuous is introduced in Y6 course book)

Whether the guidance provided for the letter made the difference, whether learners had benefitted from their previous writing practice and general exposure to English in this short time or whether it is a combination of both

things is hard to tell. I will here highlight two cases of Y5 learners who do show improvement between the letter and a piece of earlier work. In doing so I am careful to comment only where I am sure that the work is the learner's own and not the product of correction. Lr27 has, according to T1, a good lexical knowledge (demonstrated in the house advertisement task, 5.3.1). His email is five lines long of which only this is legible: *HoLLo Elisabet im sory at im don't have call can you came to*. By contrast, the letter was three-quarters of a page long with a higher level of grammatical accuracy: *Wi bought a house and found our way around in danbury. Wi went to iKee and bought thinks to our livingroome*. Another example is Lr12: *I'm work to police. I'm go up at 7 a klok and I come home 5 a klok from my work* (character description). These are grammatically and syntactically simple sentences, and none is error free. In her letter there are some visible corrections by the teacher but still many mistakes uncorrected: *We have fond a hous in the advertise. We go to the hous, and look it. It was nice. We bought a hous beacuse I have got a job in Danbury*. Later in the letter she writes: *We wanted the dump disapeared*. These more complex sentences show some control of the past simple and present perfect, subordination and an attempt to use the new word *dump*.

4.3.6 Recorded Tasks

The transcripts were analyzed with regard to use of L1, Language Related Episodes (LREs), mediation and tools. In the first task Lrs1 and 29 (proficient, Y6) decide to begin by reading the article aloud on sight. They read half each, then make individual notes on how homes could be made more secure. During their discussion Lr1 writes their suggestions. In the interaction below L1 can be

seen to have several functions as a mediating tool, some of which were seen in the interaction described in section 5.3.1:

- It is the natural means of communication (lines 1 and 13)
- It is used consciously and without hesitation to convey the message when the L2 resource is inadequate (lines 2 and 21)
- It develops the task by allowing the interlocutor to understand the message and to respond in L2, so keeping the task on track (line 3)
- It is used to provide explanation when the interlocutor does not understand (line 24) and in this way facilitates a richer exploration of ideas: the learner can say what she wants to say about the subject without being limited by her L2 resource
- It is used to talk about language correctness. In this extract there is one, lexical, LRE only (lines 10-14)

1. Lr1: *har du något förslag? (have you any suggestions?)*
2. Lr29: *like, you can always look at, eller titta om huset är låst (or see if the house is locked)*
3. Lr1: *yes, let's see, it said somewhere that you locked the door*
4. Lr29: *um*
5. Lr1: *but it didn't help*
6. [Lr29 laughs]
7. Lr1: *yes but you can lock the door*
8. Lr1: *you can like put a camera through there, the door*
9. Lr29: *um* [Lr29 waits while Lr1 writes]
10. Lr29: *and maybe look so the window is closed*
11. Lr1: *yes, you could er maybe have a, what do you call it, a lock case, for your jewellery?*
12. Lr29: *yeah*
13. Lr1: *lock case?*
14. Lr29: *heter det inte kassaskåp? (isn't it called safe?)* [she gets the dictionary from the table behind her]. *Vi kollar det på svenska (we'll check it in Swedish)* [she looks it up; Lr1 watches]
15. Lr1: *a* [scans the page with Lr29] *a safe.*
16. [He scans the article for the spelling of jewellery, Lr29 finds the word and points it out]
17. Lr29: *um.*
18. Lr1: *I don't know what can you do else?*
19. Lr29: *they are -*
20. Lr1: [interrupts] *Get a room mate so you feel safer.*
21. Lr29: *um*
22. L1: *yes, we could maybe if some of us are home we could look at the house, look so everything is OK*

23. Lr29: *like, er, yes, if Anthony [Lr1's character] is going on like the afternoon or overnight, like he going on the street, så går runt och tittar på olika hus (he goes round and looks at the houses)*
24. Lr29: *and maybe they have cars they maybe can put eller (or) take the radio out so you like hide it in the cars so you don't can show it to the thieves*
25. L1: *what do you mean?*
26. Lr29: *tjuvar kan ta ut radion så man inte har radion (the thieves can take out the radio so you don't have a radio).*
27. [Lr1 nods] *um, um*
28. Lr29: *eller något som sitter – (or something which is -)*
29. Lr1: *in the car [pause]. Should I write it?*

Lr1 appears in the interaction to be the more proficient and the more dominant. He writes their joint suggestions and keeps the task moving (e.g. line 18). Lr29 often uses *um* to signal her agreement (lines 4, 9, 17, 21). However, in line 13 Lr1 needs more than the agreement of *yeah* (line 12) because he doubts whether *lock case* is correct. Lr29 assists with a suggestion in L1 and reaches for the dictionary to find the L2 word. Lr1 joins her in scanning the page, preparing for the word in line 15 with *a....., a safe*. In order to complete this suggestion they then scan the article for the word *jewellery* together.

Their interaction has features of natural conversation. They pick up on and sometimes complete (e.g. line 29) each other's utterances. This is particularly clear from line 22 onwards. It can be seen how their use of L1 makes this possible, allowing Lr29 to say what she wants to say and be understood by Lr1 who, as the more proficient, is then able to keep the task on course.

In the interview which immediately followed there are no instances of L1 use and no LREs. There are, however, interesting examples of learner interaction and of the use of the *Storyline* frieze (which was not in the room) as a tool.

1. *S: now, we've had some problems in Danbury, as you know and I just wonder how you feel about this. First, let me ask you, where do you live here, Chelsy, which is your house?*
2. *Lr29: [looks upwards] I think it's the last one on the right side*
3. *S: so, it's just over there [pointing], is that right?*
4. *Lr29: yes*
5. *S: and what about you, Anthony, where is your house?*
6. *Lr1: I live almost, I also live on the right side of the village but that's [pauses]*
7. *Lr29: it's the third house from the beginning of the street*
8. *Lr1: yes, thank you*
9. *S: that's the big blue one?*
10. *Lr1: no, white*

Lr29 appears both more engaged and more confident here. In saying where she lives (line 2) she seems to be picturing the frieze which shows Manchester Street. With this mental image she is then able to help Lr1 who, uncharacteristically, has difficulty (line 7). The power of the mental image is seen again in line 10 when Lr1 corrects the interviewer about the colour of his house.

After a few general questions about the street the 'newspaper reporter' moves on to the subject of the article:

1. *S: what kind of problems?*
2. *Lr29: er*
3. *Lr1: yes, there have been – [stress on the participle here indicates that he is searching for a word]*
4. *Lr29: thieves*
5. *Lr1: thieves, yes, and it used to be a dump at our street so it blowing the garbage all over the street*
6. *S: so you've had garbage all over the street and you've had thieves. What kinds of things have they taken? [I look at Lr29]*
7. *Lr29: Jewelleries and have broken into houses*
8. *S: have you been broken into, either of you?*
9. *Lr1: no, it's Mrs Brown*
10. *S: ah yes, that's the young woman further down the road*
11. *Lr29: yes*

Each of the learners was an initiator in their own group during the *Storyline* yet in the first task Lr29 played a supporting role to the more dominant Lr1. This is also seen here when Lr1 pre-empts Lr29 in line 2 but then has to search for the word *thieves*, which Lr29 provides, allowing Lr1 to continue what he wants to say. This extract is interesting in two other respects: the learners' use of words which appear in the newspaper article – correct use of *thieves* and incorrect *jewelleries*, and words which were used in the *Storyline*: *garbage* and *dump*. Also interesting is that this time when I deliberately refer to the old neighbour as being young, neither learner corrects me, possibly because their attention is focused on the fact of the burglaries but also possibly because there is no mental image available here to prompt a contradiction.

4.3. LEARNER PERSPECTIVES

4.3.1 Data from the Post-Storyline Questionnaire

Table 5 shows the number of boys and girls respectively who believed they had improved in one or more of the language skills and lexical knowledge. With regard to *speaking*, Lr1 adds *I learnt to speak English while I was working*, and Lr20 *it's how I learn best*. Concerning lexical knowledge some learners are specific: *more difficult words* (Lrs9 and 11), so *many new words* (Lr19) and *less common words* (Lr6). Four girls state that their spelling has improved; in addition, one boy and one girl refer to improvement in both spelling and pronunciation. Only Lr4, a very unproficient Y5, wrote that he had not learnt much.

Table 5: Skills and competences which developed during the *Storyline*

Skill and competence	Boys (13)	Girls (18)
Speaking	8	10
Listening	1	0
Reading	1	6
Writing	3	9
Words	2	8

On the Likert scale only one learner rates their speaking skills higher than in the pre-*Storyline* questionnaire and only nine rate any skill higher on the second questionnaire. Of these, eight are less proficient learners. Reasons why the boys think they have learnt are: *we did fun things in English and it is easier when it is fun because you remember* (Lr18); *working with different things every time because then you learn something new every time* (Lr17); *we spoke a lot of English so it is easier now* (Lr21); *we've spoken English the whole day almost and I've learnt a lot* (Lr28). The girls refer to the use of the different language skills, though no one mentions *listening*. Lr12 notes *you had to speak English*. In other words, the key factors are enjoyment, variety, the amount of English, especially spoken, and the fact that they had to use the language.

The learners were asked what they thought about being in one big class. All but two boys (Lrs8 and 16) and one girl (Lr30) were positive. Although five pointed out the extra noise and lack of orderliness in the classroom, they saw as benefits making new friends, being with friends from the other class, seeing how others work, and having two teachers.

4.3.2 Data from the *Extra Questions* (Why did *Storyline* help/not help you learn English? What are the differences between using English in *Storyline* and in a normal English lesson?)

Table 6: Skills and competences which developed during the *Storyline*: extra questions

Skills and competences	Boys (9)	Girls (17)
Speaking	6	15
Listening	6	7
Reading	6	8
Writing	8	12
Words	1	9

Table 6 shows that the figures for boys in *listening*, *reading* and *writing* are higher than those in Table 5, while the figures for *speaking* and *words* are lower. There are however no data for four boys. Figures for the girls are higher in all cases in Table 6. In the case of girls' *speaking* and *listening*, and boys' *listening*, *reading* and *writing*, the differences are striking. Possible reasons for the differences between these two tables will be discussed in the next chapter.

Reasons for progress are as follows: *speaking* – *we did it in a more fun way* (Lr14), *had to explain and work in the group and then I had to speak* (Lr1). Several refer to the amount of English spoken but for Lr30 this may not have helped: *I don't like it so I don't know if I've got better*. Lr3 echoes this: *I still think it's hard talking in front of others*. Lr12, on the other hand, is conscious of a change in attitude towards speaking English and the reason for this: *I've got braver at speaking in front of the class just because no one laughs at me when I say something wrong. They didn't before either, but now I know*. As with *speaking*, learners refer to the amount of *writing* done and that in the tasks you

had to write in English (Lr22). The phrase *had to* is also used by Lr17 to refer to using English in the presentations. In *reading* once again the quantity is a common reason: *we did it a lot and so I started to understand* (Lr18, who makes the same comment on *listening*). Lr32 refers to *hard words* in the texts but *then I learnt them*. Lr11's view meanwhile is *I can read already*. When it comes to *listening* (mentioned by one learner only in the questionnaire), six link their improvement specifically to listening carefully to classroom instructions and the important information they were given, with Lr1 making the point that *with so many in the class you had to listen extra carefully and not talk*. Lr31 (Y6, but normally has English with the Y5s) refers to the other learners: *we talked a lot and then listened to the others so I've got better at listening*. Two learners, however, appear to take a narrower view of what constitutes classroom listening. One does not think her listening skills have improved *because we haven't done much* (Lr9), and the other *it hasn't helped much. But I've got better at understanding when someone explains in English* (Lr12). Finally, for two of the most proficient (both male) progress in all the skills is linked to *variety*: Lr21, *I'm better at everything because we do different things all the time*, and Lr17, *did so many different things and most were interesting and fun so you put more in and understood most so I learnt a lot along the way*.

Explanations for how learners learn can also be seen in their responses to how working with *Storyline* is different from working with English in normal lessons. 14 out of 26 call *Storyline* work *fun*. Reasons given are: there was a lot more time to get into English, it is made up, a lot of people were doing it, working together, variety. For example: *everything is made up and it's more fun. In*

normal English you have a text and read and answer questions and so on (Lr13); You do more in Storyline because you have your character and house and so on and it's more fun (Lr3). The fun is linked to learning: I learnt everything and it was fun so I remember everything (Lr18, less proficient); In Storyline you use English all the time, otherwise we just read a text and write vocabulary. But in Storyline you draw and you speak and other things and that makes it more fun and you learn more (Lr22). In Lr29's opinion: you are more active. Lr17 sees this difference between Storyline and normal lessons: Storyline is about the same thing but you do different things. In normal lessons it's different every week. So if it's a good topic in Storyline then it's fun or it can be the other way round. Only Lr4 (less proficient) did not like working with the Storyline and did not think he had learnt much.

4.3.3 Data from the Learner Journals

21 out of the 28 for whom I had journals believed they had improved. Mentioned from the beginning, by learners of all proficiency levels, are *words*, for example: *a lot of words that are useful (Lr25)*. There are some references to using a dictionary. Some entries show that for the least proficient the *Storyline* work was sometimes too hard. Lr2 writes in Week 3 with regard to reading in English, one of her goals, *I've really no idea what to do*. While less proficient learners appear to have more difficulty evaluating their learning, they do seem to be aware of learning new words. Grammar is mentioned rarely but 5 of the 10 who refer to the Grimshaw interview note that they have learnt to ask questions (two of these being less proficient Lrs4 and 9). Those who set their goal as understanding the differences between the present, past and future conclude that they either understand or have come some way in doing so. As regards

speaking, in Week 4 two less proficient boys note that they have spoken more than before, and Lr18 sums up with *I have learnt more than I thought I could*. Several learners express the view that they learn best by writing. In Week 5, 15 out of 20 refer to the *long letter* and that they have learnt new words and improved at spelling; Lr8 also mentions *word order*. With regard to *listening*, Lr6 was helped *because there was important information*, Lr22 reports in Week 3 that he can hear the differences between British and American English (the two varieties spoken by the teachers). Concerning *group work*, where there were problems some note that they have learnt to work with others, though Lr30 adds *but I don't want Lr31 in the group*.

Most learners are clear on how they have learnt. For some, improvement in speaking English is linked to presentations and in daring to do things. Sometimes learning is linked to particular tasks. For example, in the park-design task, Lr5 *learnt to listen; I learnt to remember without seeing*. Writing more has helped with vocabulary and spelling, and the motivation to write more can be seen in comments such as: *it felt like you were really writing to a friend* (Lr19).

4.3.4 Data from the Supporting Strategies

The evaluations for the teachers reveal that, in their own view, some learners learnt to read better and faster, to cope with uncertainty, about the subject of sustainability and to make more of an effort. Some are aware that they learn by reading, others by writing. For 7 out of 14 writing in English was easy or became easier. Lr28 writes that he has improved in both *reading* and *writing*: *and I think that's fun*. Other gains in *writing* were knowing when to use *have* and

has, expressing themselves better, new words and harder/ less common words (this last from Lr6, the Swedish-English bilingual), spelling and doing more without help. Although most learners feel that the amount of homework was about right only one, a less proficient learner, links it to learning: *I like it because I learn more* (Lr24). As regards *speaking*, four, of whom three are less proficient, refer to never having spoken so much English, and eight intend to *dare* more in future, and Lr12 *not to give up*. Both Lrs22 and 29 are aware of how much English their group spoke. Lr22 writes that he tried to speak English in class, but not in the group, and estimates that his was the group that probably spoke most Swedish. Lr29 estimates that her group probably spoke the most English. Lr22 also mentions *listening: you had to listen or you didn't understand*.

The learner interviews add some interesting insights regarding the language skills. For instance, Lr23 makes the point that when you write *you get it into your head*. Lr28 thinks that *writing in a group is easier because you can help each other*, but on the other hand *you probably learn more on your own because you don't ask as much*. With regard to how role play can help, Lr2 says that when you have a manuscript *you can translate anyway*, which suggests that Lr2's view of language learning is through translation and is consistent with her description of normal English lessons as being about *reading* and *vocabulary*. One of the least proficient learners, Lr2 considers that *speaking* is the skill she has improved at.

The learners' views on *speaking* show problems to be: embarrassment, not knowing what to say, fear of understanding an interlocutor, and speaking

English in the group when others do not (Lr10). Concerning pronunciation, Lr29's strategy is *what sounds right*. With regard to *reading*, Lr1 believes he has improved in reading aloud because he had to do this for the others in the group. When it comes to practical work, Lrs1, 23 and 29 believe that this helps the learning of English because you need to know the words for what you are drawing. On the subject of how *Storyline* has helped her learn English, Lr23 says *you do more*, adding spontaneously *it's more fun so you learn; the more fun it is, the more you learn*.

Finally, the pre-*Storyline* questionnaire data support the impression from other data that the learners are more aware of how they learn than the teachers seem to think. All but two stated how they learn best: by listening, reading, writing, learning vocabulary or a combination of these; interestingly, only five mention speaking English and two of these refer to doing so at home (practising with their family).

Although, as has been discussed, the data provided by the two questionnaires are on the whole consistent with each other, there is an important exception. This concerns the learners' evaluation of their ability in the language skills using the Likert scale. The following shows the number of learners who rated their ability in the language skills higher on the first questionnaire than on the second: *listening* (11), *speaking* (7), *reading* (7) and *writing* (8). In other words, in their own estimation, some learners would appear to have regressed after having taken part in the *Storyline*. Possible reasons for these results will be discussed in the next chapter.

4.4 CONCLUSION

Relevant data from each data set have been considered in relation to the research questions. The extent to which data from one set support, explain and extend data from other sets has been highlighted. In two instances differences in data from the pre- and post-*Storyline* questionnaires raise interesting questions (regarding self-assessment of the group work and language skills). In the next chapter I shall discuss these questions and also consider the findings presented here in the context of the rationale for the study and the literature discussed in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the collective data in the context of the rationale for the study, and the literature discussed in Chapter 2. To facilitate a consideration of the research questions in the final chapter I will first consider the data regarding the features of the *Storyline* (e.g. *art work*), then the findings regarding the language skills. I will use insights from the research literature to suggest possible links between the learners' experience of the *Storyline* and its effects on their learning.

5.1 FEATURES OF THE *STORYLINE*

5.1.1 Art Work, Variety, Imagination and a Made up Story

The above features are key characteristics of the *Storyline* approach; they are closely linked and therefore discussed together. Furthermore, *art work* and *imagination* are important tools used by the learners to create their characters and to depict developments in the fictive world. In common with previous studies in the *Storyline* approach it can be seen that *art work* was popular with both boys and girls – the feature rated highest on the questionnaire. This can be seen in a number of ways, some apparently trivial. For instance, the listening task in which a group of stronger learners listened to a description of the location of their new home did not work as intended; T2 attempted to dictate the directions, the learners became muddled and their individual maps messy. They then asked T2 for a copy of her original, not to check the accuracy of their own, but because it looked *finare* (*nicer*). Similarly, although the learners had already done one poster showing their characters' negative impact on the climate, they

were equally enthusiastic as they embarked soon afterwards on a similar poster showing ways of sorting rubbish. This included the more proficient learners.

Where *art work* was a learner's favourite part of the *Storyline*, reasons were sometimes simple: *because I like to draw* (Lr30). For others, *art work*, especially the character's self-portrait, was linked with *imagination: because you are that person then* (Lr5). In some cases *art*, *imagination* and *writing* are connected: *painting and writing about the person* (Lr3); *having a family and writing and drawing* (Lr32), which seems to refer both to the learner's own character and its relationship with others in the group. These two learners are girls, and it was girls who rated *imagination* so highly. What is interesting is that the feature *made up story* is rated poorly even by girls, which is surprising given the claims made for the power of stories in the literature (e.g. Halliwell, 1992; Cameron, 2001; Bruner, 2002) and in literature on the *Storyline* approach, which highlights the importance of a meaningful context in a narrative framework (Bogaert et al, 2006; Letschert, 2006). For Lr13 (*extra question*) the difference between *Storyline* and a normal lesson is that *everything is made up and it's more fun*.

That this item did not rank higher (Lr13 did not include it in her top five) can be explained in a number of ways. It might be that the learners did not understand what was meant, though this seems unlikely; in the original item *arbetat med påhittad historia*, the adjective *påhittad* (*made up*) does not have negative connotations, the teachers had approved the wording of the questionnaire, the learners were told to ask if they did not understand when they completed it, and both teachers and I were present as they did so. However, the responses of the

older learners to the question regarding their preference for *Our Sustainable Street* or *The Circus* pilot study, might provide some explanation. In stating a preference, only 4 out of 16 (of whom three are boys) do so on the basis of the story. Other reasons are: the composition of the group, older and younger learners working together, and more practical work in the pilot study (enjoyed by all but one). This suggests that *imagination*, considered a powerful learning tool in the young learner and *Storyline* literature (e.g. Håkansson, 2004; Pinter, 2006), may be linked more with character than story, possibly because the learners have greater creative freedom in developing the former. Their willingness to engage with this persona has positive implications for their language learning (Haught and McCafferty, 2008). It is also interesting to note that in stating a preference for *The Circus*, which most did, the most common reason was that they had made models of the characters and circus caravans.

The importance of *art work* is thus seen in its potential to involve the learner in the *Storyline*. The role of *art* as a tool in language learning is discussed in the literature on young learners. It brings the language to life (Wright, 2001), facilitates learning (Wells, 1999), and allows learners to exhibit this learning in different ways (Warrington and Younger, 2006). One important tool in this process is the frieze. In this study the frieze was quite small due to limited space, with a plot of land per family arranged on each side of the street. On and around this there was room only for the self-portraits, drawings of the home and car, and the house advertisement. All work was added to each family's plot by the learners themselves. Involvement in a display is considered to be a way of getting learners to notice, use and learn from it (Moon, 2005). One example of

this can be seen in the video-recorded task where Lrs1 and 29 are interviewed in role and where Lr29 appears to be visualizing the frieze and the location of the houses. That the learners took more obvious care with practical than language work was attributed by the teachers to the fact that this was displayed. If it is the case that having an audience heightens attention to detail and accuracy, as is said of writing (Lo and Highland, 2007), then it underlines the importance of the frieze as a tool to mediate learning.

Some learners could be seen to pay more attention to it than others. When asked in Week 3 to predict how the story would develop, Lr13 noted in her journal: *since you've put up a rubbish tip I think we're going to sort rubbish*. The other girls who responded to the question made similar references to sustainability, to the teachers moving in, or the families going on holiday (the families had presented their ideal holiday), Lr19 adding *I hope so*, which indicates her engagement with the story. Halliwell (1992), Cameron (2001) and Bruner (2002) identify unpredictability as a feature of story for engaging attention. Creating anticipation through *art work*, as described here, or making a change to the existing display, has the potential to arouse anticipation. This was the case in Week 4 when the remaining plot of land first had a *Sold* sign put on it and then a removal van appeared. At other times when individuals had finished their work they would look at, comment on, and ask questions about the work others were engaged in or at already completed work on the frieze (observation notes).

Some learners are aware that they can learn English through *art work*. On the one hand ‘*you learn in different ways*’ (Lr1, interview), which echoes Kantstö (2004), that practical work fulfils learners’ needs to learn in different ways, and reflects the view in the literature that young learners, especially boys, benefit from a multi-sensory approach (Warrington and Younger, 2006). On the other hand, *you have to say it in English and you learn the words* (Lr29, interview). Another point is that *art work* allows the less proficient learner to contribute with their creative talent and so participate in the group on equal terms (e.g. Crandall, 1999; Schneider and Crombie, 2003; Tornberg, 2009). The combination of *art work* and L2 may thus impact positively on learners’ self-esteem, which is discussed in the next section.

However, there can be unforeseen consequences. Group 8 (led by Lr29) gave Lr31 much of the practical work to compensate for lack of language proficiency. This had a negative effect on Lr30, who also liked to draw (her favourite *Storyline* feature). This was clear from two of her early journal entries: (1) *she [Lr31] got to draw the car, she’s drawn most things*; (2) *I’ve learnt to work with others but I don’t want Lr31 in the group* – but was not apparent, even to the teachers, in the classroom. Other journal comments from this learner about tasks not being *fun*, that she learnt *nothing* from them and disliked working with the *Storyline* all day, should then be seen in this context. On the questionnaire she indicated only two favourite features: *working alone* (one of only three girls to do so) and *reading*. This raises an interesting question: was the root of this learner’s resentment that she would have preferred to work alone (and therefore do all the practical work herself) or was it the result of not being allowed to draw

in this group? It further raises a question about the effect this had on her learning during the *Storyline*. It is important because of the implications for teachers constructing groups; the learners' respective skills, proficiency and interpersonal relationships have to be taken into account. An important consideration in the equation is personality issues, considered to be key determiners in the effectiveness of group cooperation (Klingner and Vaughn, 2000; Storch, 2001). In this study the most common cause of conflict (observation notes) was who would do the practical work. The teachers considered that where groups failed to work effectively, the cause was less ability differences and more personality factors, for instance to what extent the learners could compromise. This view is also borne out by the observation notes, journals and evaluations for the teachers.

Different kinds of *art work* combined with language work were one aspect of the *variety* which was rated highly. In the words of Lr17 *there's always something new* (journal). The rearrangement of furniture for the climate lecture and provision of refreshments appeared to create anticipation (observation notes), though the lecture itself seemed too difficult for some and was, at half an hour, too long. A problem identified by Lr1 was that the learners just listened. The remark is significant because observation notes relating to the whole study show that although the boys were on the whole more easily distracted than the girls, they were engaged and focused when required to be active: when tasks were timed, had an element of competition or involved movement (e.g. park-design task or mime).

The role of *variety* in the learning process (motivational, providing practice for language skills in different contexts and discourse genres) is discussed in the literature (e.g. Littlejohn, 1996; Ellis, 2003; Moon, 2005; Jenks, 2009). For the boys particularly *variety* is linked with *fun*, the word that appears so often in the data, and learning: *you use English all the time, you draw and you speak and other things and that makes it more fun and you learn more* (Lr22). Girls' responses are similar: for Lr29 *you are more active* and for Lr3 *you do more*. These comments (*extra question* data) highlight the importance of meaningful tasks, reflecting the consensus in the literature in which the link is made between learner engagement and learning; in Dörnyei's view, for example, 'the learners' enthusiasm, commitment and persistence are key determiners of success or failure' (2001:5). Lr23 (interview) expresses the same sentiment thus: *the more fun it is the more you learn*.

5.1.2 Group Work and Working Alone

Philp, Oliver and Mackey (2008) maintain that young learners can collaborate effectively, though the consensus in the research literature is that they require training in social skills (e.g. Fisher, 1995; Williams and Burden, 1996; Crandall, 1999; Dörnyei, 2001). The learners in this study are used to group work, though not in English lessons. Groups must be carefully constructed, as described above, and learners given the opportunity to work in different groups, partly to be with friends (e.g. Åberg Bengtsson, 2000; Pinter, 2007; Shak and Gardner, 2008) and partly to allow different talents to emerge (Van Lier, 2004). For example, Lr2, who believes girls are *nicer* (interview) to each other than boys are to girls, took an active and enthusiastic role in an all-female group task involving drama, one of her favourite features. In contrast, during the video-

recorded task, Lr29, who had been the initiator in her group, allowed Lr1 to dominate. This surprised the teachers as the two were well matched in terms of proficiency and normally worked more evenly. One explanation could be that at the time of the recording Lr29 had a bad cold. How learners feel on any particular day, physically or mentally, is likely to contribute to both level and nature of involvement in the group and therefore influence the quality of the group's work, which in the view of Lantolf and Genung (2002) impacts on learning.

Only Group 6 (all four members) reported in the evaluations for the teachers that they had worked well; only 4 of the 12 positive reviews of *group work* in these evaluations were given by girls. Indeed, while Lr13 included *group work* as a favourite on the first questionnaire, she omitted it from the second, a fact which might be explained by the conflicts between the two girls and two boys (Group 4). However, questionnaire data show that both sexes rated *group work* highly, though only three learners (less proficient boys) named it as their favourite feature. Their reasons are illuminating: *you can ask if you don't understand* (Lr22), *writing is more fun* (Lr28) and *it is easier* (Lr4). The comments highlight some attractions of group work understated in the literature. For example, Donato (1994, 2004), Williams and Burden (1996), Ohta (2000) and Van Lier (2004) refer to the strength of the group's combined knowledge and expertise while Swain, in the same vein notes that 'joint performance outstrips their individual competencies' (2000:11). Indeed, much is made in the literature of the way in which all can benefit from being in the role of tutor/tutee (Crandall, 1999) and that the more able benefit by consolidating and displaying

their knowledge (Wells, 1999a). In other words, the focus seems to be on the positive effects resulting from the pooling of resources. While this is illustrated in the journals (e.g. *it was fun because everybody helped* (Lr13); *I didn't draw but I helped decide* Lr21), these comments and those from the questionnaire cited above also highlight the socio-affective benefits of collaboration and the implications for motivation, particularly for the less proficient. The teachers reported that the younger learners were pushed to perform through working with those older and more proficient than themselves, thus displaying what Ohta describes as a 'higher level of potential development' (1995:249), and that the less proficient were encouraged to persevere in the group, whereas they might have given up if working alone. This further underlines the important socio-affective role played by the group. In the evaluation for the teachers, Lr12's advice to herself is *not give up*. Thus there is some evidence of the persistence identified by Dörnyei (2001) as having a positive impact on learning. At the same time the benefits of group support should be weighed against the needs of those who need quiet time; Lr27, the other learner to include *group work* as a favourite in the first questionnaire but not the second, was part of a democratic and supportive group (Group 7), whose work he evaluated positively, yet his favourite *Storyline* features were *working alone* and *reading because it is quiet*.

Watanabe and Swain (2007) caution against having too great a difference between the levels of ability: the less proficient cannot benefit from the knowledge of the more proficient, and the latter may not trust the proficiency of their weaker counterparts. There was some evidence of this in Groups 1 and 3, compounded in Group 3 by Lr10's appearing to equate lack of activity from less

proficient, and younger, Lrs9 and 12 (such as a reluctance to write for the group) with lack of interest. However, the decisive factor seems to be personality. Group 1, for example, displayed features identified by Van Gorp and Bogaert (2006) as leading to ineffective collaboration. Lr1, oldest and most proficient, attempted to steer all group work with little consultation. This led to conflict with Lr2 and lack of overt participation by proficient Lr3. Throughout their journals the girls refer to this dominance, which they felt as unfair, not least because it gave them little chance to contribute. When asked (interview) if she was satisfied with her *Storyline* work, Lr2 replied *everything I did myself*, and was positive towards doing another *Storyline* topic but *in a better group*. In contrast, Lr25 (one of two older learners and the most proficient in Group 7) was aware of doing the bulk of the work in her group (evaluation for the teachers), but consistently consulted and supported the less proficient and younger group members.

The issue of male dominance is raised in the literature (Mercer and Littleton, 2007). However, while it is true that the girls responded enthusiastically to working in all-female groups, the explanation given by the teachers, as mentioned above, was that boys are often less proactive and the girls tire of it. This might explain Lr23's initial concern (interview) that she would be the only girl in her group (Group 6). The other members consisted of one less proactive but proficient Y6, one less proactive and less proficient Y6 and a proactive but less proficient Y6, who usually had English with the Y5s. It is also true to say that on the days when Lr23 was absent due to illness, the boys were more easily distracted. Nevertheless, this was the one group in which all members

reported that the group had functioned well (evaluation for the teachers). Regarding the class generally, while some learners wrote that others had tried to decide everything, this concerned girls as much as boys. For example, Lrs18 (male) and 20 (female), Group 5, refer to being told what to do by the other boy and girl in the group (journals).

Ohta (2000) maintains that group work facilitates learner development and that it is in the group that this development manifests itself. With regard to the spoken language, individual learner development was apparent to the teachers. An example of this is Group 3, mentioned above, where Lr12 was seen by the teachers to become more proactive. Indeed, in this light, aspects of the observation notes take on a significance they would not otherwise have had. In several instances Lr12's voice is heard contributing to whole-class work (for instance, being among the first in the lecture to suggest how mankind harms the environment) or group work (Appendix 4, extract 2). In the latter instance she leads the group's presentation when the more proficient Lr11 shows reluctance, and in so doing appears to provide Lr11 with the support she needs to make a contribution. However, when writing was done in the group it was usually, and reluctantly, undertaken by Lr10, who believed this allowed her to make all decisions. This led to occasional visible tensions and sometimes remarks from Lr10 which suggest irritation, such as when the group are using two dictionaries to write the adjectives for the *feelings tree* (Appendix 4, extract 3). However, in the teachers' evaluation Lr12 writes that the group worked well and that she has learnt to cooperate. In answer to the *extra question* (how *Storyline* helped her learn English), she notes that she is braver at speaking *because no one laughs*

at me when I say something wrong. They didn't before either but now I know. These reflections indicate that despite conflicts the learners' friendships were strong enough to overcome them. The reference to *speaking* also highlights a sense of security. This can be contrasted with the context of normal English classes where the teacher asks a question and one learner at a time answers; the individual may feel exposed. An example of the solidarity which can be created by the *Storyline* framework can be seen in the observation notes: Lr30 goes off to join another group, and Lr29 calls after her *bye sister!* (their roles in the family group). Lr7's comment in the teachers' evaluation *I think it's been good in the family* as opposed to *group* underlines the solidarity.

The narrative framework used in the *Storyline* approach and the homogeneous nature of the groups can thus be said to foster the kind of warm and supportive atmosphere considered to be a pre-requisite to effective learning (e.g. Moon, 2005; Van Lier, 2005). The learners themselves make a similar point when they comment on working as one large class – this gave the chance to make new friends and to work with friends in the other class. The importance of the atmosphere can be considered in the light of Wells' view of the ZPD as 'an interactive space that holds potential for multiple – and unpredictable – transformations of individual identity' (Kington, 2002:246). This takes a broad view of possible learner development. For instance, Lr12, above, does not report that her spoken English has improved, but that she is now unafraid to make mistakes. The negative effects of anxiety, which can cause the learner to underperform, are discussed in the literature (Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Mahn, 2008; Lundberg, 2010). With anxiety removed, the learner may take chances to

Speak where she had not done so previously. Similarly, Lr19, a less proficient Y5 learner, could be seen to keep her group on-task, appearing to become more self-confident as the *Storyline* progressed. Being in that particular group, consisting of a proficient but less proactive Y6 and two less proficient Y5s, elicited a certain behaviour which impacted positively on the learner's personal development. This is seen both in the group and in her contributions to whole-class work (observation notes). As mentioned above, however, Lrs18 and 20 in that group felt over-ridden, so it might be suggested that one learner's personal development occurred at the expense of others'. While overt participation, such as in the case of Lr19, has been linked to learning (e.g. Van Lier, 2004), it should be remembered that learners may be participating even when they are largely silent (Seedhouse and Almutairi, 2009). The example of Lr12 demonstrates on the one hand the need to judge overt participation in the context of a learner's usual behaviour and on the other that mental participation also contributes to the learning process.

Finally in this section I would like to return to the importance of the social climate in the classroom. This is considered to be created by the learners themselves (Philp and Duchesne, 2008) and is therefore the pre-existing socio-affective context in which teaching and learning take place. In his recent discussion of communicative language teaching, in which he takes the view that form is still neglected, Swan (2010) criticizes Allwright (2003) for prioritizing the quality of life in the classroom over effective instruction. However, Allwright makes clear that while the best teaching 'generates the most, and the most productive, learning opportunities' the key to productivity is 'the quality of life in

which they arise' (2006:14). The social climate is thus seen to play a key role in effective learning, which is the view of researchers working in a sociocultural perspective. Asked (on the post-*Storyline* questionnaire) if they would have preferred to do the *Storyline* with their own class, all but three learners took the view that, although there was more noise and chance of distraction, they had also valued the opportunity to make new friends and work with existing friends in the other class.

The social climate created by the learners is also influenced by their relationship with the teachers and the teaching approaches. Together these factors determine the quality of classroom life. This brings into focus the learner's self-image. The consensus in the literature is that the view young learners have of themselves impacts on their language learning and is influenced by the perception of their peers (e.g. Alanen, 2003; Moon, 2005; Lundberg, 2010). A positive self-image is linked with motivation (Dörnyei, 2001), which itself is considered to be a key factor in effective learning (Williams and Burden, 1996; Dörnyei, 2001). Returning to Wells' view of potential transformations in learner identity, it can therefore be suggested that language development may occur in conditions where the classroom atmosphere is supportive, where self-confidence increases through contributing to group effort and where opportunity is given for extending existing linguistic boundaries. Where the learner feels marginalized in the group and peer support is lacking, the reverse is likely to be true. This is an important consideration in the discussion of the language skills in the next section.

5.2 THE LANGUAGE SKILLS

5.2.1 Listening and Reading

These skills are discussed together here since in many respects they are closely linked. The extent to which learners understand what they have to do affects the quality of their learning (Swain, 2000; Platt and Brookes, 2002); instructions were provided multi-modally, in other words, verbally and in written form, with clarification in L2 where required. When taking into account the occasions on which learners listened to their peers presenting the results of a group task, it can be said that the amount of verbal input to which they were exposed was considerable, though explicit listening tasks were few. For example, they listened to a description of the location of their street and depending on proficiency level, either drew a map or marked places on a drawn map; they listened to a lecture on climate change, and some were led by their peers around the newly designed park.

A similar point can be made about *reading*; there were few explicit reading tasks but the learners read letters introducing new developments in the story, instructions and the work of other groups. This may explain why some learners felt that they had listened and read a lot while others felt they had not. For example, in Lr30's view her listening ability had improved because *we spoke a lot and then we listened to the others*, whereas Lr9's opinion of listening is *we haven't done much*, and for Lr12 the Storyline *didn't help me listen better, but I've got better at understanding when someone explains to me* (post-Storyline questionnaire), which seems to suggest a traditional textbook-based notion of a listening task. It reflects the narrow learner view in Lundgren (2008) of learning

as facts, which in language education equates to consciously learning *about* the language, or carrying out a task to practise a particular skill. This can be seen in Lr17's comments on grammar, after having written and had corrected his character description and email: *we haven't talked about it recently* (journal, half-way stage evaluation of goals), whereas Lr9 with regard to her goals, concluded in Week 5 that she was *much more certain about where, why and all of these* [question words] *because we've used them*.

Where learners felt they had improved, this is often linked to the amount of reading and listening they thought they had done (e.g. Lr30 above), which emphasizes the importance for language learning of evaluating work which has been completed (e.g. Cameron, 2001). Learners commonly express their listening as *having to* do so because the information was *important*. Another factor for some was that being in a large class required heightened concentration. A third aspect is that the tasks were *fun*. In addition, some state specifically that they learn by reading or by listening. These factors highlight the significance to learning of both amount and level of input and its value, relevance and interest to the learner (Breen, 2001; McCafferty et al, 2001). For example, Lr12's journal response to the story dramatized by the teachers before the *Storyline* proper began, and which the learners concluded individually in writing, was: *exciting when T1 read for us. Yes!* This response also suggests that when a learner is engaged through listening, that reading and writing skills might also benefit. The full range of the class's language ability was illustrated in this task, with some choosing to write in L2 while others needed help in

knowing what to write in L1. The difficulty of knowing what to write or say can be seen in occasional journal comments of the less proficient learners.

While learners such as Lr12 clearly like listening to stories, *listening* is not mentioned at any point in terms of being liked or not, unlike *reading*, *writing* and *speaking*. This emphasizes the invisibility of the skill and suggests that learners may not be aware of improvement until they return to working with their textbooks. For many, however, this was not the case. They were aware that they had started to understand the spoken word more easily and some were able to identify the reason, as described above. It is also clear from other data, notably the observation notes and the teachers' interview, that by the middle of Week 3 the learners were able to receive and act on verbal instructions without needing clarification in either L2 or L1.

Unlike *listening*, *reading* is actively liked or disliked by some learners (e.g. it *is fun and so it is easier*, Lr9). This is significant because although many girls enjoyed the reading, only two boys listed it in their top five. So if it can be made *fun* then the reading may be easier and more may be learnt. This was the idea behind the task in which the learners read a letter of complaint about rubbish, containing a description of the life-cycle of a mobile phone (the item which seems to be a young person's most prized possession). Yet in their journals 8 out of 10 who referred to the letter called it *hard* and *boring*. This was supported by the classroom observation of a group of proficient learners, who gave up on the questions to which they did not immediately find answers, used no dictionary, and made only one (unsuccessful) attempt to decode an unknown

word, *ashamed*, as in *young people should be ashamed*, making no use of context to do so.

There are several points to be made here, not least of which is that Lrs1 (post-*Storyline* questionnaire) and 29 (journal) comment that they like *challenge*. According to the teachers, this group had made more effort than they normally would, though to the observer it appeared to be little. The teachers also pointed out that young learners live in an age of remote-controlled ability to change television channels as soon as their interest wanes. More proficient learners, in the teachers' view, often persevere the least because they expect to understand immediately. It is, however, interesting to compare the 5 out of 27 (on the post-*Storyline* questionnaire) who believed that they had improved in reading with the 19 out of 23 who answered the *extra question* on how *Storyline* had helped them learn English. The initial low figure of five indicates that the comprehension level of the reading material was too high for many (Krashen, 2004), which is borne out by classroom observations and journal entries. The *extra questions*, meanwhile, were answered almost two weeks later when the learners had returned to their textbooks. This indicates that they found the textbook material easier to read and consequently judged their reading skills to have improved. That textbook material seems to present little challenge for some of the more proficient is implied by Lr17's comment on the *Storyline* reading: *good to read the texts because I understood most words but not all* (teachers' evaluation). This is mirrored as regards *listening* in Lr18's remark after the park-design activity: *fun, I managed to understand everything, learnt*

new words (journal). The word *managed* implies that a challenge has been successfully met by this learner.

Another reason for liking *reading* was *because it is quiet* (Lr27). The nature of *Storyline* work, in groups, occasions a higher noise level than is likely to be the case in a teacher-fronted class, and practical work may also make the classroom seem messy. Cameron (2001) notes that group work presents greater opportunities for distraction, and this was seen in a number of ways: some groups or pairs within a group might at times be off-task, one or more might not be contributing to a piece of writing or brainstorming, those who finished early might wander round the room and talk to others. However, distraction may have a positive indirect effect on learning; for example, during the task in which Lrs13 and 32 were part of a group writing an advertisement for the new neighbours' house, they were observed to be off-task at times, talking about being rich and famous. T2 later reported that these girls had arranged to meet after school and do some writing on this subject in English.

5.2.2 Speaking

The sociocultural theoretical view of second language acquisition is that use and acquisition go hand in hand. *Acquisition* encompasses not only new lexical and syntactical knowledge but greater accuracy in using and consolidating existing knowledge, which occurs through *use* of the language. In the normal English lesson these learners did not speak English together and used English with the teacher only when answering questions. For some this remained the case throughout the *Storyline*. However, on the questionnaire just over 50% of both boys and girls (including the less proficient) noted an improvement in their

speaking ability, attributing it to the amount of English spoken. Lr28's view, for instance, is that they spoke English *the whole day almost* (journal); Lr7 (interview) found it tiring to speak so much English in the beginning, *thinking of words*, but *it got better*. Others refer to *having to use* the language, as was also mentioned in the previous section. This finding supports Nation's (2007) view of the benefits of fluency practice for low proficiency learners. Furthermore, it emphasizes the importance of tasks which engage the learners' interest. One such example is the tasks resulting in group presentations, in which learner reluctance to speak in front of the class was moderated by the desire to show the group's work. The link between attitude, enjoyment and learning can be seen in the way two learners sum up their progress in *speaking* (journals): Lr30, who resented fellow group member Lr31, writes that she does not like speaking English and *so I don't know if I got better*; Lr18, whose journal comments throughout are positive, *I have learnt more than I thought I could*.

Role play was also popular, perhaps because this did not always involve speaking. On these occasions the less proficient could participate on equal terms (Crandall, 1999). Lr2, for example, whose questionnaire data show her view of role play to be *such fun*, became a leading figure in the group of girls who worked on a *problem with neighbours* mime, adopting the voice and posture of an old woman. Although she rated her overall improvement as low, *speaking* was the one area where she felt there was improvement, because *we have spoken a lot of English*. It can be noted that the tasks involving some kind of drama were the only ones the learners were enthusiastic about rehearsing, but that language correctness was given little attention. Even in tasks where the

groups were to present the family, for instance, or their newly furnished room and where practice time was given, in line with Skehan (1998), it was not used by everyone. Group 8 was the only group which made use of this time, consistently rehearsing the less proficient Lr31 in what she had to say.

While Lr13 wrote in her journal that she spoke English at home now because it was *such fun*, as a classroom activity *speaking* seems problematic for almost everyone. The learners wrote in their journals that they did not know what to say, felt shy or embarrassed about making mistakes in front of each other, from a fear of being corrected in front of the others (Lr19) and in Lr2's case, fear of not understanding her interlocutor. The embarrassment extended to the more proficient. This is consistent with the view in the young learner literature that learners become less willing to speak English as they enter puberty, self-conscious about making mistakes in front of their peers. While Lrs1 and 29 attempted to use only L2 in their groups, others such as Lr10 seemed willing to do so but gave up when the rest of the group used L1 among themselves. The learners' own reflections on the extent to which they used English (teachers' evaluations) are supported by the observation notes. Lr22 is an interesting case, preferring to speak L2 in front of the class but L1 in the group. Although, as Ellis (2003) notes, this seems unusual, I see a possible explanation in the constellation of the group: Lr22 is a less proficient Y6 grouped with three others of the same age, two of whom are proficient and one of whom is also a friend. A sense of inadequacy may have been felt in this context where it might not have been felt with those who were not particular friends or who were younger or less

proficient. This is seen in Lr10's journal comment that it was not so bad speaking in the family because *most of them were not so good*.

However, in the teachers' judgment, Lr22 was more proactive than usual (a point he makes himself in the journal), spoke more and made progress. As with writing, he puts this down to *having to* do it. The general willingness to speak English in the tasks did improve, perhaps as the learners became more comfortable in using the language and in knowing what to do (Pinter, 2005), which is consistent with their improved ability to act on verbal instruction in L2. Some of the less proficient in particular noted that they had never spoken so much, a claim supported by the teachers and attributed by them to the fact that the learners were not dependent on a written text but could speak freely (interview). The opportunity to work at one's own level was taken by some of the more proactive and proficient; for instance, Lr29 tried to use more unusual words (interview). On the other hand, Lrs17 and 21 are examples of proficient learners who, according to the teachers, could have pushed themselves more, even though Lr17 was seen to make more effort, a point he makes himself (questionnaire). In their journals both note that they did not speak better English after the *Storyline*.

Finally, the use of L1 can be seen in classroom observations to have the functions identified in the literature. Firstly, it is the natural language of social communication, allowing the learners to manage their relationships (Swain and Lapkin, 2000). Time and energy were often wasted in conflicts typically concerning the distribution of labour, especially with *art work*, which almost

everyone wanted to do. It is therefore interesting to speculate in what way this might have been different had the learners been required to use only L2 as their means of communication. Another function of the L1 is that it facilitates talk about the task (Brooks and Donato, 1994), which was the case with regard to discussion between the learners about what they were expected to do, and the grammar and lexis needed to do it. Thirdly, the L1 allows the learners to think, and to talk about the target language, which is said to foster acquisition (Antón and DiCamilla, 1998). A fourth point is that the two languages provide a resource (Moon, 2005), allowing everyone to participate equally (Halliwell, 1999) and for the task to be completed successfully. One short example is given here of the spontaneous interplay between the languages observed in the classroom and in the video recordings. The learners have read a text about the new neighbours and as a class are recapping on what they know:

Lr22: they have a dog, it was a mongrel [this was a new word for them in the text]

[Some learners do not remember the word and are confused]

Lr30: blandras (mongrel)

Lr12: hunden skäller mycket (the dog barks a lot)

Lr1: barks

It might be that the less proficient Lr12 switches code as a result of Lr30's translation or that she cannot say what she wants in English, though she has understood the text. Lr1 brings the task back to English, a role he took on in the recordings in a similar circumstance, where his partner had switched code. The use of L1 here allows the learners to support each other, and it mediates the task by making it possible for learners both to say what they want and to understand what has been said. The use of L1 also ensures that the flow of recollection is not broken, so facilitating the development of the discourse. This function of L1, acting as a bridge between words and concepts which *can* be

expressed in L2 is important because it enables all to be involved, and provides conditions in which discourse features of spoken L2 may be acquired. In normal English lessons most utterances are at sentence level, usually as responses to teacher initiation and expected to be in L2. It should also be pointed out that peer-mediation, according to Lantolf (2000b), implies that learning does not require the presence of an expert, the teacher. Although the teacher in this case was present, the learners' use of L1 provided the support they needed to do the task, requiring less intervention from the teacher.

5.2.3 Writing

Just as some learners stated that they liked *reading* because they learnt that way, and one learner felt this about *speaking*, so two learners said that they learnt by *writing*. Referring to *words*, *word order* and *spelling* in the writing tasks Lr23, for example, commented *you get it into your head* (interview). On the same subject Lr6, a Swedish-English bilingual, noted that she expressed herself better, with less usual words and better spelling (teachers' evaluation and journal). One of the few to refer to grammar, Lr19 states that she knows when to use *have* and *has* (teachers' evaluation). Writing as a group was especially popular with the less proficient, which supports the teachers' view of the benefits of group work for such learners, namely that they are more likely to persevere. Of the more proficient, while only Lr10 appears to resent having to do most of her group's writing (observations, interview), Lr1 evaluates group work negatively for the teachers *I have to do all the work*. Both include in their favourite features (questionnaire) *working alone* and Lr1 explains his liking for *writing* thus: *you do it on your own* (teachers' evaluation).

Writing done in the normal English class is often at sentence level using the structure which is the focus of the chapter and for which the learner may or may not be developmentally ready. As Lantolf (2000b) notes, if a learner's or group's performance is judged solely by what they can do without assistance, we only have part of the picture. When learners write at their own level, as in *Storyline* writing tasks, their interlanguage development is displayed through their choice and command of structure and lexis (Tornberg, 2009), and the individual learner may also become aware of a sense of progress. Lr9, for example, writes in her teachers' evaluation, *have been able to do more without help now*. Some of the learners' texts show an attempt to incorporate new lexis and/or to use linguistic features which they have not yet met in their textbooks (e.g. subordination). The teachers were consequently able to target help within each learner's respective ZPD. However, the usefulness of this help depended ultimately on an individual's willingness to spend time understanding and correcting mistakes. For the process to be complete the teachers would then check this again. As was seen in the data, some learners did not correct their work and it can therefore be deduced that the teachers had not checked this. Those who learn by writing might benefit from rewriting the whole text, especially where there were many mistakes. This was the teachers' advice, but the texts show that this seldom happened. However, it can be suggested that where there are many mistakes correction should be selective, or the learner may feel the task is hopeless, as may have been the case here.

Whereas *speaking* was the most popular skill among the boys, the girls preferred *writing*; in six cases it is explicitly linked on the questionnaire with

creating the character and drawing. This combination of writing task with *imagination* made the writing *fun* for many girls, two thirds of whom rated *imagination* highly. With regard to the *long letter*, for example, *it felt like you were really writing to a friend* (Lr5, journal). The responses highlight the benefits for writing of having a context, purpose and sense of audience (e.g. Read, 2007; Kirsch, 2008; Mahn, 2008), and of writing in role (Haught and McCafferty, 2008). Lr22, who was judged by the teachers and in his own view to have been more proactive during the *Storyline*, displayed engagement in his writing, asking me the legal age for riding a motorcycle in England and the word for *gräsmatta* (*lawn*). He then created a biker with a taste for destroying the neighbourhood gardens, earning a rebuke from T2 on his character description that he should write *nice things*. A number of points can be made here. It was while writing their character descriptions that the learners asked most questions about life in Britain and for lexical items (observation notes). Cultural knowledge, a syllabus requirement, is more likely to be remembered when it is incorporated into the created character's life. However, in allowing the learners to use their imagination in this way, teachers must be able to distinguish between a learner's own views and those expressed as the character.

That the learners, collectively, were positive towards *writing* was seen in the way they approached a writing task. During the hour devoted to the *long letter* silence in the classroom was punctuated only by questions about the task. As with *speaking*, however, some learners found it hard to know what to write. The most popular piece was the *character description*. This is interesting for a number of reasons. As with the *long letter* the learners had guidelines, here in

the form of questions (e.g. *what is your name? how old are you?*). It was also the writing task which most utilized the lexis of familiar subjects and basic structures (e.g. present tense) while providing scope for the learner to use their imagination freely, together with their group, in creating the members of the family. These descriptions of the individual in the context of a family are the starting point for the story, and also provide a focus for further thinking (Fisher, 2005). For example, Lr7 writes *I have two daughters and my mum is crazy and wierd. She lives with us (unlucky us)*. In the *email*, written two weeks later, Lr6 and Lr5 respectively draw on the detail of the created family: *My grandma is always strange, I'm worried about her; Grandma is crazy like always*.

The use of imagination can also be seen in the descriptions of the Grimshaw family, written towards the end of the *Storyline*. Here, some of the learners, in pairs, combined information from the text about the family with what they had learnt in the interview, and made up other details. These descriptions are therefore the product of written and spoken texts being comprehended and developed. Similarly, in the *long letter* all except five (less proficient learners) interacted with an imagined receiver, combining phrases that the teachers had provided with their own remembered and imagined account of life in the street. This was the task which produced most text, with all but five writing a page or more. This surprised the teachers, who judged many to have improved both in the amount of text written and their grammar. This last point is borne out by the learners who had *grammar* as a goal: most felt they had achieved or partly achieved their goal of understanding the difference between the present simple, past simple and present perfect.

The learners' belief in their improvement is supported by the analysis of some of their texts, as discussed in the last chapter, even though, as far as writing in the classroom was concerned, there was little apparent attention paid to language correctness. The exception to this is *spelling*, as judged by the questions asked. In addition, during one break I noticed this jotting on a piece of paper: *coulor color colour*. It may also be that some learners were more inclined to query grammatical correctness when working together than when working alone. For instance, as they completed their climate poster, putting captions to pictures, Lr30 suggested *vi köper för många elektroniska grejor – är det buy eller bought (we buy too many electronic things – is it buy or bought?)*. However, according to the teachers the *email* template encouraged more attention to language correctness. This could be because the task felt less like school work and more real, in other words, more meaningful.

The learners were clear that *writing* had helped them to learn new words and to spell better. The fact that words (not only new ones) were sometimes used incorrectly highlights the role played by *writing* in allowing learners to make connections between words and display knowledge that goes beyond form and meaning (Szpotowicz, 2009). Another factor in lexis acquisition is *need* (Laufer and Hustijn, 2001), which can be defined both as a requirement imposed by others and an individual's own desire. The latter sense resonates with what the learners said about listening carefully to the teachers: the information was important.

Finally, it is in the writing tasks that the learners can be seen to make use of tools. Although for most, using the dictionary remained the last rather than first resort when they needed L2 lexis, dictionary use became more frequent for some. The computer was also used for finding information (as in the IKEA task and recipes for the party). Lrs2 and 15, both less proficient, found it helpful to write their new words on the computer. More than once the work was lost due to technical problems. Although neither learner refers to this in the data, it is to be expected that it would have a negative effect on their attitude to their work.

5.3 THE LINK BETWEEN LEARNING AND *FUN*

In answering the *extra questions* many learners share the views expressed here about how the *Storyline* helped them to learn: *when it's fun you learn more* (Lr29); referring to the language skills *I've learnt everything and it was fun so I remember it* (Lr18).

The importance of motivation is stressed in the literature on language learning. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) point out that young learner motivation is especially unstable. The extent to which a young learner is motivated to engage with a task depends on a range of factors, many linked to the socio-affective context, which itself may vary on a daily basis or even during the course of the day. One such factor is peer relationships. The word *fun*, a construct recognized as a key factor in the literature on young language learners, appears more than any other in the questionnaires, evaluations for the teachers and journals to describe particular tasks and the *Storyline* experience in its entirety. Working closely with friends is an important part of this experience. Even though Lr18,

for instance, does not believe his group worked well (questionnaire) he notes the *fun* of being with Lr17. Other important aspects of *fun* are seen to be: practical work, drama, variety of tasks and organization, use of imagination, and group work; the findings reflect those of the *Storyline* studies referred to in Chapter 2.

That the learners found the *Storyline* experience stimulating can be seen in their non-reaction to physical details of the kind highlighted by Fisher (2005) as influencing the effectiveness of learning: the lack of air conditioning (initially) in the new classroom, making it hot and stuffy, and the continuing building work. This varied from constant hammering on the roof to builders walking in through one door and leaving through another. At the beginning of the study there was no whiteboard, only a flipchart, and the elongated nature of the room meant that even once the whiteboard was installed, the groups at the far end of the room had to move in order to copy from it. The learners appeared unperturbed by any of this and none of it is mentioned in the data. When the learners were engaged in their task they would fail to notice the time. Yet on other occasions, notably when a task went on too long, attention would wander. The days when the classroom clock was out of order created general dismay since these learners, along with many young people, do not wear watches.

In contrast to their *Storyline* experience, the learners see their normal English lessons as being textbook-bound: reading short texts, doing exercises, listening to a CD, with little pair work and no group work, no practical work or movement, not much speaking, but a lot of repeating and learning words. In itself, having to

learn words is not considered a problem. This was the homework during the *Storyline* and although Lr26 commented that *homework is never fun*, the much less proficient Lr24 wrote *homework is fun, I like it because I learn more* (both in the teacher evaluation). That the retention of the 124 words was so high can also be accounted for by the fact that words are recycled in a *Storyline* in a way that they are generally not in textbooks, where chapters have different themes. As the teachers phrased it, the learners had *lived with these words*. This is significant given the emphasis in the literature on the need for recycling of lexis (e.g. Nation, 2007) and for words which relate to young learners' lives (Cameron, 2001). That there were no complaints about the learning of the words might relate to just this point: Lr25 notes that she has learnt *lots of words that were useful* (journal, Week 2). The key word here is *useful*: in this particular week the families had created their homes; these words were *close to them* (teachers' interview). As Read (2007) points out, children and adults tend to measure learning in terms of words, so if a learner believes their lexical knowledge is expanding, this is likely to have a motivational effect.

At the same time it was observed that words met incidentally could be problematic: the word *supermarket* appeared in the extract from *The Road* and was explained by the teacher, but when subsequently used in a map task, where the learners had to identify places in their own village, in preparation for listening to the location of their new street, many did not remember it. Towards the end of the *Storyline* the word appeared again in the text about the Grimshaws, and the less proficient group I was observing asked what it meant. Similarly, *estate agent* was also used in the map task; two days later the

learners wrote their own house advertisement, but some had forgotten the term. This indicates that the recycling of words must involve repeated encounters in different contexts, in which the task requires learners both to notice and use the words, and is consistent with the research into vocabulary acquisition.

5.4 LESS PROFICIENT LEARNERS

Where less proficient learners are concerned, the research literature emphasizes the importance of group support and practical work (Schneider and Crombie, 2003; Madsbjerg, 2004; Tornberg, 2009; Gustafsson Marsh and Lundin, 2010). However, the factors which apply to all learners could have particular significance for the less proficient. One of these is being involved (e.g. Moon, 2005), which Lr29 (interview) sees as the difference between *Storyline* and normal English lessons. Being involved seems to stimulate the learners in this study to make an effort, of which both they and their teachers are aware, taking an active rather than passive role in the classroom. This has implications for the learning of all individuals (Breen, 2001; Van Lier, 2008; Seedhouse and Almutairi, 2009) but especially so for the less proficient, who are more likely to be passive in normal English classes. For example, Lrs15 and 22 spent over two hours preparing a word game based on *Storyline* words for the party, so absorbed they had to be reminded of the break; Lr20 was so determined to present the group's poster well that she spent the whole of the preceding break time practising, with particular emphasis on pronunciation. Many aspects of the *Storyline* have been identified as contributing to learner engagement but what is common to all is the sense of fun. When this is absent, the consequences for learning (especially for the less proficient, who may give up more easily), can be

seen in the journal entries of Lrs2, 12 and 32 that *writing is hard when it isn't fun*. A sense that something is hard is likely to contribute to an individual's negative self-image as a language learner.

Changes in learners' self-perceptions are sometimes revealed in the journals. Lr18 is one example. The quotations already given in this chapter about managing to understand his partner in the park-design task, and his having learnt more than he thought he could (referring to *speaking*) indicate the development of a more positive self-image. Similarly, in the teachers' evaluations eight of the less proficient give themselves advice to *dare* to do more, suggesting they have been positively surprised by what they have been able to do. While change is not always apparent to the learners themselves, it can be seen in the classroom data. For instance, Lr4 was the only one to state (questionnaire) that he had not learnt much; he relied heavily on his friend, Lr1, in the group and required help from the teachers to complete his tasks. The observation notes show that throughout the *Storyline* this learner would foreground a lack of understanding with remarks (in L1) such as *I don't quite understand* and reveal insecurity with comments such as *even I can understand that*. Yet in Week 4 when the families were writing questions for Sandra Grimshaw, Lr4 reminded Lr1 (in Swedish), *we're not supposed to write sentences, we have to do questions*, later noting in his journal that the task was hard but he had learnt about asking questions. T2 helped him write his character description by asking questions in English and writing his answers, given in English. As there were two teachers, it was possible for T2 to do this. Finally, a less proficient learner's development could be revealed in a surprising

way. Lr2 pointed out to T1 that the teacher had failed to correct something the learner had written in her character description (*look at TV*). Lr2 had realized this when T2 reviewed the class's lexical errors on the whiteboard. This suggests that the learner was sufficiently focused to notice a difference between her word choice - the result of direct translation from L1 - and the target item.

5.5 SUMMARY

The literature on young language learners emphasizes the connection between learner engagement and learning. Table 7 provides a summary of aspects of language change and the *Storyline* tasks in which change could be observed.

Table 7: Aspects of language change and the *Storyline* tasks in which these can be seen

Language Skill	Language change	<i>Storyline</i> task
Speaking	Willingness of some to speak in L2 (especially the quieter and/or less proficient) Use of new lexis	Spontaneous contributions in whole class (eg climate lecture, Grimshaw interview) As part of group preparations and presentations
Writing	Longer and/or more morpho-syntactically complex texts Incorporation of new lexis	Character description, email, letter
Listening	Quicker and more accurate decoding	Instructions and information given by the teachers at the start of tasks

In the concluding chapter I will evaluate the design of the study and its findings. I will go on to develop the links between the popular features of the *Storyline* topic and language learning. I will then use this discussion to provide some answers to the research questions and to highlight areas of potential future

research which I believe might add to current understanding of what makes a young learner a successful language learner.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter I shall first evaluate the research design and restate the findings of the study in the light of the research questions. I shall then suggest links between the features of the *Storyline* approach and language development before going on to assess *Storyline*'s potential for the young language learner classroom. I shall conclude by considering the directions that future related research might take.

6.1 EVALUATION OF RESEARCH DESIGN

The choice of theoretical framework for the study was determined by my belief that change, the focus of interest in sociocultural theoretical SLA research, can occur both cognitively and affectively when the learner interacts with others using the L2 to perform a meaningful task. My interest was, to use the words of Firth and Wagner, in 'social' and not 'disembodied' cognition (2007:801). Firth and Wagner argue that while the cognitive perspective on second language acquisition regards the learner as a deficient speaker of L2, and interaction in terms of 'problem-sources'(p.801), the sociocultural perspective is that the learner is a potential achiever, able to communicate effectively despite an imperfect command of grammatical structure and lexis. The sociocultural perspective is also consistent with the theory of learning which underpins and informs the *Storyline* approach, namely social constructivism, in which 'learners [construct] their own knowledge and meanings on the basis of personal experiences' (Firth and Wagner, 2007: 806).

The data collection strategies employed in the study provided the holistic perspective which was necessary to investigate the impact of the *Storyline* approach on these young learners. The greatest benefit was the complementarity of the data sets, which enhanced each other by illuminating details which might not have been visible in one set of data only. There are many instances of such details. For example, Lr30's resentment of Lr31 was not apparent in class. Two details in the observations become significant only in the context of the journal: while Lr30 was drawing the family home, Lr31 attempted to give advice and was told in a quiet but firm tone *it's me who decides*, and in the climate poster work when Lr30 positioned herself beside Lr19, who was sticking on pictures, and said *I want to stick too*. The relevance of this in turn is seen in the context of Lr30's favourite part of the *Storyline* topic (post-*Storyline* questionnaire) *dra wing*, because *I like to dra w*.

Another example relates to Lr12, a less proficient, less proactive learner whose position by the window in one of the bays meant that she was less conspicuous than others. Her regular, though brief, utterances recorded in the classroom data (for instance, as seen in section 4.3.1 and as discussed in section 5.1.2) become significant in light of the teachers' comments on her speaking more English than usual, what she writes herself in the journal (at the half-way stage of *longing* to come to school and work with the *Storyline*) and in answer to the *extra question* concerning how *Storyline* had helped her learn English, where she writes of being *braver* now in speaking because she is sure *no one laughs* at her.

A third example is Lr1 who, when interviewed, stated that in his group each person decided what they would like to do, and where there was disagreement they would vote. This was never seen to happen in class and the journal entries from the girls in the group indicate that it did not happen this way. This emphasizes the problematic nature of interviews where these are the only source of data. Lr1's statement above might be explained by a desire to appear in a good light, or it could be that he genuinely believed he accommodated the opinions of his peers, as indicated in this interview comment on the advantages of group work: *there are more heads, more ideas, more who can do things I can't*. However, in his evaluation for the teachers he writes that group cooperation did not work well because *I have to do all the work*.

Apparent contradictions in the data appear elsewhere. For example, Lr16's favourite part of the *Storyline* topic was *drawing because I like to draw and make models* (post-*Storyline* questionnaire), but he did not like drawing the family car (journal, Week 2): *it was hard, not good at drawing*. Lr11, meanwhile, did not like drawing the character because *I can't paint well* (post-*Storyline* questionnaire), but in the answer to the *extra question* how *Storyline* had not helped her learn English wrote *art work – I can do it already*. These two apparent inconsistencies might have less to do with drawing in itself and more to do with how the learner felt at the time of writing. This was discussed in relation to the research design: data are likely to be influenced by affective factors. There is a greater risk of this with children, where positive or negative, perhaps chance, remarks of a peer may affect the learner's view of a situation, experience or even their own ability. As was seen in the classroom data, these

young learners were very eager both to do practical work and to look at and remark on that of their classmates. Another explanation, in Lr11's case, where both comments relate to creative skill rather than simply liking to draw, is that whether or not she drew well, it was good enough in her opinion and had no link with learning English.

If I were to conduct a similar study, I would attempt to record some of the tasks during the *Storyline* topic itself: tasks of different kinds and at different stages of the study, as in the pilot study. There are, however, some problems. One concerns the increased noise level which accompanies group work in the classroom. A second problem is how to ensure that the learners are not affected by the presence of the camera, which was a distraction in the pilot study and the reason I chose not to do this in the main study. It could be, however, that just as the learners became used to seeing me every day, they would also get used to the camera. During the pilot I was not in the classroom throughout the whole study so they did not have this opportunity. However, for the learners to get used to being filmed, they would have to be filmed on every occasion, and here I see a problem. Being in the class, observing and taking notes as I did, I was able to focus on a particular group but still be attuned to comments and activity in and between the immediately surrounding groups, providing a more holistic view of learner activity, not least the informal, spontaneous interaction between the groups. This would not have been possible if I had been filming one group. With regard to the filming carried out after the *Storyline* topic had come to an end, analysis of the interaction reveals

similarities with that based on field notes regarding the respective use of L1 and L2, and the ways in which the learners mediated the tasks.

Finally, with case study research there is always a question regarding the trustworthiness of the results and how far generalizations can be made. As the respective popularity of the individual features of the *Storyline* approach are central to this study both as research questions in themselves and in the wider issue of connections with language learning, I asked that post-*Storyline* questionnaires be completed by the classes working with the other two teachers responsible for this year group. Here the learners were taught in their usual English class, that is Y5 and Y6 learners were taught separately, but otherwise worked with the same schedule, story outline and material. The results of these questionnaires show that the same features were popular here as in the study class. For instance, *art work* was the favourite, with 93% and 82% respectively putting this in their top five. For the younger learners *group work* and *imagination* were the next most popular (both 57%) while the older ones chose *not working with a textbook* (65%), and *group work* and *variation* (both 57%).

However, even though the similarities between the three classes are striking, it does not necessarily follow that such would have been the case with learners at another school, just as the results at this school might have been different at another time of year, with a longer or shorter *Storyline* period, or shorter and/or fewer sessions per week. As Allwright notes, such is the dynamic nature of a classroom that 'any understanding reached on one occasion may rapidly become irrelevant' (2003: 130). Nonetheless, while I do not suggest that these

results can be automatically generalized to other learning situations, in order to strengthen the study's claim to trustworthiness, I shall go on to discuss its practical and theoretical significance (Yin, 2003; Silverman, 2006).

6.2 THE FINDINGS

As Samuda and Bygate observe, 'language development is complex: it involves a number of distinct though related processes such as social interaction, perception, ideational comprehension, motor control, contextual mapping and strategic control' (2008:15), adding that factors which contribute to the socio-affective context (such as timing and atmosphere) are also influential. In other words, language development results from change in the individual (cognitive, physical and emotional), occurring within a social context. Some aspects of development, such as grammatical change, are, they suggest, easier to observe than others (e.g. complexity and fluency), over a short period; social development, I would add, may be most apparent to the learners themselves (e.g. Lr1, teachers' evaluation and Lr31, journal, refer to learning to work with others) but the effects of this process of maturation may be observable in the individual's future collaborative work.

The subject of my research was the impact of the *Storyline* approach on a class of 32 Swedish 11-13 year olds, a study lasting five weeks. The first two research questions address the features of the *Storyline* approach to which the learners responded more and less positively. The rationale for these questions was the relationship identified in the research literature between learner *enjoyment* and *engagement* on the one hand, and *engagement* and *language*

acquisition on the other. Hence features of the *Storyline* approach to which learners respond positively can be considered to have the potential to contribute towards language development. The collective data show that *art work*, *group work*, *role play* and *variety* are popular features, with *using imagination* being prized more by the girls and *not using a textbook* by the boys. *Working alone*, the *made-up story* and the *language skills* were rated less highly; regarding the latter, the girls preferred *writing* (the data also suggesting a link for the girls between *using imagination* and writing tasks), and the boys, *speaking*.

The third research question concerns observable language change during the study period. The data highlight the following:

- greater willingness to speak English, relative to the individual learner's behaviour in normal English lessons
- longer and more complex written discourse; attempts at incorporating new lexis and at using structures only recently formally introduced or not yet introduced; more accurate use of some linguistic features between the first and subsequent texts for some learners
- increased ability to understand L2 instruction without L1 or L2 clarification
- increased lexical knowledge

Regarding the fourth research question, the ways in which the learners mediate task requirements for each other and their use of tools, the data show that L1 plays a primary role in facilitating understanding of L2 input when learners explain to each other what to do and discuss how to do it, enabling the least proficient to participate equally (Halliwell 1992). Concerning the benefits of group work, learners cite getting help, of everyone being involved, of being with friends. There are significant implications for learning here, for, as Nikolov notes, although individual motivation is important, 'classroom processes' (2009:104) may have even greater influence. Where the group worked well it

created a sense of solidarity, as seen in the journal and post-*Storyline* questionnaire references to the *family*, rather than *group*. However, the extent to which mediation worked depended on the personalities involved, notably the attitudes of the older and more proficient to the less proficient. Where the former preferred to work alone or where they equated the reticence of the less proficient with lack of interest, the group functioned less effectively. Where the group did not work well the learners were less likely to include *group work* in their *favourite features*. With regard to use of tools such as dictionaries, this improved slightly, and challenge or time limit was seen to have a positive effect in that groups wanted to be the first to finish a task or to find the most words related to the task. Using an online dictionary was more popular, and computer use, for checking facts or word processing, was always popular.

The final two questions concern what and how the learners believe they learnt through working with the *Storyline*. All are aware of language development in one or more skills area and they attribute this to being involved: doing more with the language, practical work, working together, doing different things. The data for the least proficient are particularly revealing, showing the popularity of practical work, of group work and references to improvement in *speaking*. This suggests that if the learner's self-image can be bolstered via practical work, which includes the use of L2, and an awareness of progress in the spoken language, then the resulting positive attitude can be channelled into developing their weaker linguistic skills, namely *reading* and *writing*. Instead of allowing the learner to write in L1 (which resulted in Lr31 concluding that her writing had not developed), the teachers might consistently adapt an approach of questioning

the learner in L2 and writing down their L2 response for them, as T2 did on occasion with Lr4, or supporting them with written questions or words and phrases. Indeed, there might be benefits for the more proficient learners in a group if they were sometimes to take on the role of tutor, as argued in the literature on sociocultural theory, for instance, in formulating questions and writing down the answers as they would in dictation. In order for this not to be resented by the more proficient, the task would have to be made meaningful within the context of the *Storyline* (for example, the character of the less proficient learner has broken their wrist) and used selectively. In such cases it might contribute both to variety of task and potentially to the sense of solidarity in the group. The link between group solidarity and learner enjoyment, even with reservations for the instances of conflict, is apparent in all the data sets.

The word most commonly used by the learners of all levels of proficiency to describe their *Storyline* experience is *fun*. This reflects the importance of enjoyment highlighted in the young language learner literature, and also in the wider field of general education. For instance, Hattie, having researched the influences on achievement in school-age children in a large number of contexts over a period of fifteen years, concludes ‘when students enjoy learning then achievement is higher’ (2009:197). This can be illustrated in my study by returning to the comments of two proficient Y6 learners who make the connection between *fun* and learning: *we did so many different things and most were interesting and fun and so you put more effort in and understood most of it so I learnt a lot along the way* (Lr17); *You learn more in Storyline because we*

talk more, write more and such – it's more fun and so you learn, the more fun it is the more you learn (Lr23).

In contrast, the normal lessons are characterized by textbook exercises and reading, listening to a CD and learning words. Lr17 describes the difference in this way: *In Storyline everything is about the same thing, more or less, but you do different things. In normal lessons it is about different things every week. So if there is a good topic in Storyline then English is fun, but it can be the other way round.* Although the less proficient found the sustainability topic difficult and some of the older ones, who had taken part in the pilot, preferred the circus topic, none expressed negative views of the topic as a whole, only certain tasks (e.g. the lecture and the letter of complaint), and the teachers saw it as challenging the most proficient.

By comparison, the questionnaires of the other two classes reveal that more learners disliked the topic, which they found boring, and that there was too much of the *Storyline* (amount per day and number of weeks). The dislike of the topic and the sense of time dragging are understandably connected, which leads to this, rather obvious, conclusion: intensity of exposure to the L2 may contribute to language development (Nikolov, 2009), but only where the learners are enjoying their work. Since I was not present at any time in the non-study classrooms, I cannot account for the responses here, but it is interesting to speculate whether or not the results would have been different if the younger and older learners had been mixed, as in the study class. Nevertheless, I draw the conclusion that the *Storyline* approach is most likely to have a positive

impact on learning where the topic appeals to the interests of the learners, provides challenge for all, and support for those who require it.

6.3 THE POTENTIAL OF THE *STORYLINE* APPROACH FOR THE YOUNG LEARNER CLASSROOM

SLA researchers working in a sociocultural theoretical perspective argue that social context and affect are significant factors in the language learning process, namely that a warm and supportive atmosphere fosters self-confidence which contributes to the development of a positive self-image and motivation with which learning is linked. This is indicated in the words of Lr12: *Have got braver at speaking in front of the class just because no one laughs at me when I say something wrong. They didn't before either **but now I know*** (my emphasis). This learner's subsequent advice to herself is *not to give up*.

Regarding language development, that which receives most comment in the learners' data is that of *new words*. This is important in two respects: one is with regard to the syllabus goal that learners learn about life in an English-speaking country. When learners do this via a textbook it is often a meeting with facts, but when they meet the culture in the course of a *Storyline* it is through the experience of creating and acting as another person in that context. For example, if the learner's school-age *Storyline* character is created wearing a uniform, and/or if the learner wears an appropriate accessory, such as a particular item of clothing during every *Storyline* lesson, then a fact (that British children wear uniform) becomes an experience, which can be compared and contrasted with the learner's own life. In this way learners acquire cultural

knowledge as they acquire the language through which the culture is expressed.

Secondly, the learners' sense of knowing new words is important from a motivational perspective (Read, 2007). Researchers into vocabulary acquisition argue for the need to recycle and that learners should meet words in different contexts, both receptively and productively. It is also argued that much vocabulary learning is incidental (Malmberg, 2000). When working with a *Storyline* topic in English the learners encounter and are required to use lexis which is core to the topic in different ways, some of which are incidental, throughout the period of the topic. In this way vocabulary is recycled.

However, there is a correlation between attention paid to words and their retention (Nikolov, 2009), which suggests that recycling alone is not enough. Attention paid may be dependent on interest level, the need for the information or both. That the learners did learn many new words is seen in the high level of retention of 124 words after the study. This was not a scientific test. Some words may have been known by some learners before the *Storyline*, the learners were not required to use the words in context. Nevertheless, the results in almost all cases showed a higher level of retention when measured (by the teachers) against the learner's usual performance on vocabulary tests. I believe this reflects both reasons named above, namely interest and/or necessity, for why attention might be paid. The learners contributed actively during brainstorming (some because they were required to, others because they had much to say); words elicited were listed on the whiteboard, and in cases where

the L2 was not known the L1 item written instead, then later translated by the learners working in pairs. Active listening was also required when the teachers gave information, during which time the learners encountered English words incidentally. That the learners were conscious of paying attention is seen in journal comments about *having to* listen because the information was important, or simply because there were so many in the classroom. This in turn can be linked with the fact that the learners were actively engaged in the developing story and therefore motivated to make the effort required to listen. When the teachers comment, by way of explaining the high level of retention, that the learners *have lived with these words*, this refers not only to the frequency with which many words were encountered, but literally, that the words became a part of the world in which the learner as a character was living.

During the *Storyline* a large number of words concerning aspects of *sustainability* were either introduced explicitly, elicited from the learners in either L2 or L1 and where necessary, translated, and also met incidentally. These words subsequently provided a resource for both speaking and writing tasks. Common lexical errors, as displayed in their writing, were sometimes brought to the attention of the class (e.g. incorrect spellings of *with* and *were*). There was, however, no explicit grammar focus, though the tasks were designed to call for the use of certain structures. The aim was consolidation and the learners had set themselves goals based on structures and functions they had worked with and with which they wished to feel more secure. It is important that the goals are expressed in the learners' own words (L1) and not copied from the syllabus, as appeared to be the case with some learners in my study. The consequence

of not writing in their own words is that they may not understand the meaning of the goals they have written and therefore be unable to decide if they have met them. This may be compounded, as in my study, by some learners not recognizing, for instance, that they are working with *listening* simply by being present and active in the class where English is spoken, or, even in the case of proficient learners, not realizing they are working with grammar when they construct a letter. Learners would therefore benefit from a class discussion early in the *Storyline* about what it means to learn and how we know we have learnt something. This is in line with the view in the literature regarding the importance of setting and evaluating learning goals (e.g. Williams and Burden, 1996; Dörnyei, 2001; Strandberg, 2008). The advantage of having the discussion once the *Storyline* has started is that learners have something to which they can relate.

Within this framework each *Storyline* task may be preceded by a whole-class review of the structure targeted in the task. The consensus in the literature is that young learners benefit from knowing what, how and why a task is to be done. Such a review might especially benefit the less proficient, who may find model sentences helpful, not least because this would also provide a content resource for what they should write about. At the same time there is a risk that in being asked to focus on a certain structure, the learners' freedom of expression is inhibited and that they do not therefore display the features of interlanguage development, such as the attempts at subordination or structures not yet encountered, examples of which occur in the writing of some learners in my study. For this reason I would suggest that while structures may, on

occasion, be reviewed pre-task, at other times grammar should be allowed to emerge from the task (Nunan, 2005). Where writing is concerned this would mean, for instance, that once the teacher has corrected a piece of writing targeting the *past simple*, the structure is then reviewed in class, after which the learners make corrections to just that structure. This could be followed by another task eliciting use of the same structure. Thus the *Storyline* provides opportunities both for consolidation and interlanguage development. This is an important consideration for the following reason: extended writing may be neglected in the classroom from a belief that *speaking* or *grammar* should have priority in the limited available time. However, this overlooks the fact that some learners learn by writing. Therefore, although a targeted structure may still be beyond the current developmental level of lower proficiency learners, the meaningful context may help to mediate understanding and so facilitate learning. Parallels can be drawn here with L1 contexts. With regard to developing L1 speaking and writing skills, Arnold stresses the importance of 'an engaging and dynamic environment' (1991:5). Similar arguments are made with regard to L2, namely that young language learners learn best when their attention is focused on meaning and when engaged in experiences with which they can identify (Bloor, 1991). If learners can identify cognitively or emotionally then they are likely to have something to say; if they can express it in L1, this provides a better basis for understanding and learning in L2 than a de-personalized explanation or textbook exercise. As Wright (2009) notes, learners learn the language by experiencing it, not by learning about it.

With regard to primary age learners, the explicit teaching of grammar is deemed unsuitable (e.g. Malmberg, 2000) and may contribute to loss of motivation, which research shows can occur as learners approach puberty (Nikolov, 2009). At the same time, Nikolov notes that more able learners may be better served by decontextualized tasks, but does not explain why this may be the case. The results of my study show the *Storyline* topic to be popular with learners of all proficiency levels and considered by them to have a positive effect on learning development. Nevertheless, where learners might benefit from the kind of decontextualized language focus which Nikolov seems to be advocating is where they are developing an analytical capacity. This explicit focus can be considered to complement what learners of this age continue to learn holistically. On the other hand, it seems to me to be more a question of learning style than proficiency: decontextualized tasks may be preferred by those who need an explicit focus in order to see what they are to supposed to be learning. The two (less proficient Y5) learners who were identified by the teachers (interview) as likely to benefit from a tighter structure both reported (in journals, interview and post-*Storyline* questionnaire) that they had enjoyed working with and had learnt from their *Storyline* work, though in the case of one (Lr2) the enjoyment was muted by the recurrence of conflicts within the group (Group 1).

As Swan (2005) observes, no one way of working suits everyone, hence the need for variety. I know of no examples where teachers use only the *Storyline* approach in their classrooms, despite its popularity with young learners. There are sound reasons for this: if it becomes over-familiar, it may lose its appeal and therefore the benefits it offers; for teachers, planning and executing a *Storyline*

topic requires a considerable amount of time, effort and energy; not least, although there are opportunities for individual work, the learners work predominantly in small groups. While many, notably the less proficient, benefit from the group support, while all certainly benefit developmentally from learning to collaborate and while many of all proficiency levels enjoy the social interaction inherent in group work, there are those who prefer to work alone and in quieter conditions than are possible in the *Storyline* classroom.

6.4 CONCLUSION AND LOOKING AHEAD

The Swedish national curriculum stresses the need for teachers to take into consideration and respond to learner differences. While proficiency differences can be catered for in the *Storyline* approach, differences in personality regarding preferred ways of learning are harder to take into account. In my opinion, the *Storyline* approach can have most benefit when used once a term for a period of about four weeks and for one to two hours each day, depending on the age of the learners and the types of task involved at each stage of the story.

It is my view that the *Storyline* framework is able to create conditions in which declarative knowledge can become procedural in both the written and spoken language, and in which oral and written fluency can develop. I would recommend a pre-task focus on lexical content with some sample, illustrative, sentences elicited from the class. Focus on structure should occur post-task, with more attention to accuracy with older learners. I believe that all learners can benefit from knowing what aspects of language the *Storyline* topic is

designed to practise, from setting goals in relation to these aspects and from evaluating them. In addition, some learners may benefit from the following: being told in advance about a particular task, being given lists of lexis instead of copying from the board (and where there is copying the accuracy of this should be checked in the work of all learners), being given additional written support, and fewer words to note down in order that they do not feel overwhelmed. Finally, there should be clear delineation of the respective roles of L1 and L2 for all learners.

A *Storyline* topic as described above can meet Swedish policy recommendations: it can provide conditions in which young learners are comfortable speaking English and in which they can practise aspects of the language, such as the alphabet, which are otherwise neglected (Skolverket, 2010); it provides for vocabulary to be taught in context and creates communicative opportunities in the classroom (Skolverket, 2004). Not least, it incorporates skills other than language skills and allows individual learners to work at their own level while pushing them to go beyond it, so creating conditions in which a positive self-image can be fostered.

As regards future research, three aspects particularly interest me. One concerns the role of the teacher in the *Storyline* classroom, a role in which the teacher is less instructor, as in the traditional classroom, and more facilitator. Carless (2008) observes that the skills required by a teacher in TBLT are different from those used in traditional language teaching; the same point can be made regarding the *Storyline* teacher. The issue is important because quality

of teaching has been identified as a key factor in young learner second language acquisition (e.g. Mihaljevic Djigunovic, Nikolov and Otto, 2008). A second area of interest concerns the possibilities of a *Storyline* topic for older language learners, particularly those demotivated by traditional teaching methods, in which different kinds of art work can be integrated. Many of the older learners in my study reported a preference for making models of characters and homes, as they had in the pilot study. It is possible to design practical tasks, integral to the story, which are closely linked to the syllabus for English, for secondary level learners also. The third area of possible future research concerns the strategic use of L1 for facilitating acquisition of L2. Noting that even beginners can switch code in the way that bilinguals outside a classroom do, Dailey-O'Cain and Liebsher (2009) observe that a sociocultural framework is well suited to such research since it emphasizes both cognitive and human interaction.

In my study a number of uses for L1 have been identified: it allows learners to manage their relationships, the task, and lexis; it bridges gaps in communication and keeps everyone involved by mediating understanding. It therefore serves an important function both socially and in facilitating learning. But it must be stipulated in any classroom when the use of L1 is allowed and why. In my study the aim was to provide fluency practice and to enable the learners to consolidate and proceduralize existing knowledge. They were supposed to use English as the working language. While some, and not only the more proficient, would have been willing to do this, it soon became clear that others were less willing and/or able to do so and that the L1 played a dominant role in learner

interaction. However, what was initially a disappointment became an opportunity for studying the many beneficial aspects of L1 use in the L2 classroom, which, during the time I have been working on this study have been increasingly recognized (e.g. Dailey-O'Cain and Liebsher, 2009).

At the same time, it would also be interesting to investigate what happens when only L2 is allowed. Throughout the literature the question of age recurs, the loss of motivation from around age 10 and the increasing reluctance to speak English which accompanies the onset of puberty. The truth in this was brought home to me when, just after completing the study, I was asked by the teacher of a Y3-4 at the school to help her do a simpler version of the same topic (without sustainability) with the Y4s (age 10). It was striking how eager these learners always were to speak in the whole class forum, but the biggest difference between the younger learners and my study class was that many groups (Y4) continued to speak English when discussing the task out of the teacher's presence. These sessions, at one hour, were shorter than those in the study (though the *Storyline* topic lasted the same length of time). The challenge then is to ensure that older learners, who are generally more proficient but often less willing, take every opportunity to use the spoken language, and it may be that a requirement for learners to speak only English for the life of the *Storyline* is one solution. After all, learners in my study attributed their development in speaking and listening partly to *having to* do so. This requirement would benefit those of all proficiencies who are willing to speak English but who give up when others use L1.

I would like to conclude by returning to Read's C wheel (2007) of features considered necessary in young learner language education, displayed as segments of a wheel with the child at its hub. These features are: *communication, creativity, curiosity, cohesion, community, care, challenge, connections, and context*. The C-wheel reflects a holistic view of learning, and I would like to suggest that its segments are also key features of the *Storyline* approach for the reasons that follow.

A *Storyline* topic provides a *context* in which young learners individually and in groups work *creatively* with many opportunities for spoken and written *communication*. In the story framework a range of practical and language-based tasks intended to *challenge* the learner within their ZPD are carried out. This framework, in which the tasks serve the purpose of developing the story, provides *cohesion*, enabling learners to see *connections* between concepts, words and grammatical structures, and to combine new with existing knowledge. The homogeneous nature of the groups in the story and the amount of work which the learners do within the group creates a sense of *community*, which is seen in the popularity of group work and references to the family. In my study group work was most popular where the learners co-operated and supported each other in accomplishing the task. Perhaps the key word here is *care*: caring about each other and each other's work, caring about the story and the people in it. Without this there is no *curiosity* and consequently no engagement, which the literature on young language learners places at the heart of the learning process.

APPENDIX 1

Hallo again from Sharon!

Now you have finished *Storyline* I would like to know what you think about it and what you have learnt. Please answer the following questions.

Here are some of the things you did in *Storyline*. Underline the 5 which you liked best.

Working in groups	Working with a 'made up' world
Making things	Doing different things every day
Not using a textbook	Writing a reflective journal
Reading in English	Writing in English
Speaking in English	Role play
Working on your own	Using your imagination

Have I forgotten anything you liked? Write it here -----

What did you like best about working with *Storyline*? Please say why.

Is there any part of *Storyline* you did not like?

Please turn over

Now think about how easy or hard the following are:

Example: If you think writing in English is quite easy, mark as I have done

	Easy			Hard
	-----	--x--	-----	-----
	Easy			Hard
Understanding spoken English	-----	-----	-----	-----
Speaking English	-----	-----	-----	-----
Reading and understanding a text in English	-----	-----	-----	-----
Writing a short text in English	-----	-----	-----	-----

Please turn over

How has working with *Storyline* helped you learn English?

How has working with *Storyline* not helped you learn English?

(Your answer is very important for me so please write as much as you can).

THANK YOU!

APPENDIX 2

Table 7: Summary of Data Collection Timetable - 2009

13 January	Pre-Storyline questionnaire administered
19 January – 26 February	Classroom observations carried out
27 February	The learners reflect for the last time in their journals
2 March	The learners write their evaluations for the teachers
5 March	Post-Storyline questionnaires administered
10 March	Teacher interviews conducted
11 March	Six learner interviews conducted
13 March	The learners answer the three extra questions in their journals
19 March	The remaining two learner interviews conducted; video and digital recordings made of two Storyline tasks.

APPENDIX 3

PERMISSION FOR DOCUMENTATION WITH DIGITAL CAMERA

TO THE PARENT/GUARDIAN OF _____

During the spring term 2008 the pupils now in year 6 took part in Storyline *The Circus* in their English lessons. They created circus artists who went on a European tour. This involved speaking and writing in English as well as practical work. The project was evaluated positively by the children.

I work as a teacher and teacher trainer at University College Kristianstad. I am also studying for a doctoral degree at the University of Leicester, where my subject is Storyline and second language learning.

The classes in years 5-6 are going to work with Storyline again this term and I have permission from the head teacher and class teachers to study the work. The children will be asked to complete a questionnaire both before and after the Storyline. I will also observe and take pictures, and interview some of the children. The interviews will be recorded.

All the material is confidential and will be used only by me in connection with my studies. Neither the teachers nor the children will be named. The photographs will not appear on the internet.

Please contact me if you have any questions.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Regards

sharon.ahlquist@loberod.com

CHILD'S NAME: -----

I give permission for my child to be photographed Yes No

I give permission for my child to be interviewed Yes No

Parent's Signature -----

APPENDIX 4

Extracts from observation notes

Extract 1: Monday 26 January (Week 2):

9.30-9.40 (the week's planning has taken up till now)

Missing Lrs4, 28, 12, 18, 19

Sitting by Group 1

T2 tells them to put on their accessories and they should speak English.

Get out the list of car words. T2 shows them an outline of a car – one person to do this, another to do a drawing of the family car and another to do a small sign of the family name. There is no task for the fourth person. Half the groups have someone missing – one group has two. Any questions?

Lr5: hur många bilar? (*how many cars?*). T2 tells them only one. They get one minute to decide who does what. Lr1 says what he will do, then Lrs2 and 3 have to do what is left. Lr1 offers *sten sax påse* as a way of deciding (*rock, scissors, bag*). T1 then does eeny meeny miny mo and both girls accept that. Lrs2 and 3 carry on a few minutes though it is break.

In the break I find out that evaluations will be done on Friday to allow more time for SL. The teachers ask if this matters to me; it doesn't, only that it was interesting to see how easily and how much they remembered when this was done on Thursday. Will have to find this out some other way. The *people* words have to be learnt for Thursday and *Spotlight* character descriptions given in on Wednesday. Slips (for interview and photo permission) handed in again –Lr17 has a no and the teachers think this is probably him rather than his parents.

10.00

Lr3 continues with her drawing, Lr2 the sign. Both T1 and T2 see that Lr3 is drawing a proper car and not the outline she should be drawing but they let it go.

Lrs9, 10, 11 seem to be doing little. Lr12 asks T1 a question beginning 'When I' but then goes into Swedish. Then she tells T1 'I don't know how to write the car' in English.

Lr3 has not begun writing the words onto the car yet yet and is reminded by Lr1 to do so. T2 explains again in Swedish.

Lr12 again asks about drawing the car, in English.

Everybody seems to be working (I am still by the group by the door) and the room is quiet.

There has not been a discussion of the family car so this is the decision of the one drawing, which is a shame.

Lr6 checks with Lr7 how they should write the words.

I hear Lr10 say `hur stavas man 4?` (*how do you spell 4?*), asks Lr9 then asks Lr11 to get a dictionary. Lr10 checks a word from the dictionary with T1.

10.10

They get 10 mins for the next stage – put down pencils. T1 tells them in E. The families are going to introduce themselves, without notes. Time to prepare who says what and also about the car. T2 tells them that they should have a question for the audience to answer. I overheard one person at the bottom table, as I was walking round looking at the work, realise, to T2, why this was – so they would listen. As always the children ask their questions in Swedish and the teachers answer in English.

Lr1 says `jag kan börja (*we can start*) We are the Eastons så kan du säga (*you can say, We are the Eastons*) to Lr2 – she reads from her paper, no one says anything to Lr3. Then Lr1 says `du kan säga vem du är` (*you can say who you are*) and begins a trial run. Lr2 says her bit without looking at the paper. She glances at me and I nod and smile back. Lr3 is so quiet I can't hear her. Lr1 says `this is our car`. He says `I'm Anthony Easton` but he's reading from the paper. Lr3: `vad ska jag säga` (*what shall I say?*) and she waves the car picture around. She says her character's name and age and shrugs. I can't hear the details though I'm sitting so close. The fact that Lr4's chair is still up doesn't help. This seems to be a practice not to take down chairs of those who are absent – don't know how the teachers put up with it. I couldn't on English day. T2 reminds this group to have a question – Lr1 understands but the girls don't and he explains in Swedish. Lr1 comes up with `What's her name?` indicating Lr2.

The bay table group closest are interested in Lr3's self-portrait – it is good, she has a talent.

10.27

Half the class – 4 tables nearest the door – go to the art room until 10.45 when there is another class. T1 takes down the extra chairs and tells them to turn around so they can see each other. The families are to stand by the window as they do the intros.

Lrs 13, 14, 15, 16

Lrs 5,6,7

Lrs 1, 2, 3

Lrs 9, 10, 11

T1 helps Lr16 get something ready to say.

Lr7 starts but he is reading from his paper, the back of the portrait. Even Lr6 (bilingual) does this, and Lr5. Little eye contact, therefore. They introduce the missing grandma. Lr7 talks about the family car – or rather he reads all the words off the outline. T1 thanks them and asks if they have a pet. Lrs5 and 6 improvise by talking about their rather wacky grandma who is at a disco right now. T1 asks them what question they have for the audience – Lr5 gets the point and asks Lr7 what to ask – about his hair

colour. Lr10 points out they can see this from the portrait. Lr1 wonders about their ages and relationships. He tells Lr7 in English 'You're their dad, you are X (one girl) and you're X (the other) so you got her when you were 14? He has misheard an age.

Lr9 introduces herself again from the paper and the problem is that they say 'My hair colour and my eye colour' Lr11 does manage 'I have blue eyes' but then talks about hair colour. All use the paper. They mention who is missing. Lr11 talks about the car without looking at the paper. Question? What is the twins' name?' says Lr10. Lr1 answers wrongly. Lrs13 and 14 say they couldn't hear because the presenters were laughing (in Swedish). Interesting that apart from this bit of giggling there is little sign of embarrassment or awkwardness.

Lrs 13,14,15,16. Lr15 reads from his paper and the audience asks what he said. Lr1 repeats it. Most stick to name, eye and hair colour. Lr13 adds the pets she has. They put the question to the groups but at this point we have to let the next class in and this continues in the big class. How old are our grandfathers? Lr1 raises his hand but Lr10 answers and Lr1 tells her to raise her hand.

Lr1's group has to present in front of everyone but it seems OK. They all read off the paper and Lr3 can hardly be heard. Lr2 tries without the paper and then Lr1 talks about the car. Question: What's her name? Hands shoot up eagerly eg Lrs5, 20, 29

10.45

They put things away in the family box. T1 tells them it is time for something completely different. On the flipchart she writes a long list of the types of buildings that they know in Swedish. Lr1 (twice), Lrs7,11,14, 21,22, 23, 24 (twice, clicking his fingers out of eagerness), 25, 29. There is still no whiteboard but it is hard to see where it would go.

10.55

T2 takes over – they are to make a new list of the buildings with the English equivalents. They all go for the dictionaries. 12 mins for this. Lrs1 and 2 have a dictionary each and work independently, starting at the top of the list.

Lr7 asks if they should write in order. Lr3 writes out the list in Swedish, asks Lr1 when he finds *cottage* – hur stavas det? (*how do you spell that?*). He doesn't reply, maybe doesn't hear. He goes on to the next. T2 asks some to start from the bottom of the list – Lr15 says they have. I wonder if anyone has started from the middle – will ask if anyone had a strategy. Lr1 spells *cottage* for Lr3 (in Swedish).

Lrs17 and 20 are the only ones in their group and are working on their own either side of the desk.

Lr11 uses the dictionary but Lr10 is helping, Lr9 is doing her portrait.

Lr3 asks T2 for a dictionary, which she gets.

Lrs23, 29 and 32 leave and come back just before lunch – went to get something, not sure what.

T2 puts up portraits. Can't see how they will get all this on the frieze.

11.05

T1 tells them to finish what they are writing, The builders are hammering above us. The group at the bottom can't possibly see the flipchart.

T2 asks if they have found words they didn't know (they could also add to the list on the flipchart. Lr7: hen house, Lr25, shed; Lr17, block of flats

T1 – they get a map and have to work out where they are. Someone asks in England? They are told to take off the accessories, they are in their home village. T2 tells them to find where they are now (school) and they do and then work through the others – it takes a while to get to 'doctor' and no one knows *health centre*. Lr21 (*baker's*), Lr14 (*flower* – Lr1 chips in with *shop*), T2 gives them *estate agency*, Lr15 (*supermarket*), lots of hands up for *pizzeria* (Lr5), Lr21 (*bank*), T2 gives them *petrol station*. Lr24 knows the word *zebra*, T2 gives them *crossing*. We come back to this tomorrow.

Slips needed for Lrs 3, 8, 14, 20

Extract 2: 3 February (Week 3): 1 pm [presentation of the IKEA poster]

T2: put on your accessories

[asks Tysons if their pictures are on the poster yet – they have forgotten to put the prices on and will do this on Friday]

[T1 asks the Smiths]

Lr11: vi har inte presenterat (we haven't presented)

Lr10: jag vet ingenting (I don't know anything) [Lr10 was absent when they did this]

Lr11: we bought a bed, it cost two hundred and thirty pounds, jag vill inte berätta (I don't want to say it)

Lr12: this is a mat and it is white and it is round [T2 helps her with 'round']

T2: what else did you buy?

Lr12: a bedside table

T2: did you spend all your money?

Lrs 11 and 12: no

T2: what are you saving for?

Lr11: I don't know

Extract 3: 10 February (Week 4) 8.06 am:

[Lr11 spells out a word to Lr10 – they have both the dictionaries, are using gel pens and I am not sure the words can be seen]

Lr10 to Lr12 (in L1): you look something up and write it

APPENDIX 5

Journal extract of the evaluation of Week 3 followed by translation of the questions and the learner's (Lr13) answers in italics

w 3	story line
1	Nej jag har inte riktigt nåt målen jag skrev upp, men jag vet att jag kan träna på dom kan jag träna på hemma.
2	Det jag gillade var när vi var indelade i åldrar och gjorde poster det var roligt för att det är roligt att vara med andra än bara sin familj.
3	Jag gillade inte så mycket mötet det var rätt så långtråkigt men jag att vi fick kaker
4	Jag tycker att jag har blivit bättre på att skriva och prata men jag vet inte varför.
5	När jag ska gå till skolan på morgnarna så känns det roligt om jag tänker på story line.

Think about the goals you set before you started *Storyline*. Have you reached them? If not how are you going to do this?

No, I haven't quite reached the goals I set, but I know that I can practise them at home.

What part of *Storyline* have you liked most this week?

What I liked was when we were divided into age groups and made a poster, it was fun because it's fun to be with others than just your family.

What have you not liked?

I didn't like the meeting much, it was quite boring but we got some biscuits.

Do you think you have got better at any part of English since you started *Our Street*. If so, why do you think this is?

I think I've got better at writing and speaking but I don't know why.

When you get ready for school in the morning and you know you are going to do *Storyline*, how do you feel?

When I go to school in the morning it feels good if I think about Storyline.

APPENDIX 6

Extract from transcript of interview with the teachers (SA are my initials)

SA: The proficient map drawers were disappointed with their version and wanted the original. This is consistent with the effort they put into their drawings of various kinds but it contrasts with how easily they gave up on the reading task (mobile phone). Why do you think this is?

T2: My first reflection was that what you draw and are creative with, and what is going to be put up, it's that you are careful with. That was my first thought

T1: Email, we had a nice template and so it was written more nicely than on normal lined paper, and Spotlight on Us, they knew it was going to be rewritten so they didn't bother so much about it. But then I think we said specially that the long letter was supposed to be nicely written (from the beginning) because it is better than the others

T2: I've thought a lot about how at school over the years we don't emphasize enough that being neat is actually important, and also we live in a paper society, so that in a way paper isn't important, it is important but you don't bother about it

T1: We saw that when we were going to put the papers all together

T2: Then the frieze wasn't so important when we took everything down

T1: Some of them are really careful about putting things in plastic folders and in their files. Some. (Referring to others adds *Do I have to take it?*)

T2: *Can I throw it away?* (still referring to the less careful learners)

T1: *Do I have to file it?* and so on

SA: So it's a question of personality?

T2: Yes, or a question of attitude, not just individual but some kind of general attitude it seems – Ah (shrugging to represent the lack of importance of paper)

SA: What difference did it make for you doing this *Storyline* in one big class? What difference do you think it made for the pupils?

T1: Yes, we talked a bit about the presentations in the beginning, if it would take a long time, but most of the things we did anyway in one big group. I think it went well. Yes, it was good, most of the presentations went well. But everything takes longer

T2: It was surprisingly good anyway that they managed to keep their concentration. We talked about it and I didn't see it as a problem

T1: We divided up some of the presentations, from one day to another

T2: Then it was the case for the pupils but also for us that it takes more energy when there are many and I think the children also felt this

T1: I think so. We felt it. Then it gave us the chance to divide up the groups in different ways. That was good even if the group left with one teacher was still rather large

T2: If you can pick out one group for one or another reason –

T1 comes in: Sometimes we took out the less proficient

SA: Previously you have done *Storyline* in English with either the year 5s or 6s but not both together. What difference has it made having the two together?

T1: Well –

T2: I think that the younger ones benefit from the knowledge of the older ones

(T1 agrees)

T2: And they are pushed to perform

T1: Especially the 5s who are quite strong, I think they benefitted, I'm thinking of Lr19. The 5s don't have the vocabulary. We talked with C (who teaches in this year group and who had the other two classes of year 5s together) and she found this. Last time round she had the 6s.

SA: But if we took out the sustainable development and had a normal street of families, that would work?

T2: Yes, but on the other hand I can say that the sustainable development was also the challenge that the stronger pupils never get, I shouldn't say never, but very rarely, in order to take one, two or even three steps forward (T1 agrees). In reality you spend your time and energy on the weaker ones

T1: Yes

T2: Even in a group where they are the same age you have an ability span, though not so great, and it's this subject that is less familiar to them than house and home that provides the challenge

T1: I agree

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