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**TURNING THE KALEIDOSCOPE - (E)FL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE AND
INQUIRY AS AUTO/BIOGRAPHY**

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Abstract

This book is a study on learning, teaching/counselling, and research on the two. My quest has been to find a pedagogically-motivated way of researching learning and teaching interaction, and in particular counselling, in an autonomous language-learning environment. I have tried to develop a method that would make room for lived experience, meaning-making and narrating, because in my view these all characterise learning encounters between language learners and counsellors, and learners and their peers. Lived experience as a source of meaning, telling and co-telling becomes especially significant when we try to listen to the diverse personal and academic voices of the past as expressed in autobiographical narratives. I have aimed at researching various ALMS¹ dialogues, and autobiographical narratives within them, in a way that shows respect for the participants, and that is relevant, reflective and, most importantly, self-reflexive. My interest has been in autobiographical telling in (E)FL², both in students' first-person written texts on their language-learning histories and in the sharing of stories between learners and a counsellor.

I have turned to narrative inquiry in my quest and have written the thesis as an experiential narrative. In particular, I have studied learners and counsellors in one and the same story, as characters in one narrative, in an attempt to avoid the impression that I am telling yet another separate, anecdotal story, retrospectively. Through narrative, I have shed light on the subjective dimensions of language learning and experience, and have come closer to understanding the emotional aspects of learning encounters. I have questioned and rejected a distanced and objective approach to describing learning and teaching/counselling. I have argued for a holistic and experiential approach to (E)FL encounters in which there is a need to see emotion and cognition as intertwined, and thus to appreciate learners' and counsellors' emotionally-charged experiences as integral to their identities. I have also argued for a way of describing such encounters as they are situated in history, time, autobiography, and the learning context.

¹ Autonomous Learning Module, University of Helsinki Language Centre English course and programme. The programme's homepage is at <http://www.helsinki.fi/kksc/alms>.

² (English as a) Foreign Language. After a careful consideration and prompted by Flávia Vieira in her pre-examiner comments I have decided to use the abbreviation (E)FL to talk about learning, teaching, counselling and inquiry into these in foreign language education..

I have turned my gaze on various constellations of lived experience: the data was collected on various occasions and in various settings during one course and consists of videotaped group sessions, individual counselling sessions between students and their group counsellor, biographic narrative interviews with myself, open-ended personally-inspired reflection texts written by the students about their language-learning histories, and student logs and diaries. I do not consider data collection an unproblematic occasion, or innocent practice, and I defend the integrity of the research process. Research writing cannot be separated from narrative field work and analysing and interpreting the data. The foci in my work have turned to be the following:

- 1) describing ALMS encounters and specifying their narrative aspects;
- 2) reconceptualising learner and teacher autonomy in ALMS and in (E)FL;
- 2) developing (E)FL methodologically through a teacher-researcher's identity work;
- 4) research writing as a dialogical narrative process, and the thesis as an experiential narrative.

Identity and writing as inquiry, and the deeply narrative and autobiographical nature of the (E)FL teaching/counselling/researching have come to the fore in this research. Research writing as a relational activity and its implications for situated ways of knowing and knowledge turned out to be important foci. I have also focussed on the context-bound and local teacher knowledge and ways of knowing about being a teacher, and I have argued for personal ways of knowing about, and learning and studying foreign languages. I discuss research as auto/biography: as a practising counsellor I use my own life and (E)FL experience to understand and interpret the stories of the research participants even though I was not involved in their course work. The supposedly static binaries of learner/teacher, and also learner autonomy/teacher autonomy, are thus brought into the discussion. I have highlighted the infinite variability and ever-changing nature of learning and teaching English, but the book is also of relevance to foreign language education in general.

Tiivistelmä

Väitöskirjani on sekä tutkimus- että opetusteksti, jossa kirjoitan (E)FL³-opetuksesta, oppimisesta, ohjauksesta (counselling) ja näiden tutkimisesta. Työssäni haen pedagogisesti perusteltavissa olevaa tapaa tutkia yhtäältä opettajan/ohjaajan ja oppijan ja toisaalta oppijoiden keskinäisiä kohtaamisia autonomisessa kielenoppimisympäristössä. Kehittelen tutkimusmetodia, jossa kokemus, merkityksenanto ja kertominen ovat läsnä. Tarkastelen aiempia oppimiskokemuksia ja niistä kertomista ja pohdin menneen merkityksiä ohjaukseskusteluissa ja muissa oppimistilanteissa ALMS-kurssilla⁴. Haen reflektiivistä ja itserefleksiivistä tapaa lähestyä autobiografista kerrontaa kielenoppimisen ja -opiskelun kontekstissa. Pohdin myös (E)FL-tutkimukseen liittyviä metodologisia ja eettisiä kysymyksiä.

Väitöskirja on kirjoitettu kokemuksellisen narratiivin muotoon. Tarkastelen oppijoita ja opettajaa/ohjaajaa (counsellor) saman kertomuksen henkilöinä. Tällä pyrin välttämään erillisten, vain yhden osapuolen retrospektiivisten merkityksenantojen tuottaman ongelman. Narratiivisuus mahdollistaa oppimistilanteisiin liittyvien subjektiivisten ja emotionaalisten kokemusten kuvaamisen. Olen kyseenalaistanut ja päätenyt hylkäämään etäännyttävän ja objektiivisen tavan kuvata oppimista, opettamista ja ohjausta. Haluan tuoda esiin holistisen ja kokemuksellisen lähestymistavan kielenopetuksessa ja tutkimuksessa. Tässä lähestymistavassa emotio ja kognitio kietoutuvat toisiinsa ja opettajien ja oppijoiden kokemukset kuvataan olennaisena osana heidän identiteettiään. (E)FL on aikaan ja paikkaan sidottua, se liittyy aina ihmisen (oppimis)elämäkertaan ja kulloiseenkin oppimis- ja opetustilanteeseen.

Käytän aineistonani videoituja ryhmä- ja yksilötapaamisia, narratiivis-elämäkerrallisia haastatteluja, minämuotoisia oppimishistorioita, sekä oppimislokeja ja -päiväkirjoja. Tarkastelen aineiston keruuta eettisesti kompleksisena prosessina, joka kietoutuu yhteen narratiivisen analysoinnin ja tulkinnan kanssa. Teoreettiset ja metodologiset sekä eettiset pohdinnat kulkevat läpi koko tutkimuksen ja kirjoittuvat työn eri osiin.

Kokemukset kuvioituvat työssä aina uusiksi ja erilaisiksi yhdistelmiksi. Päädyn kuvaamaan ALMS-kohtaamisia ja määrittelemään kuvaukseni narratiivisia aspekteja. Kehittelen opettajan autonomian

³ (English as a) Foreign Language. Lyhenne kattaa englannin ja vieraat kielet yleisemminkin suomalaisessa kielikasvatustilanteissa sekä näiden opettamisen, oppimisen, ohjauksen ja tutkimisen..

⁴ Autonomous Learning Modules, Helsingin yliopiston kielikeskuksen englannin kurssi.

käsitettä suhteessa oppijan autonomiaan sekä ALMS-ympäristössä että yleisemmin (E)FL-kontekstissa. Lähestyn tutkimusta auto/biografisena ja dialogisena toimintana ja pohdin sen metodologista kehittämistä opettaja-tutkijan identiteettityön kautta. Tutkimuskirjoittaminen ja kokemusten kirjoittuminen kertomuksen muotoon nousevat keskiöön: kirjoittaminen näyttäytyy relationaalisena prosessina. Pohdin teoreettisia, metodologisia ja eettisiä kysymyksiä opettaja-tutkijan näkökulmasta ja päädyn opettajuuden ja tutkijuuden suhteen uudelleenarviointiin.

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This work has its beginnings in the many language learning and teaching encounters that I have had during my life. I want to express my gratitude especially to those people with whom I have had close encounters during the thesis process, but my heartfelt thanks also go to all and sundry who have contributed by telling their language learning stories in works of fiction, in newspapers, in magazines, in conferences and research texts, and on the buses.

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The pre-examiners of my thesis, Flávia Vieira and Terry Lamb, read the thesis with imaginative and experiential eyes in the way that I had asked of my readers. Their comments were invaluable when finalising the thesis and their reader reactions moved me to tears of joy: there were readers out there who understood.

The ALMS community has been my pedagogical and research haven for years. I owe more than I can ever begin to describe to my colleague and the founding mother of the ALMS programme Felicity Kjisik: her unwavering support and enthusiasm for my work helped me at moments when I was about to lose faith in it. I have had inspiring and memorable curricular discussions with my colleague Joan Nordlund over the years and in connection with this thesis: she figures as an important character in so many of my ALMS stories. Joan deserves a special thank you for going through a research process with me twice and for reading both theses with a sharp but friendly editing eye. The rest of the ALMS team deserves a hug: amongst other things they willingly helped me with my timetabling problems during the research time. The past and present generations of ALMS students, in particular Aino, Anne, Johanna, Juuso, Katja, Maria, Mia, Mike and Päivi made this thesis possible and gave me dialogic moments beyond any dreams and hopes I had at the beginning of my counsellor career.

The Language Centre and my many colleagues there all deserve a warm thank you for supporting me in their various ways. I thank the director of the Language Centre Ulla-Kristiina Tuomi for letting this thesis start the brand new series of the University of Helsinki Language Centre

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CONTENTS

Figures

Dear reader 1

PART A 4

THE STORY BEGINS 4

Initial positioning: my convictions and concerns 4

The structure and nature of the research report 9

Initial methodological and theoretical considerations and understandings 10

Complex methodological quest 10

Concepts in flux 14

Standing at the crossroads 25

An “is-when” story of the ALMS programme 26

The licentiate or the first chapter 30

On auto/biography in FLE research 35

A teacher-researcher’s intellectual and pedagogical autobiography 38

Kaleidoscope as a research metaphor 43

Finding a voice through writing 45

PART B 52

THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF ALMS STORIES 52

Story meets story 52

The kaleidoscope of research pattern 53

Data or field texts 55

Narrators in the stories, patterns and fragments of the kaleidoscope 61

Counsellor/researcher reflections 63

Kaleidoscope pattern one: Learner stories 68

Reading for learner voices 73

A neutral counsellor reading of the texts 82

Coda 83

Kaleidoscope pattern two: Counselling talk 85

My English, oh, my English 88

Kaleidoscope pattern three: Down Memory Lane 92

Down Memory Lane in November 95

Down Memory Lane, again	101
Our Fragile Stories	102
A curricular moment	106
Kaleidoscope pattern four: Interview talk	108
Preparing to interview	110
Here - and out there	113
A restless interview story	118
Kaleidoscope pattern five: Stories written and unwritten	129
Auto/biographies in (E)FL	132
The shadowed or unwritten ALMS stories	153
Reflective interlude	155
Kaleidoscope pattern six: Teacher memories	160
Kaleidoscope pattern seven: Emotions in focus	170
Kaleidoscope pattern eight: Autonomy and Auto/biography in focus	178
On the narratives in the kaleidoscope	183
PART C	187
WRITING INSIDE THE KALEIDOSCOPE: Kaleidoscope pattern nine	187
A writing story of EFL research as auto/biography	188
A little story about consent and confidentiality: ethical concerns	190
Research writing as a relationship	192
ALMS writing as a relationship	200
Finding a voice	205
My story to live by	209
“Looking for ourselves in others’ stories”	213
A short <i>currere</i> in ALMS	218
Whose story is it anyway?	220
Bibliography	225
Appendices	243
Appendix 1. Accompanying letter and pre-course questionnaire	243
Appendix 2. A few stories from my licentiate thesis	245

Figures

Figure 1. The spiral of action research	32
Figure 2. ALMS field texts	57
Figure 3. Narrators in the stories	62
Figure 4. One student's ALMS journey	66
Figure 5. Kaleidoscope pattern one: Learner stories	68
Figure 6. Kaleidoscope pattern two: Counselling talk	85
Figure 7. Kaleidoscope pattern three: Down Memory Lane	92
Figure 8. Kaleidoscope pattern four: Interview talk	108
Figure 9. Kaleidoscope pattern five: Stories written and unwritten	129
Figure 10. Kaleidoscope pattern six: Teacher memories	160
Figure 11. Kaleidoscope pattern seven: Emotions in focus	170
Figure 12. Kaleidoscope pattern eight: Autonomy and auto/biography in focus	178
Figure 13. Kaleidoscope pattern nine: Writing inside the kaleidoscope	187

Dear Reader,

During my early years as an English teacher at a Finnish university Language Centre I was engaged in introducing my students to various reading strategies on ESP and EAP⁵ courses. These were courses for what was in the 1980s and 1990s called ‘reading comprehension’, later ‘academic and professional reading skills’ for students in various faculties, excluding those majoring in foreign languages. For many students there was a novelty in learning to approach their study texts by using skimming, scanning and surveying techniques. The whole strategic reading behaviour and approach had a very prominent role in our courses.

The reading strategies taught at that time might not work with the work at hand. Skimming the section headings and the first and last sentences of paragraphs, and paying attention to the diagrams and tables might not be the best way to read it. It may be difficult to quickly pinpoint the one place in the text that gives the purpose and the aim of the research. This thesis is research, the meaning of which is in the reading. Moreover, the use of a personal approach, of implicating myself, my self (Suleiman Rubin 1994), in the writing is something that I did not teach my students to look for in the academic texts they had to read. On the contrary, the use of the passive was one of the structural points we studied in order to recognise it and understand the texts. The differences between the texts assigned to our students in the hard and soft sciences were not huge: qualitative research and articles in education, for example, were not the bread and butter of our students’ studies.

This is a study that does not seek to be comprehensive or objective. It speaks about (E)FL as blended knowing: there are numerous theoretical, conceptual, methodological, pedagogical, genre-related and metaphorical ‘blends’ it touches upon. One of these blends is teaching/counselling and research. This research text is also a teaching text in the sense that it breathes both, methodologically and theoretically. It aims to produce a multi-voiced and open-ended effect without claiming to know all that much better. It uses both theoretical and practical insights, and draws on the experiences of various participants in learning encounters, but also on texts by theorists and practitioners. It uses language that is at the interface of practice and theory. It aims at understanding but not at controlling and explaining away.

⁵ English for Specific Purposes and English for Academic Purposes.

Some of the readers of this work might find the overall research and researcher story interesting, and they might take the time to read through all three parts of it. This would be one way of tracing the development of my thinking, and also of appreciating the inter-narrativeness of the project. Each of the three parts, A, B and C, also tells an overall story of a certain time and thinking span, so they could be read separately. Part A describes the tentative beginnings of the research project and looks back in time, and Part B re-stories one episodic period in autumn 2004 during an ALMS course. Part C aims to pull together some of the loose ends from Parts A and B, focusing on the writing process and product and their relevance to the past, present and future of an ALMS counsellor or counsellor/researcher.

The writing in the thesis is restless in that it seeks a rhythm in learning encounters, the whole episodic language needed to describe teaching and learning in (E)FL. The aim is not to fully explain what happened: there is space for the reader to make her own conclusions. The text is not meant to be a recipe book either. There are no teaching ideas here to be quickly found and used in another language classroom. It nevertheless invites colleagues to read and vicariously experience some past, present and future encounters in (E)FL. Obviously, I have assumed that there will be other teachers and counsellors out there who share my concerns and engage in similar reflections. For others, the text is probably an example of Otherness, foreign and distant, not a story that could have been their own. These readers might nevertheless appreciate that Otherness, and thus expand their horizon of experience. I hope that at least an episode or two will ring true to each and everyone.

One other feature I should mention is the repetitiveness. It is partly intentional and has to do with the need to bring one and the same episode, fragment, story or idea into the kaleidoscope at various angles in order to highlight the constantly changing constellations of experience. It is also intentional in the sense that with some aspects of the work the need to understand the stories was more pressing than with others. So I kept going back to them. Partly, I admit, it may just be bad editing or being unable to kill one's darlings and I apologise for it.

Remember how it feels when somebody says they lived abroad and/or studied hard and now master language X? In Finnish we say: *Opin kielen/englannin*. Mastering, fully knowing, fully understanding and using with perfection have not been my goals. In fact, I share my hesitations, worries and questions, and only offer tentative answers. I do, however, get carried away at times

and work towards convincing my reader of the “betterness” of the path chosen. Those moments aside, this thesis, if anything, is about the possibility of knowing “otherwise”.

Like Phillion et al. (2005), I invite you to read this text with an experiential and an imaginative eye. I invite you to see, hear and feel, and to imagine *what if*. I would like to finish this dialogue with you with a quote from Saara’s ALMS learning diary. Saara⁶ called it ‘The Diary of Learning’, and as a continuation of our counselling conversation she wrote on the title page:

“All the stories that I promised to write are between the lines”.

⁶ I am deeply grateful to Saara, an ALMS student in spring 2008, for letting me use this quote. She wrote many stories about her ALMS journey in her diary; some of them need a very close reading with an experiential and imaginative eye in order to be appreciated.

PART A

THE STORY BEGINS

Initial positioning: my convictions and concerns

Why am I writing this? Why am I telling this story? Because I take telling a story to mean interpreting oneself and taking responsibility for what one does and how one interprets the doing. Teaching is a profession and a process laden with paradoxes and tensions. Being a teacher means struggling and coming to terms with constantly changing perceptions of teaching and learning but it also means much more. Teachers stand at the crossroads of the public and the private, the general and the particular, the actual and the potential, the practical and the theoretical (Witherell and Noddings 1991). Teachers need to take a stance on knowledge, but they cannot escape lived experience. Counselling in language learning is a didactic solution, the aim of which is to accommodate learner autonomy into a formal educational setting within institutional constraints. In itself, the concept of learner autonomy involves further paradoxes. Significant learning experiences seem to take place not in classrooms but outside, in real life. I am writing this because I have always been intrigued by my own role and identity as a language teacher and counsellor in the midst of these paradoxes. Of late, stories about teaching and teachers have given me food for thought more than ever before, and after looking for myself in others' stories (Ricoeur 1992, 122) I have written a teacher's story. Ricoeur (1984) states that narrating a story already means reflecting upon the event narrated. That is what this text is all about.

When I began my doctoral research I was intrigued by the fact that I had come across what I perceived as two different and separate sets of stories in the research literature and in my own professional experience: there were stories about and by teachers on the one hand, and about and by foreign-language learners on the other. They were all about the same place, the language classroom, but the learner stories and the teacher stories remained separate. Even when learning encounters and interaction were described, the focus was on either one participant or the other, and much more seldom on both or on the interaction between them. In particular, the jokes, memories, stories and texts about teachers often assigned them a very controversial and even inhuman role: they were

described as tyrants or witches, but also as angels or demigods (Oxford 2001, Turunen 2003 and Turunen and Kalaja 2004). These textual doubles troubled me.

I hoped and believed that language classrooms had changed from the times that Alice Kaplan (1993, 128-129) remembers:

There is nothing cruder, nothing simpler, in terms of pedagogic power than what goes on in a language classroom: listening, repeating, listening, spurred on by the sound and rhythm of someone else's voice, by mockery and desire for revenge. The language classroom is bare-bones pedagogy, the rawest pedagogical situation I have ever been in. A place where content means almost nothing and power, desire, provocation almost everything.

She paints a picture in which witches and demi-gods fit in nicely: the teacher is the one with the power and the skills. As we gradually moved from teacher-centred pedagogy towards more learner- and learning-centred approaches in the 1980s and 1990s we language teachers had, I believed, learnt to better understand our learners and the conditions that enhance learning, and even to make it rewarding and enjoyable. In order to understand ourselves and the approaches we had chosen to use, many of us had seen the need to engage in research based on our day-to-day teaching experience. Language learners' voices were definitely not missing from teacher-research, neither were the teachers' own voices, but there was an absence of research efforts in which both would come through infiltrated with the other. I also felt that research in (E)FL was rarely written using a reflexive researcher voice (for notable exceptions see Jaatinen 2003 and 2007, and Conle 1996). My inquiry started from an insecurity I felt when considering the separate stories I encountered, and in particular stories in which a teacher figure seemed to loom over all other influences and motivational factors. Moreover, my own at times very fragile teacher (and counsellor) identity was causing an inner urge to work out the tension that I experienced between my way of being a teacher and the image created in the learner stories in particular.

When I think of the thesis proposal that I wrote in spring 2004 I feel that I have come a long way. When does a research project begin? My thesis started as an independent part of the Helsinki University Language Centre project *Language Needs at the Workplace* (Akateemississa ammattissa tarvittava kielitaito, led by Ritva Horppu, reported on in a publication edited by Karjalainen and Lehtonen 2006). The goals of the big project were, firstly, to survey what kind of foreign and second official language skills graduates from Helsinki University needed at work, and secondly to

find out about employers' perceptions of the language skills needed in professional life. I was involved in the ALMS (Autonomous Learning Module) programme as a counsellor and was thus responsible for helping students at our university to develop the skills required to function well in academic and professional circles, first as students and later as graduates: this is the aim of all English courses organised by the Language Centre. I had been doing research into the programme before, and the bulk of my teaching was in ALMS, so it seemed to be an obvious environment in which to do my teacher-research.

The purpose of the ALMS environment is to offer an alternative way for students to fulfill their compulsory degree requirements for English: in a nutshell, the Autonomous Learning Modules are English courses that are offered as alternatives to the other teacher-fronted courses offered by Helsinki University Language Centre.

In the proposal I state the starting point for my own research in the following way:

The starting point for my research is the need to understand and critically interpret the theoretical construct of 'learner history' or 'biography' and the autobiographical elements in foreign-language learning, and in particular in the ALMS environment. Moreover, I want to construct knowledge about the way in which our learners' histories affect their management of learning, and in particular their experience of the meta-cognitive tasks of planning and evaluation.

My proposal was written in the future tense starting with a theoretical discussion followed by methodological considerations, and presuming a certain, systematic data-collection procedure and a timetable. It thus compares with Chaim Noy's (2005) description of how he came to perceive the fractured nature of narrative research and how in the end the title of his doctorate proposal had nothing to do with his proposed research. Noy describes his evolving thinking and research and continues: "And so, slowly but surely, the dissertation began drifting away from its proposal" (Noy 2005, 361 and 363). My feeling about the research, the process and the thesis as compared to the proposal is very similar to Noy's. In hindsight, it is evident that the change or shift came because of the theoretical and scholarly growth that I was going through and thus it is only natural that the proposal had, as Noy (2005, 365) puts it, "exhausted the theoretical field it dealt with at the time it was written". Like Noy, I have felt guilty and I have felt puzzled and I have felt stuck and lost on my voyage of discovery. Like Noy, I look upon my proposal as an "introduction" beyond the one written in this thesis, an open reflexive chapter or episode in a research narrative. In a way, this

makes the thesis “a reflection of its own becoming”: I look upon it as a reflection of how I struggled and felt I was succeeding, how I hesitated and thought I knew, how analysing the data deepened my understanding and then again seemed to stand between me and understanding learning and teaching. I look upon the thesis as a reflection of meaning-making in (E)FL and pedagogy.

This thesis proposal grew out the work I had done for my licentiate thesis, which I finished in 2002⁷. I had leaned heavily on applied linguistics as the theoretical background. Very soon after embarking on the new thesis, the fairly silent theoretical voices in the licentiate started to become stronger and my work took a cross-disciplinary turn: I have drawn mainly on education, but also on women’s studies, sociology and cultural studies. Methodologically, to begin with I had a loose action-research framework in mind, although the focus on change interventions and a problem-based approach already felt less appealing than it had at the time of the licentiate work. In the course of my reading I started to perceive the significance of autobiographical knowledge in the learner histories, which I had at the outset pictured as mainly linguistic life stories as in my licentiate. The centrality of experience in autobiographical telling was also becoming clear. I started to see how when we tell something about others, we also tell something about ourselves, and thus started to look upon my researcher role as much more decisive to all aspects of the research process. I have come to conceive of the licentiate and the proposal as chapters in a continuous journal, the journal of my research journey. I fully agree with Noy in that a thesis proposal, in fact, does not propose what is ahead, but instead reflects on and conveys the current position and state of the researcher in relation to theoretical, methodological and presentational matters.

My proposal does phrase what later became the autobiographical themes of the thesis. In particular, I focussed on the role of teachers and teacher memories from school in learners’ stories, and on how ALMS counselling echoes these voices. Moreover, as early as in 2004 I envisaged a research scenario that would be a learning process for the researcher, and which would mean adapting both data-collection methods and the analysis and interpretation to the deepening theoretical understanding. I also foresaw the importance of the dialogic approach to learning and teaching, and the concept of voice as an element in the personal construction of learning and in the learners’ stories or histories. This included the idea of learners’ voices, and how these can be heard, accessed and appreciated in a counselling situation, which was ingrained in my licentiate. The novel, not much thought-out theoretical idea was the autobiographical knowledge and how it appears and

⁷ See Appendix 2 for the summary, discussion and conclusion of the licentiate thesis. Moreover, a student biography from the thesis is included.

takes form in learners' stories and telling, both written and oral. Methodologically, I point out narrative research as of interest and I acknowledge a future trend in the learner-autonomy field in learner histories. It is easy enough to see that a pre-narrative urge was there and that the road towards the full use of storying and telling lay ahead.

As I foresaw, my research did become a work on learners' autobiographical knowledge and its role in their learning, but it also became a work on a teacher's autobiographical knowledge and experience. It became, in fact, an amalgamation of the two. I look upon autobiography as a relational idea and engagement, and I add a lot of autobiographical content. I use memories and other first-person narratives as sources and as pointers towards converging, diverging and clashing personal narratives (Conle 1996). My inquiry is into both teaching/counselling and learning and I include my own experience of these in it. In doing this, I aim at language that is descriptive rather than evaluative. This is difficult, however, and I fail at many points. Yet I turn to novel vocabularies for (E)FL, vocabularies of life-history writing and story-telling. Because of the difficulty and novelty of my approach the language of the thesis probably oscillates between a universal and neutral way of using English in an academic piece of work, and a more creative, engaged way aimed at voicing personal experience. I am writing, to start with, in a doubly foreign language: in English and also in an English that would give a tangible feel of (E)FL experiences, in part even bodily experiences but always experiences wrought with emotions and autobiographical elements, in "Language Learning". My thesis process has been and will also be described as a learning process in the sense that I am practising the use of this "Language Learning"/English in it.

For me, one of the many beginnings of the thesis work was the break away from the proposal that occurred when I returned to my licentiate text and the three learner biographies I had written. Revisiting the data, especially the interviews on which the learner biographies were based, set off a process of reflection that continued throughout the research process. The broadening of the research horizon and the need to look not only at the metacognitive skills but also at the other aspects of the learning process as parts of a whole came from rereading the interviews and their rich potential for interpretation in the light of autobiographical knowledge and autobiographical telling. Was the revisiting of old data then the real beginning of this project? It is very much a part of this story, the research narrative that forms the thesis I ended up writing as the experiential story of a teacher-researcher in (E)FL. It is also an important element of the self-study and description of a teacher-researcher's epistemological development, of her teacher knowledge and its growth as part of her multilayered teacher identity.

The structure and nature of the research report: a narrative in three parts

The structure of the thesis follows what has often been seen as the traditional structure of stories: there is a beginning, a middle and an end, which constitute its three main parts. Like any easy definition, however, that of a story as having the three parts is problematic. In particular, this idea as expressed by Aristotle in *Poetics* has been contested because stories often lack a definite ending. It seems to me that research stories are good examples of those in which the end starts to evolve into a new story before the last word has been written. Perhaps only a story told in a routine fashion for the purpose of convincing its listeners or readers of one possible conclusion could be defined as simply as this (Hyvärinen 2004). I, however, see the experiential nature of telling as a focal element in stories (Fludernik 2000). Moreover, I have taken narrative to be human interaction in relationships (Riessman and Quienney 2005), thus placing stories between people. Both of these conceptualisations mean that in my view narrative has a multidimensionality and openness that make a definite ending problematic, if not unnecessary.

This thesis came about through narrative inquiry and writing, which means that the conceptual content also developed narratively through the writing: thus the theoretical and methodological reflections are presented in all three parts of it, which in its entirety forms an overarching interpretative framework and the full narrative. In all three parts I am speaking in two voices at the same time: the narrator's voice telling the stories from the data and the theoretical voice aiming at conceptualising the telling (cf. Conle 2000). In the first part (Part A), I describe the beginnings of the quest, both the theoretical and methodological as well as the autobiographical understandings. The research question is presented as a broad problem field or puzzle rather than as specific questions.

In the second part (Part B), it becomes even clearer that life and theory necessarily come together for me: it is in this empirical part, which I call the kaleidoscope of ALMS stories, that I build theory when I write about the tensions folding and unfolding, and about the interlinkages between the stories and fragments, the episodes in the stories. This also represents a modest attempt to develop (E)FL methodologically through dialogic questioning in which I pose questions to the data at various points in time and place, and address different aspects of learner/counsellor experience, in other words both intra-individual and inter-individual aspects.

In the final part (Part C) I look at how the research experience and experiences were reported, and how the writing came to mean more than I could have imagined or intended at the beginning. Writing has been a process that has surprised me at times, and has made me question my previous conceptualisations and look for new ways of perceiving and conceptualising. I have created a complex and reflexive collage that presents my image, understanding and experience of the phenomenon, narrative and telling, studied. Experience and experiences have changed during the research process, and will continue to change and so be different from what was there to be described. I also clarify and tie together some experiential strands from parts A and B in part C, and touch upon the new research and teaching/counselling horizons coming into view. The three parts A, B and C roughly reflect the chronological order of how my thinking developed, but they do not always tell the whole truth about the order of the writing.

Initial methodological and theoretical considerations and understandings

A complex methodological quest

My research process has been motivated by a need to better understand the nature and meaning of how (E)FL learning and teaching interaction is experienced by learners and counsellors, and how past experiences are carried into the counselling sessions. Carola Conle (2000, 194) writes:

Feelings and experience come together in the first step of any thesis work, that is, they come together in the motivation that generates initial involvement with a topic. Traditionally, we expect this motivation to come from the inquirer's personal interests and expertise and, to a major extent, from the needs of the field, that is, gaps in a body of knowledge that needs to be completed or expanded. In personal narrative inquiry, the body of knowledge to be explored is the writer's life. The motivation is therefore likely to come from the writer's interests, her expertise, as well as the particular life-world that is her own. It is true that in narrative theses there is usually a topic that gets explored through the narrative (...) But the topic does not initiate the inquiry; it emerges in its initial stages and often gets modified as the writing proceeds.

The motivation for my work definitely came from my interests and my expertise as a counsellor. It came from the tensions I felt in my role and from the personal experiences and emotions connected to them (Dewey 1934). The tensions acted as an impetus for my work; in a sense they were like “a

subconscious question mark about something that is emotionally and intellectually interesting” (Conle 2000, 190). In my work as a practising counsellor and in my licentiate research my attention had been caught by the membership (Riley 1999) problems many ALMS students had: for example, the ‘hanging judge’, to use a metaphor from Rebecca Oxford’s 2001 data from student narratives, was for many the only acceptable role for the counsellor when it came to evaluation and assessment, and self-evaluation by the students.

This problem very clearly had its roots in the learner histories on which they built their expectations of the course, in other words in testing and external evaluation in which the teacher’s role was very clearly set. In contrast, in ALMS we have conceptualised the students’ role as an active one in learning and managing the learning, which we feel involves a process of internalising a personal approach to planning, monitoring and evaluating. The way we act as counsellors in supporting but not controlling the students’ process will not always fit the expected role. This was thus one tension and experience expressed in my lived story and others’ told stories (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

My ALMS colleagues and I had stated in various articles describing the programme that we aimed at a reflective approach to learning-to-learn. This was also the basis of how we introduced the idea to our students. From the beginning of the programme in 1994 we had taken it to mean choosing appropriate learning approaches, planning a language-learning programme and carrying it out, and evaluating language skills and levels. More recently we had started to define learning-to-learn more widely: we had viewed it as implying understanding the complex and multilayered nature of language learning. Among other things, this meant appreciating the relationship between the intrasubjective (learner-subject matter) and intersubjective (learner-teacher/peers) aspects of learning. More and more, however, my lived curriculum was making me aware that it also meant appreciating the integral nature of educational and life experience, and considering the role of affect and emotions: in other words I was seeing the need for an even less technical way of conceptualising learning-to-learn.

If one looks upon teaching and research as lived experience it is necessary to deal with the emotional aspects inherent in them. I had started to realise that becoming an active agent in one’s profession very probably meant that teachers had to engage in reflexive self-study in order to recognise and accept the emotional responses arising in one’s everyday life and work. Arlie Hochschild’s 1979 definition of emotion as “a bodily cooperation with an image, a thought or memory” is appealing in the sense that it captures the classroom experience of an emotional

response so well: feeling joy, anger, or shame as an integral part of an image or thought arising from an episode, something not planned by the teacher, arising from a social act or self-interaction (Denzin 1983).

Surprisingly, it is only recently that the emotional context of research and teaching has attracted any attention. When we were learning and training to become teachers in 1979 we were taught to suppress our feelings and our subjectivity. We were taught by some teacher trainers and expected by all of them to control and manage our emotions, the implication being that there was no place for them in the classroom. Expressing emotions was considered irrational, a quality of life outside academia and the language classroom. As a consequence, we did not ask our students about their stories - or at best we hesitated in doing so. However, in censoring our feelings as teachers we silenced our voices, and at the same time we also denied our students the right to claim their full voices. Foreign-language classrooms have always been, and continue to be, social situations hugely wrought with emotions that reveal and carry meanings, and affect the social dynamics of the group.

From the very beginning, what I felt was an unjustified separation of emotion and intellect in the academic tradition bothered me. Although narrative was initially familiar to me mainly as a mode of representation, its potential for bringing together the emotional and intellectual dimensions of research and educational encounters appealed to me. I took Juha Varto's advice (1992) and searched for and worked at developing a method for my research that would make it possible to get to the heart of the matter. My quest was for a mode and language of researching that was not distancing, in other words a language that makes it possible to ease the tension between analytic distance and lived experience (Conle 1992), and to make sense of "life as it is lived" (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). My aim has been to discover a way of linking experience and intellect, emotion and theory, thought and action, communication and analysis, reading and writing, and most importantly, learner and teacher/counsellor.

I have sought a method of inquiry that would be pedagogically sustainable, and suitable for researching learner autonomy and counselling; a method that would make room for lived experience, meaning-making and narrating, which in my view characterise encounters between learners and counsellors. There must be a way of researching that would honour the past and be respectful towards the participants, in other words ethically sound. I wanted to develop a way of researching learner-counsellor dialogues, and autobiographical narratives as part of them, that was relevant and reflective, as well as self-reflexive. Self-reflexivity became my very starting point, and

I hope to show how it has guided my research and my writing. I will be looking at research as a complex internal quest in which reflexivity has helped me to recognise my own preconceptions and to monitor their influence.

I have chosen to interpret educational experience through a narrative lens because, like Clandinin and Connelly (2000), I argue that narrative inquiry arises from experience, and that it is the closest one can come to it. Experience is ambiguous, it is complex and multilayered; it can be interpreted but only in ways that will remain non-conclusive. As my initial concern was for the seeming separateness of teacher and learner stories, narrative inquiry appeared a potential way of bringing my interpretation and the socially constructed experiences of the participants under the same research lens. I also take my own understanding to be experience and thus something that is not final and conclusive, but open-ended.

I have based my work on the insight of what it means that we always look at past events from where we are at the point of telling: the meanings we read into past experiences may change because the present, the moment of telling, guides our interpretation. Thus when constructing an experiential narrative we open our past to reflection and reappraisal. Moreover, the same process of bringing in current perspectives to illuminate the past may take place when we listen to the experiential narratives of others (Conle 2006). When one story causes us to make metaphorical links with another, through resonance (Conle 1993), we respond to the memories and stories of others with memories of our own, and together these stories will open up possibilities for our future. This is how narrative could help teachers/counsellors and learners to meet.

Moreover, I have aimed at avoiding a technical interpretation of the past as a series of events that we can control and explain away. Juha Varto (2005) writes about how an experience, in fact, has no beginning in the sense that each moment we experience can give rise to unexpected and strange constellations of experiences, meanings that are new and unpredictable. When experience is looked upon in hindsight, this beginningless beginning is no longer clear, and we only need to think of our everyday experiences to realise how the only link between the fragments is the *I*, the one who experiences. Individual experiences are not born out of the past, not even our own pasts. Nevertheless, we need to look into the past to be able to interpret them. For me, narrative seemed to be a way of doing this and approaching both individual and socially organised experiences. However, I did not see it as a way of reaching out for the original experiences of the participants. And yet, I turned towards narrative and towards autobiographical reading and writing as potential

ways of touching upon those experiences because of what I see as the remaking and retelling nature of experience.

Concepts in flux

... the work that is carried out is interpretative, and an interpretation is always personal, partial and dynamic. Therefore, narrative research is suitable for scholars who are, to a certain degree, comfortable with ambiguity.

(Lieblich et al., 1998, 10)

In this section I interweave my theoretical understanding at the beginning of the thesis process and the stories contained in this inquiry. I start making the links between my researcher narrative and the broad research problem field as described by Clandinin and Connelly (2000): I bring into the conversation between theory and life the central concepts used in the thesis. The five principle concepts through which I attempt to draft the main interests in this research are *learner autonomy*, *dialogue*, *narrative* and *experience*, *auto /biography*, and very importantly, the narrative web between these concepts.

In the following I explore my initial understanding of four of these concepts, ‘learner autonomy’, ‘dialogue’, and ‘narrative’ together with ‘experience’. The concept of ‘auto/biography’ will have to wait a while: I write about it in a later section, the one concerning my intellectual autobiography. This reflects the rough chronology of how the concepts became meaningful to the inquiry. Naoko Aoki’s comment (2003) on how our knowledge and understanding of concepts such as ‘learner autonomy’ are always merely tentative only and in flux describes well the way I have approached all of the central concepts and my understanding of them at various stages of the research process.

Learner autonomy

As Naoko Aoki (2003) suggests, there is no single authoritative definition of learner autonomy. When we planned the ALMS programme in the 1990s, we defined it as the ability to take charge of one’s own learning (Holec 1981). The focus in theories about learner autonomy in language education (see Gremmo and Riley 1995 for a historical view of the concept, Benson 2001 for an extensive and thorough presentation, Little 2007 for considerations on *language- learner autonomy*,

and Rebenius 2007 for a critical survey) has been on the learners' capacity to make decisions concerning their learning process at its various stages. Holec's classic definition (found in his report to the Council of Europe) has been quoted extensively and it certainly provided a good starting point for defining and describing autonomy for us in the 1990s:

To take charge of one's own learning is to have, and to hold, the responsibility for all the decisions concerning all aspects of this learning, i.e.:

- *determining the objectives;*
- *defining the contents and progressions;*
- *selecting methods and techniques to be used*
- *monitoring the procedure of acquisition properly speaking (rhythm, time, place, etc.)*
- *evaluating what has been acquired.*

The autonomous learner is himself capable of making these decisions concerning the learning with which he is or wishes to be involved (Holec 1981, 3).

At this point we were keenly interested in the teacher's changing role, and mainly saw the implications in terms of reducing the teacher's power and making students partners in learning and thus empowering them. For us, knowing how to learn was a major part of this empowerment. The concept of 'knowing how to learn' is central to Holec's definition mentioned above. He sees autonomy as an ability or capacity that needs to be acquired (that is, learning how to learn). Autonomy according to this view is separate from the learning that may take place when autonomy is being/has been acquired. For Holec, this learning is self-directed. In other words, self-directed learning is a way in which learning is carried out, whereas autonomy involves learners developing the potential to take control of every stage of their learning, from setting the goals, making plans, carrying them out and evaluating themselves.

Holec's definition focuses on the learner's capacity to make all possible decisions concerning his or her learning process. Benson (2001) rightly points out that this does not make the cognitive factors involved in learning explicit enough. He sees Little's 1991 definition as complementary to Holec's because it describes the learner's capacity to take control over his or her learning more in terms of the cognitive processes involved in managing it:

Essentially, autonomy is a capacity - for detachment, critical reflection, decision-making, and independent action. It presupposes, but also entails, that the learner will develop a particular kind

of psychological relation to the process and content of his learning. The capacity for autonomy will be displayed both in the way the learner learns and in the way he or she transfers what has been learned to wider contexts (Little 1991, 49).

Benson further argues for another vital element that is missing from both Holec's and Little's definitions. He emphasises the learner's right to freely determine the content of learning. It seems to me that this element is present in Little's definition ("...psychological relation to the process and content of his learning"), but it certainly is necessary to focus on the social aspect of autonomy, too, which Benson sees as an element of control over learning content. Benson refers to his earlier work in which he argued as follows:

Greater learner control over the learning process, resources and language cannot be achieved by each individual acting alone according to his or her own preferences. Control is a question of collective decision-making rather than individual choice (Benson 1996, 33).

Leni Dam, another early influence on our thinking, includes the element of social interaction in her definition of autonomy:

Learner autonomy is characterized by a readiness to take charge of one's own learning in the service of one's needs and purposes. This entails a capacity and willingness to act independently and in co-operation with others, as a socially responsible person (Dam 1995, 1-2)

In the field of learner autonomy the social nature of learning and the interaction between participants came to the foreground, and in 2001 Little focussed on the social element of autonomy yet again. He argued that autonomy had a social-interactive as well as an individual-cognitive dimension, and that it arose and developed from various forms of collaboration and co-operation. In terms of defining autonomy, then, this means that the interdependence of the three factors (learning management, cognitive processes and social factors) has to come out. We felt that finding a balance between the more technical learning management on the one hand, and the cognitive processes and social factors on the other as levels of exercising control over one's learning was an issue to be accounted for both in the practice of and the research into learner autonomy.

Over the years, like Benson (2001), we felt that for our purposes it was neither necessary nor desirable to define autonomy more precisely than as the capacity to take control of one's learning,

given the variety of forms it can take in the programme depending on the learner, the learning process and its stages, and the learner – counsellor relationship. We saw it as a multidimensional capacity that could take different forms for different individuals and/or in different contexts at different times. Our understanding of it, as explained above, had always implied interdependence (Kohonen 1992), both between the counsellor and the learner, and the learners and their peers. Out of this understanding, however, a new horizon had opened up in my own thinking when I was working on my licentiate. A socially respectful and responsible definition of learner autonomy strongly echoed the dialogic nature of human communication and also linked learner autonomy to learning histories. I felt that in defining learner autonomy as a capacity and in taking it as a learning goal, we made the dialogue between the learner and counsellor in a counselling session the site for listening to the many voices in the telling: in other words aspects of educational and life experience were expressed not only in terms of language but also as meanings, opinions, attitudes and thus reflections of the teller's personality and world-view (Dufva 2003).

The basic tenet in experiential learning (Kohonen et al. 2001), a related field of study, is that experience plays a significant role in learning (Kohonen 2001), and this insight points towards a need to redefine language learning not as a time-, context- and individual-free generalisable process but as a situated autobiographical process. If one looks upon learning as experiential and situated human action, and as creating new meaning structures (Jaatinen 2001), the context and the pedagogical situation become very significant. We can only understand these new unique meanings in the particular context, as results of each learner's development, personal and educational history and individual experience. On the other hand, experiential learning is concerned with the encountering of the Other, and with the socially responsible skills of understanding, listening and expressing that this requires (Jaatinen 2001). It seemed to me that the idea of dialogue in counselling as I had used it in my licentiate work (Karlsson 2002) was helpful in linking the two needs.

Dialogue

In my licentiate thesis the idea of dialogue was an umbrella for me, a metaphilosophical construct (see e.g., Dufva 1998 and Lähteenmäki 1994), in that it covered not only my ideas about research into language and language as such, but also my thoughts about learning and teaching and the nature of teachers' and learners' ways of knowing. I had also conceptualised my research process as dialogue between myself and the counsellor and the learners, and myself and the data collected.

There was a strong Bakhtinian undercurrent in the thesis. As Freema Elbaz-Luwisch et al. (2002) point out, the complexity of classrooms and the whole world of learning and teaching are places where many voices meet. This makes the themes of voice and dialogue appealing when we try to understand classroom practice, teaching and learning. Moreover, as Bakhtin conceives of dialogue from a very wide perspective, it made looking at ALMS interaction “through a Bakhtinian lens” (Elbaz-Luwisch et al. 2002, 202) an inviting approach:

Life is by its very nature dialogic. To live means to participate in dialogue: to ask a question, to heed, to respond, to agree, and so forth. In this dialogue a person participates wholly and throughout his whole life: with his eyes, lips, hands, soul, spirit, with his whole body and deeds (Bakhtin 1984, 293).

The idea and ideal of dialogue is indeed persistent and perennial in Western philosophy and educational theory. Nicholas Burbules (1993) presents dialogue as a unique perspective on the interplay of philosophy and education. As such, for many contemporary authors it acts as a source of knowledge and understanding, a medium of interpersonal discourse, and a pedagogical relation.

Although the use of dialogues as a method of instruction and inquiry goes back to ancient Greek philosophy (see e.g., Huttunen 1999 and Burbules 1993 on the use of the Socratic method), recent interest in dialogic teaching has its roots in Martin Buber’s dialogic philosophy of the 1950s. Mikhail Bakhtin, the Soviet linguist and researcher of literature, is the other main source for the construct of ‘dialogue’ in the modern discussion on dialogic teaching. Bakhtin had drawn the line between using this as just another teaching trick and the true use of a dialogue, as opposed to a monologue by the know-all-teacher, as a basis for teaching, although his life's work was not focussed on teaching as much as it was on philosophy (see Holquist 1990/2002 on the difficulty of encompassing all of Bakhtin's activity in one term).

Like Bakhtin, Buber has left a mark on various disciplines, including anthropological philosophy, theology, sociology and education. His philosophy of education has a relevance to today's educational thinking, particularly because his ideal education is dedicated to fostering true dialogue, not to merely transmitting knowledge and information (Cohen 1983). Buber (1993) introduced two basic pairs of words, I – you (I - Thou, Ich - Du) and I – it (Ich - Es). The I of the I - you relationship is different from the I in the I - it relationship. We exist not in Is and yous, but in between, in the relationship between the two. Similarly, the I and the it only exist in the I - it

relationship. For Buber man's world is dualistic because of the way man communicates with others: thus both basic pairs of words, I – you and I – it, are an integral part of our lives. As individuals we have an I – it relationship with the world. Individuality is a necessary condition for us: it is the essential way for observing, feeling and reaching for things. We need the I – it world for its established forms, time and space, causality and intentional relations. We also need the dialectic between I –you and I – it. The realisation of I – you is only possible momentarily but it is the ethical and epistemological basis of our relation to the world. All human meanings stem from I – you. The basis for working collaboratively and communally is the human encounter. Buber sees dialogue as a way of being in the world, but also as its main goal (Värri 2000).

Buber's idea of dialogue has implications for the way teachers conceptualise their position in educational encounters in that it centres around the relation between the Self and the Other. This is also a point at which Buber and Bakhtin come together: they share the idea of the Other as a partner in dialogue, not identical with the Self, not necessarily a somebody with similar ways of thinking and similar values. The absolute core of dialogic teaching as I have come to understand it is the acceptance and appreciation of difference and otherness. This means bringing different views and attitudes, beliefs and experiences, values and appreciations, different life histories and educational autobiographies into dialogue.

I take dialogue in teaching to mean accepting individuality and a willingness to, in the Heideggerian sense of *Gelassenheit*, 'let be or go' (Heidegger 2002). This is based on mutual respect and the acceptance of not even trying to totally understand the other. The totality of understanding would almost mean control, and this all-encompassing and piercing teacher way of seeing certainly has been an element in the monologic truth of teachers. According to Buber (1993), we have a choice here: we can either foster the monologic relationship towards other people or we can accept the otherness by allowing ourselves to enter into dialogical relationships with others. In the first relationship there are no objects for observation, for benefitting from, or for transforming, only subjects. This is the dialogic choice for us. If, instead, we think of teaching as a relationship between a subject (=teacher) and an object (=learner), it indeed means transferring information from one place to another. This then, is the teacher's monologic truth.

Lately, dialogues in teaching, critique and critical reflection have been seen as crucial elements in the theory and philosophy of education, and as the central elements of a modern university system (Huttunen 1995, 1999a, 1999b and 2003). Huttunen defines dialogic teaching as openness to the

Other: to the other person on the one hand, and to the subject matter on the other. For the teacher, a dialogic stance means a readiness to engage in genuine discussion regardless of the form of the instruction. For the student it means, firstly a readiness to engage in an internal dialogue with the subject matter, and secondly a dialogue with the teacher. The latter might not always come about for various reasons, but the former must always take place for any meaningful learning outcomes to appear.

A genuine academic dialogue is honest, reflexive and critical. It aims at finding a common meaning, which may fall short of agreement; it could mean understanding and accepting the other's justification of a different conclusion (Huttunen 1999a). Huttunen further elaborates on the need for a modern university system to critically look at research on teaching and its theoretical foundations. He sees critical action research, as opposed to a mere critique of theories and concepts, as a way of carrying out real changes. This emphasis on the social, interactional and cooperative processes in university teaching situations is aligned with the developments in theories about learning that have come to the fore in the past twenty years, and that have their roots in epistemological questions dealing with the nature of knowledge.

Lehtovaara's (2001) concept of 'open dialogue' (as opposed to his idea of a technical type of dialogue) has the following elements: deep exploration of life phenomena together; joint effort; mutual encouragement; and a personal basis of lived experience and an autonomic perception of reality. What comes into being in an open dialogue is a whole new world. He emphasises that this is not exactly the same world for each of the participants, but it is a world between them since they both view it from a unique point of view. Here he acknowledges the Buberian space between the participants, "a dimension which is accessible only to them both".

What is particularly relevant to language educators is the fact that Lehtovaara sees the basic questions of teaching foreign languages as intrinsically more educational and pedagogical than linguistic. This has to do with the technical stance to language, a worthwhile consideration for all language teachers because it is often true in classrooms that learning English or another foreign language is detached from the rest of students' lives or their whole persons in that the focus is, first and foremost, on the language system. Lehtovaara's way of looking at technical dialogue has to do with Buber's I-it relation. In his encapsulation of open dialogue listening becomes an important skill. In an open dialogue it is not evaluative: it is not about correct answers. It is not about

totalising the speaker, but it lets go of her, it leaves her the space that she needs. Lehtovaara (2001, 171) writes very beautifully about listening in open dialogue:

Listening prizingly and attentively is as if surrendering oneself to resonating along with what the other person is expressing in words but also on a deeper and more holistic level. It is letting the other and his or her ideas and feelings be what they in themselves are, without forcing them to present themselves as what the other participant wants to have them.

We had come to look upon the core of counselling in ALMS as a dialogic approach to learning and learners. Drawing on my licentiate work, we had defined a dialogic approach as openness to the other, the other person, and to the subject matter (Huttunen 1999) in our theory and practice. As we saw that there needed to be a readiness in the student to engage in internal dialogue with the subject matter, we saw the counsellor's responsibility to be to help this dialogue come about. We had taken counselling discussion to involve authentic questions as opposed to the traditional question-and-answer sequence in language classrooms, in which the teacher expects predefined answers from students. Consequently, the counsellors were expected to initiate open dialogue with every student in every counselling session, and to be prepared to give enough space to the student to do his or her own planning and decision-making based on the jointly perceived learner needs.

In fostering the true use of dialogue it is important to focus not only on the cognitive side, in other words gaining knowledge, learning about others and oneself, and reaching agreement, but also on the affective side. Many elements of interaction can only be understood in terms of our emotional reactions and involvement in a dialogic relation to the Other. Burbules (1993), who defines dialogue as a pedagogical communicative relation, mentions feelings of concern, trust, respect, appreciation, affection and hope as a substantial part of the give-and-take.

This way of looking at dialogue as requiring both cognitive and emotional involvement is at the core of experiential learning (see Kohonen et al. 2001) as I understand it. Jaatinen (2001, 107) writes: "Experiential learning (...) means exploring and studying in the world oneself, the environment and the world immersed in the world; it means exploring the world and its phenomena such as they are, as honestly as we can, and paying attention to all its various meaning-structures that are stored in our life-world and embodied in our feelings, language, thoughts and actions". She continues to define the ideal teaching to suit this way of learning as "being in dialogue: teaching as a dialogue is encountering the learner, listening to and respecting him or her as a whole human

being, sharing experiences with the learner and helping him or her to expand his or her experiential reality” (Jaatinen 2001, 108).

In ALMS, counselling starts with each learner’s needs and thus involves appreciating and accepting individuality. I have always perceived face-to-face counselling as a personal learning encounter that does not benefit from an approach that has predefined problems or techniques as the starting point. When I was working on my licentiate, the concept of ‘dialogue’ served as a general description of my position as a researcher, or of the method used (Saresma 2006). It was both a metaphorical and a concrete methodological choice I made. I engaged in concrete dialogues with the research participants as I would have done as a counsellor. This continues in the work at hand. As a metaphor, dialogue also continues to speak for the empathy I have wanted to bring into both the counselling and the research, empathy towards Otherness, and curiosity and the acceptance of difference.

Narrative and experience, or experience and narrative

The centrality of experience in autobiographical telling, and in particular in stories about educational encounters, was the impetus for this thesis. I understand experience as the meaning that we read into our particular life situations, a relationship between subject and object (Dewey 1938, Perttula 2005, Erkkilä 2005), and narrative as a way of understanding experience (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). For me, understanding experience on its own terms, an idea common in narrative inquiry, was more appealing than defining it according to predetermined structures and theories (Phillion et al. 2005). Experience in my interpretation is ambiguous, complex and multilayered; at the outset I felt that the complexity of experience and experiences would mean that ways of interpreting should remain non-conclusive.

I agree with Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson (2001) in that what in autobiographical telling seems like something truly personal is anything but merely personal. Experience is already an interpretation of the past and our place as looked upon from a culturally and historically specific present. It is mediated through memory and language, and is discursive in that sense. In being discursive it is collective. The language that we need in order to mediate experience to our listeners or readers shapes the experience and is shaped by it. Especially when people are relating their experiences in a foreign language the limitations of language as the mediator become obvious. This is not to deny the existence of human experiences outside of the discursive realm: feelings of the

body, and sensory events and images, for example. The tension that is palpable in a teacher's or counsellor's work in finding a way to be sensitive to lived experience that is "only" discursively mediated in students' oral and written narratives has been one of the dilemmas in this work, and remains one of the paradoxes in teaching.

What is 'narrative' in this research, then? I agree with Kohler Riessman (1997) that not all talk and texts are narrative, not in educational contexts either. When one starts looking at educational contexts in research, however, one cannot escape storytelling and its prevalence. My working definition of narrative at the outset was to understand it in terms of sequence and consequence (Rimmon-Kenan 1999, Riessman 2004), and to think of events selected, organised, connected and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience. In other words I focussed on how and why events are storied (Riessmann 1993). I have used the terms 'story' and 'narrative' as synonyms. I agree with Polkinghorne (1995) that 'story' carries stronger connotations than narrative does in the sense that 'story', in exactly the same way as 'tarina' in Finnish, is often used to refer to something that is not necessarily true, that is imaginary and emotional. 'Narrative' has more neutral, research-oriented connotations that link it with discourse, it is a term to give a description that links single episodes by means of a plot. It is, in fact, exactly for this reason that I chose to use the terms synonymously. In educational contexts we move on the interface of theory and practice, we try to work with the paradox of theory and practice, distance and proximity.

I found the broad use of emplotment (Ricoeur 1984, Erkkilä 2005), not as a formal structure for analysing stories but as an interpretative process of linking narrative episodes, of searching for and understanding both while listening to and reading the stories in my data and when restorying myself, appealing. For Ricoeur (1991), narratives presuppose plots that link possibly discordant actions, characters and their purposes. Thus when producing a narrative we are engaged in an active process of emplotment. Ricoeur sees narrating as a creative act in which life events are woven into a story with a plot. The plot is interesting because it has two different time dimensions: it implies linear time on the one hand, and creative emplotment time, which "slows down at the turning points and lingers on at the end" on the other (Löyttyniemi 2004, 47). As telling a story, or listening to one or reading one, is a way of understanding the self (Ricoeur 1991), we are always faced with a potential horizon of experience when we enter the world of stories. This means that there is a potential for change and also a way of foreseeing where we are going as educators.

As Clandinin and Connelly (1990 and 2000) suggest, I came to understand narrative as both the phenomenon and the method. Jerome Bruner (1987, 1990) sees human life as having a narrative quality, and argues for the significance of narrative (as opposed to paradigmatic) ways of knowing. Life is filled with narratives or stories, and so are educational encounters. Like other life events, language-learning experiences are organised in stories, and autobiography guides this lifelong development. My interest in this work is in how language learners and teachers organise their lived experience, and how they story and re-story their experiences. Their telling is filled with narrative fragments, which happen in time and space, are prone to change, and are context-bound and meaning-bearing. Narrative helps to link the fragments, and shows their interdependence, but not necessarily the cause-and-effect dependency.

Narrative as both the phenomenon and the method is doubly true in this inquiry (cf. Heikkinen 2000). Firstly, as a phenomenon it is to be observed in the ALMS counselling and other interactions through and in the dialogues between the participants. Secondly, written and oral narratives are used in ALMS as a method of supporting reflection on learning in face-to-face counselling. In addition, I have written this thesis as a self-reflexive and analytical narrative, and at the same time, the method of thesis as narrative has been an object of my study.

I became interested in conceptualising narrative inquiry as a three-dimensional space (Clandinin and Connelly 2000): temporality forms the first dimension, the personal and the social the second dimension, and place the third dimension. This later became part of the emplotment process for me. Clandinin and Connelly conceptualise experience as defined by John Dewey, with the notions of interaction, continuity and situation as the defining criteria. A narrative study thus focuses on both the personal and the social: it moves both inwards to include feelings and outwards to include the environment, other people. It has temporal dimensions: it moves backwards and forwards, it has a past, a present and a future reference; experiences grow out of other experiences. Moreover, a narrative study occurs in a specific place or sequence of places (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). I started building this three-dimensionality into the research process. The focus came to be on how the research participants talked about their past experiences, both personal and social; how they remembered and how they re-interpreted the past in the present situation, but already looked into the future and always kept the place in mind.

Gudmundsdottir (1997) has argued that the significant aspects of classrooms are the contextual social features, and that it is these very aspects that interpretive and narrative research methods

capture well. Classrooms are places in which many truths are created because participants' ways of interpreting are unique and different. ALMS does not necessarily share all the features of language classrooms and the work done in them, but it is still an environment for learning a foreign language within institutional constraints. In the two group sessions at the beginning of each course in particular bring the students into what looks and feels like a language classroom. This was what I was after at the outset: studying the unique and the contextual in ALMS via narrative.

Standing at the crossroads

Towards the end of my work on my licentiate thesis in 2001 I read Alice Kaplan's memoir, *French Lessons*. I was truly shaken by her description of foreign-language classrooms as places in which the teacher exercises raw pedagogical power. I comment as follows:

What this glimpse tells us is a story from the past. This, at least is what one would hope, as the picture painted is about a battle of wills where the winner is always the language teacher, the one with the power and skills (Karlsson 2002, 1).

To me, Kaplan's idea of language teaching as "bare-bones pedagogy", a metaphor that I had no problem relating to, provided a solid background for justifying the use of "a new division of meta-cognitive labour" (a metaphor suggested by Carl Bereiter and quoted by Hakkarainen et al. 1999) between learners and teachers that we had built into the ALMS programme. Traditionally it had been the teacher who was responsible for planning, choosing content and methods, monitoring the learning process and evaluating the learning outcome, but in ALMS these processes became the student's responsibility.

We had made an effort to create a learning environment that supported the development of meta-cognition in various ways and at all stages of the student's learning programme. Learner support included group awareness sessions, skills-support groups and individual counselling, but the students were encouraged to form their own networks and study groups as well. Peer communication is essential in the development of meta-cognitive awareness (Hakkarainen et al. 1999), and thus we felt that the students needed the opportunity to communicate and interact without the teacher being the ultimate transmitter and controller. Most importantly, with regard to the pedagogic power and the bare-bones pedagogy reference, we did not deny the existence of

power relations. On the contrary, we worked hard to give away some of our power and fully agreed with Naoko Aoki's comment that, paradoxical as it is, "teachers need greater expertise to level the power imbalance between the teacher and the learner than to hold all the power themselves" (1999, 152).

Kaplan's description of the language classroom as a place where "content means nothing" is related to what Irma Huttunen, one of the pioneers of learner autonomy in language learning in Finland, wrote in 1996. She described two different types of language classrooms: form-focussed and meaning-focussed learning environments (Huttunen 1996). She referred to the Bachman model of communicative competence (Bachman 1990, 1991) in arguing that the way interaction is organised in form-focussed language classrooms prevented authentic communication. Mostly, she argued, interaction is organised in a question-and-answer sequence with the teacher lecturing, explaining and asking all the questions. If the stress is on the intensive practising of language forms, of the three components of communicative language ability only language competence, and in particular grammatical and textual competence, are focussed on. Strategic competence (the assessment, planning and execution of learning) is ignored, and of the psycho-physiological mechanisms, the receptive and visual channels are the ones mainly in use.

In contrast, in a meaning-focussed learning environment the whole spectrum of communicative competence is taken into account, and learning-to-learn is of concern. Interaction happens in the form of communication between students on topics that are meaningful to them in a way that supports a personal approach to language use. ALMS, which started in 1994, was heavily built on the ideas of learning-to-learn and a broader interpretation of communicative competence, in other words the focus was on strategic competence and authentic and meaningful communication. Our students at that time came mainly with experiences of form-focussed language teaching, which meant that they faced a challenge. In particular, some were at a loss when tasks were not set for them and they did not have to pass tests as a matter of routine.

An “is-when” story of the ALMS programme

When I tell the story of the ALMS programme I am aware of what a good example of an “is-when” story (Conle 1999 and Conle and Sakamoto 2006) it is. Carola Conle conceptualises is-when stories as narratives of teachers’ knowledge of their practice when understood through narrative. Narrative makes it possible to think about what teachers know without assigning it to categories and without stripping it of contexts, emotions and participants. She sees “is when” as the temporal marker for a story about the practical, about actions experienced in classrooms. The idea is that an “is-when” story can be very different from the official version, although the two may overlap and they often shape one another. The “is-when” story of ALMS was and has been shaped by both the personal and academic biographies of the ALMS teachers and by our physical environment and institutional idiosyncrasies. The official view to start with was very much of savings and self-study, but our teacher knowledge persistently made us focus our talks and articles on learner autonomy and how to enhance it. In *From Here to Autonomy* (1997) Felicity Kjisik wrote about the principles we had formulated and were putting into practice in the programme. These principles had to do with aspects of autonomy recurring in the literature and discussion in the field at the time. Our ten aspects of autonomy were:

1. Autonomy is a capacity that has to be learned
2. The road to autonomy is a process
3. The state of autonomy is essentially unstable
4. Autonomy inevitably involves a change in power relationships
5. Autonomy requires supportive structures, both internal and external
6. Autonomy requires a conscious awareness of the learning process
7. Autonomy has both individual and social aspects
8. Autonomy is not limited to the classroom
9. Autonomy has to be adapted to different cultural contexts
10. Autonomy is closely related to social identity.

The way we defined autonomy as a ‘capacity’ caused some uncertainty among colleagues and other outsiders. Felicity Kjisik argued that if we accepted Holec’s view that language- learning autonomy was not innate, then this would leave scope for the development of a system and techniques that could help learners learn how to learn. She went on to explain our approach in the ALMS programme: we aimed at helping students to become aware of their own and other approaches to

learning, and at encouraging them to use their own experiences of language learning and, indeed, their own exposure to language teaching. This is particularly significant for the work at hand because it shows the long history of being aware of and trying to work with the tensions past learning experiences can cause. She also brought up our belief in introducing students to the idea of strategies, without dictating an “ideal” set. She summarised our approach as a wish for students to start to trust their own abilities to analyse problems, set objectives, make plans and, finally, to evaluate themselves. In a conference on learner autonomy another ALMS colleague, Joan Nordlund, much later spoke about the corollary of this, the fact that the teachers involved also have to learn to trust the students. This, as they both suggest and what I also feel, has frequently proved to be an even harder task.

At the beginning we read a lot of meaning and importance into the idea that autonomy inevitably involved a change in power relationships. Felicity Kjisik (1997, 28) wrote:

Any changes in terms of responsibility or decision making are directly concerned with the power relationships in the classroom. Students in traditional educational settings have been used to an unbalanced power relationship, with little say in what, how, when or even why they learn. Assessment has generally been entirely out of their hands. In an autonomous setting, both teachers and students have to come to terms with a new relationship, and this may cause difficulties. Of course, we must acknowledge that the teachers do not absolve themselves of all responsibility - we are ultimately responsible for providing the best we can for our students. We should also be aware of the wider political aspects of autonomy. As has been mentioned, we are working within a larger structure, be it the university or the society in which we live, and there is only a certain amount of power that can be handed over to the students. In some societies the implications of power exchange may be much greater.

There is a certain pragmatism in how we approached the issue of “fading away the teacher’s power”. A related concern was expressed in aspect 8, which states that autonomy is not limited to the classroom. We found that students in the 1990s were surprisingly unaware of the possibilities of using the English that was and is in their environment. Many of them did not seem to be consciously aware of the fact that a lot of language learning goes on outside the classroom, and more importantly, that this could be looked upon as a positive thing. Again, we were the gatekeepers but we felt it was our responsibility to encourage learning outside the classroom when that seemed the best solution for the particular student. We felt that teachers could only provide

circumstances, frameworks and structures that would encourage students to take control of their learning. We saw these structures as both external and internal. By offering learner-awareness sessions and counselling, and by setting up support groups and networks for our students, we felt we were providing an external framework that we hoped would lead to internal development.

In order to develop learner autonomy we strongly felt that teacher development was needed: we needed “teachers who can and are willing to go beyond the technician role and become the authors of their own thought and action”. To me, this description by Flávia Vieira (1999, 27) captures the very essence of action research, which was our approach to teacher practice in ALMS. For us, the dividing line between researcher-theorists and language teachers seemed like a border worth crossing: we were keen to engage in critical and self-critical reflection and we were keen on becoming the ones who do research instead of being the ones that “research is done ‘on’ or ‘to’” (Kemmis 2001, 91).

We started running the programme in autumn 1994. By the time I was starting my licentiate work we had been developing it for five years. Developing the programme meant working collaboratively on small-scale research projects addressing a practice or practices that appeared to be problematic on the basis of learner feedback or counsellor experience. We were firm believers in Benson’s suggestion that the unique teaching and learning characteristics of each situation in which autonomy is the goal are best examined in action research carried out by practising teachers (Benson 2001).

In our joint research projects we had first studied the new role of the counsellor in ALMS because teacher development and helping the teachers in their changing role was an important concern. Having started with a focus on the counsellor, we then moved to look at the partners in the encounter, the learners, and their changing attitudes towards autonomy and learning. These projects were ways of understanding both theory and practice, and a way of becoming subjects of our own professional realities. They are both reported on in the book *From Here to Autonomy*, which came out in 1997 (see Karlsson et al., 1997).

We were fully aware how blurred the line between a teacher’s reflective practice and action research is, as any reflective teaching will constantly produce ideas that could be used as a basis for more disciplined and critical inquiry. Therefore, we felt that there was a necessity to continue making the knowledge public and shared by the partners. In 1997, we embarked on a project into counselling in which we started to look a bit more closely at the interaction between learners and

counsellors. At first we looked at counselling in terms of the content of the sessions and the counsellors' various functions. Secondly, we focussed on what the students said about themselves as learners and their learning in ALMS. This history in collaborative action research was very significant for the ALMS programme and course, and gave us a firm background in developing our teaching and counselling.

The licentiate, or the first chapter

Even at these early stages we were guided in our thinking by the notion of collaboration and of learners as beneficiaries of the research. My licentiate project, which I started in autumn 1999, was no exception. Benson (2001, 183) sees no reason why learners should "be kept in the dark about the researcher's purposes". As action research is a form of autonomous learning for teachers developing their teacher autonomy, it is natural to have learners as partners in the research process. If autonomy is seen to imply learner control, it becomes a key issue in collaborative action research that learners are active partners and beneficiaries.

Perhaps even more explicitly than before, I pictured the learners as active partners in the research process, and I felt that this kind of partnership came about during it. The starting point for my study was the need to take a critical look at the cornerstones of our programme, learner autonomy as a theoretical construction, and self-evaluation both as a theoretical concept and as one of the practical applications and outcomes of learner autonomy. I also wanted to construct knowledge about the reality of the programme as experienced by the participants in one module during the autumn term of 1999. My general aim was to improve the programme by feeding the deepening theoretical and practical understanding of a teacher-researcher into the practices.

Juha Varto (1992) has talked about the projectivity of research, meaning an approach in which problems and methods are seen as gradually changing and evolving. In practice, this means that replacing the linear process in which the researcher tries to answer the question posed at the beginning are simultaneous cyclic processes in which the questions, methods and results are in dialogue with each other. Thus, at the outset I did not know all the issues I would have to address. Tackling an area of foreign-language education such as self-evaluation was clearly venturing into something involving the unexpected. Action research is often seen as a self-reflective cycle in which planning, action, observation, reflection and re-planning follow each other. I saw my research as a problem-solving process in which emerging problems and issues related to self-

evaluation would be dealt with as the research proceeded: in other words, the successive cycles were attempts to take up the issues surfacing in the previous cycles. Although my research plan incorporated both the big picture of self-evaluation (all 20 students in the group) and the in-depth views of three students, the content of the cycles was determined by my deepening understanding of the research issue and its implications for the programme

In the course of my research I moved from a problem-solving and action-oriented approach to become a more reflection-oriented. My purpose in collecting the data was not so much to answer a particular research question or to test pre-formed hypotheses as to help me to find new ways of looking at self-evaluation. Thus, the refinement of my original aim of improving the programme and helping students with their self-evaluation was an aim in itself, and in the end the focus moved onto this. Moreover, the project changed in focus over time in terms of the important issues, and each change involved an expansion of the area of inquiry.

Following the first cycle a need arose to look more carefully at the factors that might contribute to how inexperienced self-evaluators tackle their task in ALMS. The second cycle highlighted the importance of the learner-counsellor dialogue in self-evaluation, and how that dialogue could be affected by learner histories and beliefs. The aim in the third cycle was to see if the idea of dialogue and potential friction that surfaced in the cases reflected more general student experiences.

The successive cycles of action research are often represented in the form of a spiral. The problem with using a spiral to represent the messy research process is obvious: it makes it appear linear, progressive and systematically forward-moving. McNiff, Lomax and Whitehead (1996) suggest using side spirals to show the new influences coming in. One advantage of using side spirals is that they accommodate the unexpected. Figure 1 shows the projective development and change of focus in my licentiate thesis. Moreover, the three side spirals indicate the new influences and the beginnings of the work at hand. The planning, action, observation, reflection and re-planning of the cycles should be seen as a broad framework for research and action taking. It is impossible to capture all the multiple processes that were going through the research, and throughout the learning and teaching term, in this progressive and chronological form.

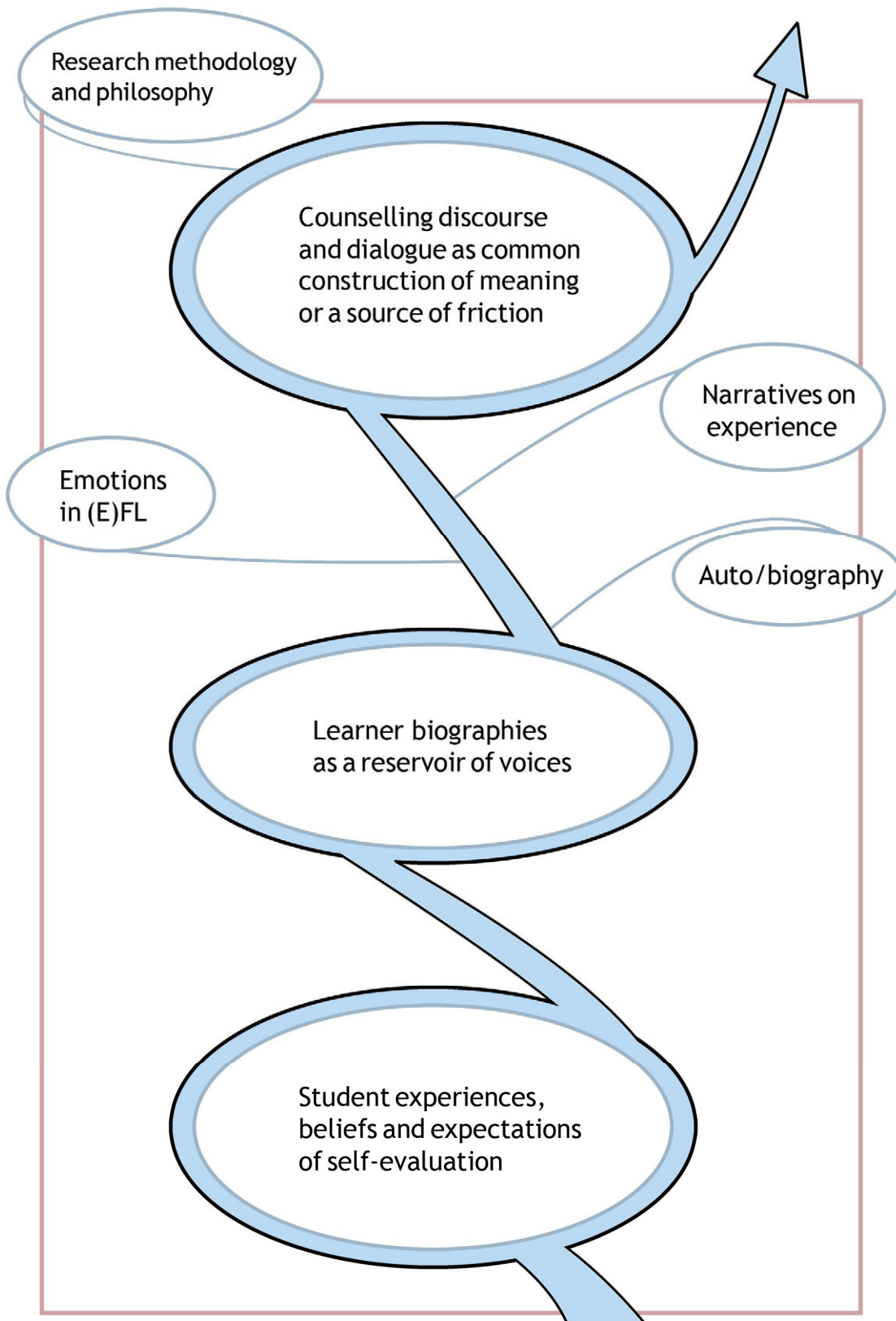


Figure 1. The spiral of action research

The main practical implications of my licentiate thesis were related to developing further the reflective approach to learning-to-learn in ALMS. Because the importance of English learners' histories or biographies for their construction of self-evaluation evolved from my research, I suggested that a deep-going discussion of learner histories was necessary if the learner-counsellor negotiation and dialogue were to support the learners in developing a working knowledge of self-evaluation. Moreover, I argued for a jointly constructed understanding of what self-evaluation was, and suggested that this in turn involved the use of authentic questions in counselling rather than pre-formed and pre-defined replies or comments. The emphasis in this joint construction was on the counselling dialogue, and in particular on the issues of membership (when the student insists on the counsellor adopting a controlling role) and, very importantly, the meta-cognitive implementation process of the new learner responsibility, self-evaluation.

My licentiate work led to the following two concrete interventions in the programme, in other words the creation and introduction of two new practices into the learner-support system. In autumn 2000 we incorporated a group discussion of the language-learning process in the preliminary awareness session based on a diagram of the language learning process that we modified from Sara Cotterall's (2000) simplified flow chart. We did this as a way of putting the planning, monitoring and, in particular, self-evaluation and reflection into the wider context of learning, and thus supporting the students in actively managing the learning process. The discussion is continued in the subsequent individual counselling sessions to make it possible for the students to further develop and reflect on their meta-cognitive notions about the new aspects (planning and evaluation) of their role. Starting in autumn 2002 we asked students to produce a brief reflection text on their language-learning background to be written after the first awareness session and discussed in the first counselling session. The idea was to give our learners an opportunity to reflect on their histories as language learners, and perhaps to learn something new about themselves as language learners from the writing of the text.

The research as a whole is best described as a learning process, and thus the main result was the deepening of my own and the ALMS team's understanding of the process of self-evaluation. Despite the individual nature of the thesis writing, there was collaboration and learning together over the years, too.

Methodologically, my project focussed on the development of a dialogic interpretation of the research process and the language-learning environment - the process and the interaction. As the

dialogic stance presupposes an understanding of the many voices to be heard in the research process, I took a multi-method approach to collecting, analysing and interpreting the data. I looked closely at the pre-course questionnaires, learner logs, transcripts of the counselling sessions, email counselling messages and end-of-module questionnaires, and analysed the participatory interviews. As a complex reflective process was anticipated, the data collection took place at various stages of the students' progress through the module: I did not trust the questionnaires to give deep enough insights so they were complemented with participatory interviews and an analysis of some video-taped counselling sessions. I was greatly influenced by Dufva et al. (1996) and Dufva (1999) and their work on Finnish foreign-language learners: they used a dialogic approach with a view to seeing how their beliefs regarding language learning could be accessed, and how they could be shown to accumulate and fluctuate with time and depending on the context in which they spoke about them.

The theoretical background to my research was mainly in second-language acquisition and the psychology of language, but theories of learning in general contributed to my understanding and conceptualisation of the issue of self-evaluation as well. My starting point was to familiarise myself with the literature on learner autonomy in foreign-language education (see e.g., Aoki 1999, Holec 1981, 1987, Dam 1995, Little 1991, 1995, 1996, 1999, 2000, 2001, Riley 1994, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2001, Benson 2001, Benson and Voller 1997, Breen 2001, Huttunen 1986, 1996, 2001., van Lier 1995, 1996, Gremmo and Riley 1995, Vieira 1997, 1999, Kohonen 1997, 1999, 2000, 2001). I then continued by looking into the sociocultural approaches to second-language-acquisition research (see e.g., Lantolf & Appel 1994, Lantolf 2000, Breen 2001 and Breen & Mercer 2001) which is in line with socioconstructivist approaches to human learning. The constructivist perspective on learning emphasises the active role of learners in constructing meaning and knowledge instead of passively receiving and accepting what is given to them. Individuals create meanings and understandings that are personal, not absolute. Moreover, socioconstructivists consider the social context of knowledge construction extremely important. The interaction between individuals is taken to be decisive for the way individual constructions are formed. The dialogic approach to learning and teaching with its basis in Bakhtin's and Vygotsky's ideas, Bruner's work and also in the practical applications of Bakhtin and Vygotsky reported by Dufva (1996, 1998 and 2000) and Alanen (2000), was a major discovery. I came to share their interest in the relationship between the intersubjective (learner-counsellor) and intrasubjective (learner-subject matter) as applied to the counselling dialogue. The concept of 'voice' (Bakhtin, Dufva, Kramsch (1993/4) as an element in the personal construction of learning and an element in learners' histories was also

important for my work, as was the context of experiential and intercultural foreign-language education (Kohonen et al., 2001, Jaatinen 2001).

By way of a conclusion to this section, I will go back to the side spirals of my work. The idea of learners' voices and how these voices can be heard, accessed and appreciated in a counselling situation was my specific interest when I was analysing and interpreting the data. Out of this interest grew my understanding that there were two areas in particular that could become sources of friction in counselling: 1) learner histories or autobiographies, and 2) the counselling dialogue and discourse. Moreover, I became convinced that both areas were shared meaning-making arenas: not even in the individual linguistic biography is it only the student's voice that is to be heard. It is in the side spirals that the major research puzzle and themes of the work at hand are situated: the themes of affect and emotions in language learning, shared narratives on learning experiences, and the building of partnerships in the research process, are all touched upon and written about but only in the subordinate clauses of the entire report.

On auto/biography in (E)FL research

Enter the author: the auto/biographical I.

(Liz Stanley 1992/1995, 20)

The concept of auto/biography as presented by Liz Stanley (1992/1995 and 1993) has enormous analytic potential for teacher-researchers trying to understand the classroom experiences and memories of their learners, their colleagues and themselves, and more importantly, wanting to write about these experiences. We have been learners in various language classrooms for quite a number of years in our lives as children, teenagers and adolescents. We have been teacher trainees and teachers in yet other language classrooms as adults. These experiences are bound to have influenced us deeply and, as uncomfortable as it may feel, they are probably a strong driving force in our interpretation of our students' educational experiences, both past and present. As Liz Stanley puts it: "... biography and autobiography are inseparable dimensions of the same experience." (1992/1995, 158).

Autobiography (a story of one's life as seen by the person herself) and biography (a story as told or written by someone else), according to this view, are only angles that meet in the researcher's reading. The same analytic apparatus is required for engaging with all forms of life writing (Stanley 1992/1995).

Autobiography as a story of greatness, as a retrospective, linear and chronological truth about a great, mostly male, life has been contested and subsequently revised (e.g., Stanley 1992/1993 and Vilkkio 1997) in the social sciences, and in particular by feminist writers. Autobiographical work, its traditional forms and ways of production are also contested in Carola Conle's educational work and writings (1997 and 2006). Conle (2006) points out how the emerging autobiographical work in the field of teacher development aligns itself with a different autobiographical tradition, writing by women and persons of a lower social status. These autobiographical writings are characterised by being self-presentations framed through the writers' relationships with others. They are writings that deal with identity struggles and describe everyday events. Conle emphasises that the construction of teacher stories happens through dialogue, dialogue with ourselves, with our colleagues, and with our learners. She points out that autobiography as a philosophical idea makes it possible for us to occupy ourselves with self-knowledge and self-study, whereas autobiography as a relational inquiry makes it possible to recognise our everyday practice as developmental and with a history. The latter also makes it possible for us to focus on the relational mode of teaching and on the potential of change when stories are seen as co-constructed.

I wanted to combine these three theoretical voices, Stanley's, Vilkkio's and Conle's, in my approach to autobiographical telling and research writing. A fourth theoretical voice was that of Riitta Jaatinen (2001 and 2003), who has referred to Liz Stanley's concept of auto/biography and the auto/biographical *I* in language teachers' work, both teaching and research into teaching. Talking and writing about life, or learning experiences, means that the researcher is active in constructing knowledge; that research is auto/biography in the sense that the researcher is using her own life to understand and interpret the lives of the research subjects. The auto/biographical *I* is the very agent who is actively producing knowledge: knowledge that is contextual, situated and specific (Stanley 1990, 1993). The teacher-researcher thus needs to analyse the research and writing process carefully for accumulating layers of understanding – and misunderstanding - and temporally located acts of biography (Stanley 1992/1995, 1993 and Jaatinen 2003).

Susan Rubin Suleiman (1994) suggests that this type of life writing be called 'mediated autobiography'. Like Stanley, she sees a writer dealing with the life and work of others as being engaged in exploring his or her own self indirectly through the mediation of writing about others. Closely linked to this idea of writing about others is her notion of autobiographical reading, which effectively captures the way a teacher-researcher works: for Suleiman the reading of another's story "as if it were one's own" (1994, 8) is "strong" autobiographical reading, "strong" meaning more than simply projecting ourselves onto what we read, which is obviously a familiar experience to all of us. One does strong autobiographical reading "for the sake of self-recognition, an expanded historical awareness, and a sense of at least potential collective action" (Suleiman 1994, 8). What Suleiman considers its most significant consequence is that it can lead us to do autobiographical writing. Her point about strong autobiographical reading not only as a particular kind of reading but also as a double possibility, also applying to a particular kind of *account* of such reading and writing, applies to the work at hand, to my reading and writing as a counsellor and also as a researcher.

A teacher's strong autobiographical reading experiences are inevitably linked with her inner dialogue concerning teaching theory and practice. The other elements in this dialogue come from what we have learnt about teaching in classrooms and from discussions with our colleagues. All of this adds up to what Connelly and Clandinin (2000) call 'teacher knowledge'. This personal, experiential knowledge is what we act on and consult in various unexpected situations in the classroom rather than what they call "knowledge for teachers", which is what we have all been taught in our formal year(s) of teacher training and is part of the written curriculum. Teacher knowledge according to this interpretation has both personal and professional dimensions, and it is important for us to reflect on this knowledge as it is expressed in practice.

Riitta Jaatinen (2003) has emphasised the significance of studying both personal memories and experiences and the "roots" of these experiences in the teacher's own autobiography. She writes that the teacher's way of experiencing life events in general colours the way he or she experiences individual classroom events. We need to be aware of the overall tone and shade of our experiences, otherwise we might focus on individual aspects of experience in our decision-making that never took place apart from in our minds. According to Jaatinen, this is also a significant understanding for a teacher-researcher who is studying both her own and other people's actions.

A teacher-researcher's intellectual and pedagogical autobiography

... for the act of biography is temporally located: this person with this particular personal and intellectual history in this time and place who understands, in now this light and now that, first one and then more facets of this other person as seen by that person, their friends, their enemies, the indifferent.

(Liz Stanley 1992/1995, 163)

In the following I would like to draft some paragraphs of what Liz Stanley has called a researcher's 'intellectual autobiography' (Stanley 1990, 1993, see also Aoki 2000, Jaatinen 2003, Heikkinen 2001, Perttula 1999 and Vilkkio 1997). According to Stanley (1990, 62), this should be "an analytic (not just descriptive) concern with the specifics of how we come to understand what we do, by locating acts of understanding in an explication of the grounded contexts these are located in and arise from". She also argues for "a textual recognition of the importance of the labour process". In these paragraphs, which do not follow a strict chronology, I focus on a self-reflexive analysis of how and why my current documents and data appear the way they do to me. In particular, I move between two points in my teacher-researcher career, the time when I was working on and finishing my licentiate thesis and the time when I was working on my doctoral dissertation. My quest in both projects was to find a pedagogically-motivated way of researching learning and teaching interaction and, in particular, counselling in an autonomous-language-learning environment.

In my licentiate thesis (Karlsson 2002) I produced the linguistic learner biographies of three ALMS students, Mike, Maire and Ian, based on various documents collected during their programme. My work was likened to that of a biographer. I carefully read their learning diaries, letters, emails, essays and other learning documents. I watched and transcribed their videoed counselling sessions in which they spoke about their experiences with a counsellor. I also interviewed my subjects. I collected a massive amount of information about them and put it under my research microscope. I sincerely wanted to give the students and the counsellors, my research subjects, a voice in my final report. I finished my licentiate thesis with the following words:

(...) my interest in this research has been in hearing as many voices as possible behind the participants' experiences (...). The inclusive way of researching that has been attempted here should mean that everyone concerned is included. Moreover, an action researcher should make

sure that everyone is treated with justice. I truly hope that I have shown enough concern and insight, and managed to re-story the (...) experience by the ALMS community, including both learners and counsellors/teachers, not forgetting myself, in a way that is acceptable to everyone included. I hope that all of these voices come through. (Karlsson 2002, 229).

This extract makes visible and audible many of my convictions at the time of writing and finishing the thesis. First and foremost, my dialogic approach to teaching, learning, counselling and research on the whole emerges from it: I express my wish for the readers to hear my voice, and also voices other than mine, in the study. I use the term ‘inclusive’ for the type of action-research approach that I used, thus emphasising the role of the many participants in the research process and product, most importantly the students and counsellors with their individual learning backgrounds and histories. In various other sections of my thesis I talk about the active participation of both researchee and researcher, and learner and counsellor. There are many indications of an awareness and intention of researching and writing in such a way that I would not reduce my research subjects to mute examples. I also express a major ethical concern at the final stage of my research about having treated everyone with justice.

The consequences of the dialogic approach to research are also to be seen in my methodological choices. I chose, to take an example, to carry out interviews that were meant to stimulate spontaneous conversation between myself and the interviewees. The emphasis was thus less on interviewing, although the initiative for introducing topics was mostly mine. The student comments led the discussion, and a process of negotiation was going on all the time. I felt that this was a way of ensuring that the student voices came through. My researcher role was that of an active participant in the negotiation, and this is also explicitly acknowledged in various sections of the thesis. Nor did I see myself as a detached scientific researcher on the lookout for objectivity and truth. I was not assuming that “truth” was something waiting for me to come along and find in the interviews. I saw my interpretation as a possible construction of what had been said, and the knowledge acquired was valid in the context in which it was constructed, partly evoked by the situation.

When planning and carrying out the research interviews, which were a central part of my thesis, however, I was not particularly focussed on the role of autobiographical elements and autobiographical knowledge in language learning. The thematic interview frame shows a concentration on the linguistic background and skills of the students, on their idea of language and

language learning in general, and self-evaluation and autonomy in particular. There is, though, an emergent autobiographical interpretation in my writing:

When we think of typical university language-centre students, the long history that they have as language learners is one of the first things that comes to mind. Ignoring that history would be a mistake for a teacher designing a course for these students, but it would also be a mistake for an action researcher trying to conceptualise the practice and find ways of improving a programme. The personal experiences these students have in learning different languages, and their experiences about the teaching of those languages, provide a wealth of data that can be used when trying to understand foreign-language learning and teaching more deeply (Karlsson 2002, 156)

This extract shows that I was aware of the significance of students' learning histories for an understanding of foreign-language learning and teaching. However, I limited my understanding of those learning histories to a problem-solving-oriented approach: I tended to see the histories related in the interview only as opportunities for learners "to describe their own learning experiences and express their feelings about those experiences" (Oxford 1996, 581). Like Oxford, I was thus "looking into the past instead of the present". I, too, felt that language-learning histories were useful for raising the students' awareness of the personal, contextualised nature of language learning, but in the interviews and their interpretation I ignored the effect of the moment of speaking or telling on how they interpreted and storied their experiences. Thus, their experiences remained somewhat anecdotal, separate instances and happenings in their personal histories, in the past. Consequently, an important layer of meaning was missing from my approach.

Moreover, I neglected my own autobiographical knowledge as a teacher-researcher. I concentrated on listening to the students actively and with empathy when they told me about their experiences, but I failed to see the role that my own autobiographical knowledge played in the interviews, both in the chosen topics and themes, the actual interaction and discussion, and most importantly, in my analysis and interpretation of the emerging interview narrative. Today, my thinking puts much more emphasis on the experiential, autobiographical knowledge (Jaatinen 2001, 2003) of both partners in the dialogue and the interplay of these biographies. These dialogues may take place in a research interview or a learning encounter, such as a counselling situation. Jaatinen (2001, 109) defines autobiographical knowledge as follows:

It is individual, lived and experienced, often incoherent, imperfect and fragmentary. It is not a direct reflection of what has happened or how things have been in our past, but it is a narrated description of the past events told or written retrospectively via memory.

The awareness and acknowledgement of the presence of emotions in the research process, i.e., our own researcher emotions, is relevant to how we, for example, conduct interviews concerning people's life events and interpret the transcripts of these interviews. If we accept that autobiographical knowledge can also be stored in our memory in a non-linguistic form, as feelings or physical sensations (Jaatinen 2001), then we may realise that these feelings are inevitably linked to how we understand and interpret the data we are collecting in an interview (and the data that we have collected when we read transcribed interviews). Our understanding of the data may grow from engagement with our personal feelings (Thompson 2004). Again, there is a parallel to the counsellor's and the teacher's work. I did not explore my researcher experience extensively at the time. It has come to the fore in social sciences and education, although not so much in applied linguistics (for notable exceptions see Pavlenko 2006, Jaatinen 2001 and 2003), that separating mind from body, nature from culture, public from private, and reason from emotion is not as unproblematic as it has seemed. My own researcher emotions, "having, using and keeping them" (Holland 2005) in the interviews, for example, was still not a major issue, although I repeatedly claimed in my research diary at the time that emotion was crucially linked to both action and cognition.

Unfortunately, I did not fully acknowledge the profound effects of the whole research experience, emotions included, and my own background on my understanding of Mike's, Maire's and Ian's histories. It was only when I came across Stanley's concept of 'auto/biography' that I was awakened to the need for a specific kind of approach to writing life stories (or in my case, educational life stories). This approach should acknowledge the existence of the researcher's intellectual autobiography, which has been forming through accumulated educational and personal experiences. I can now appreciate the way that I changed through producing the learner biographies in my licentiate thesis. Moreover, I now understand my subject, and indeed the idea of 'learner biography', slightly differently, not primarily as a linguistic story but as much more multilayered and complex, involving a student's whole autobiography. These profound analytic effects on my thinking made Chapter five (student biographies) in my licentiate thesis the beginning of my doctoral thesis. Moreover, the way I look upon the teacher-researcher autobiography as interwoven

with her construction of student biographies makes revealing the braidedness a way of showing how my thinking changed. The research story becomes the researcher's story.

My educational history and its formative influence on my intellectual autobiography, however, go far beyond 2002. When I interpreted Mike's, Maire's and Ian's memories and experiences and saw glimpses of 'the routine tragedy' (Laine 2000), there were my memories of a learner of English who became a teacher of English to shape the story. To be able to see the routine tragedy of Finnish language classrooms I needed my past in the Swedish, English, German and Latin language classrooms of the late 1960s and early 1970, not to mention my university studies in the English and German philology departments, and probably most importantly my teacher-training period towards the end of the 1970s and my first attempts at teaching in various secondary schools and at a teacher-training college. What I saw in my data were stories that could have been my own.

My readings at the time I was working on my licentiate thesis are telling examples of autobiographical reading: I read the language-learning memoirs of Alice Kaplan (1993) and Julia Alvarez (1998). Both books are autobiographies with a focus on the role of a foreign language in the writers' lives. Susan Rubin Suleiman (1994) emphasises that it is not only fiction that we read by projecting ourselves onto what we read. Narratives, potentially, are the strongest candidates for this projection. In the same spirit of autobiographical reading I moved on to two collections of educational life-stories published in Finnish in 2002: the first has the telling name of *Kielivuori/ Language Mountain*. I also read stories by university English majors and foreign-language teachers that became available through other researchers' work (Dufva et al. 1996, Dufva and Pöyhönen 1999, Kalaja and Dufva 1997, Kalaja et al. 1998). I read these stories as if they were my own, too. In particular, I found myself stopping at descriptions of student-teacher encounters and descriptions of teacher personalities and perceived teacher roles. A tension was created when I read about learners and teachers and a world of language learning and teaching in which teachers seemed to occupy a very particular place of power over all other influences and motivational factors, and in which other learners and peers hardly existed. Furthermore, my own teacher identity was still very fragile after more than twenty-five years of teaching. There was an inner urge to work out the tension that I experienced between my way of being a teacher and the image created in the various learner and teacher stories.

Thus the whole web of strong autobiographical reading and auto/biography was, without my fully recognising it, woven around the data of my licentiate thesis. Questions were forming in my mind

based on my being, reading, researching and writing. What is the drama in the language classroom that sets off these strong emotional reactions? What is it in the relationship between individual learners and teachers that makes the teacher remain the one strong memory and influence in language learning? Is a counsellor role different in this respect? These questions were partially answered in the licentiate thesis when the importance of language learners' histories for their learning management evolved, and when the need for true dialogue in counselling emerged. Yet, I did not touch upon how learner experiences grow into other experiences to form a narrative learner history, nor on the role of experience and memories in the actual telling of the story. These questions still needed to be researched.

The kaleidoscope as a research metaphor

You look and you see one fascinatingly complex pattern, the light changes, you accidentally move, or deliberately shake the kaleidoscope, and you see – composed of the same elements – a somewhat different pattern.

(Liz Stanley 1992, 178)

Again, with this work I am and have been looking for various ways of representing the experiences and voices in the data. What has helped me in this is a metaphor I have borrowed from Liz Stanley (1992/1995) that encompasses my way of researching, and of conceptualising the phenomena of language learning and teaching, and of teacher knowledge: the metaphor of the kaleidoscope. In 2004-2005 I was involved in developing a learning-to-learn tool for the Language Centre web pages⁸ with my colleague Felicity Kjisik, and we used the same metaphor to describe the language-learning process. It all came together when I realised the connection with my way of doing research. Although this metaphor is probably painstakingly familiar to those working with life-story research in sociology, I find it a novel enough way of picturing language learning and teaching, and most importantly it offers me a way of conceptualising my research into learner histories by making a kaleidoscope effect the goal of representation. Liz Stanley writes further (1992, 178): “A reflexive biography rejects ‘the truth’ in favour of ‘it all depends’, on *how* you look and precisely *what* you look at and *when* you look at it”.

⁸ To look at the reflective interactive tool, Kaleidoscope, go to <http://www.uiah.virtu.kaleidoscope>.

The kaleidoscope is a very general metaphor that is applicable to many phenomena. I have taken an everyday understanding of the functioning of a kaleidoscope as my starting point: 'kaleidoscope' and 'kaleidoscopic' are expressions used to describe phenomena that are perceived to be versatile and variable. The decisive aspect of how a kaleidoscope functions is the fact that the one looking into it is also the one who can change the image, its form and colours, by shaking or turning the tube. It has been the infinite variability in kaleidoscopic images that has attracted me: this kind of non-conclusiveness seems to capture the lives and the learning of foreign-language students in language classrooms and outside of them really well. Looking at learning experiences as a kaleidoscopic picture of many associated factors means rejecting the spotlight approach to student learning and, instead, trying to see the narrative webs or networks that develop.

In the course of the present work I have come to acknowledge writing about and describing past (learning) experiences as taking a stance on or explaining what happened (Stanley 1993). This applies not only to my own description of what I see in the kaleidoscope but also to the students' descriptions of what happened in their language classrooms and outside. It is a different pattern that I see now when I turn the kaleidoscope to look into, say, Mike's history: I am more aware of his deliberate choices and interpretations, and the fact that he was not necessarily focussed on describing what actually happened but was using his memories to explain the past in the light of the moment of speaking and the ALMS course in which he was participating. Because at the time I built my interviewing around themes and was not focusing on the nature or relation of experience and memories, I only partly appreciated the true nature of remembering past events: I failed to see the utmost importance of the present moment in how we look upon our experiences. I failed to interpret and recognise the students' interpretations of school and language-classroom events as a reinterpretation, and, therefore a reconstruction. I did not fully appreciate the fact that the students in their interview situation were engaged in a process of restructuring and reappraisal of what had happened through the moment of speaking, and also of forecasting the future.

I also failed to see the narratives the students produced as stories. I did recognise their general narrative quality but I did not realise that they were reframings of stories told by the students to themselves as well, not only to me. I was, in fact, using a microscope (Stanley 1992/1995) when looking at my data and thus missed significant patterns that could have been seen in a kaleidoscope. Two considerations are of extreme importance: firstly, it is always my hand turning or shaking the kaleidoscope and secondly, the whole formed by the fragments is always a novel entity and the change never stops. Thus the work of the teacher-counsellor or teacher-researcher is to understand

anew every learning encounter and its kaleidoscopic effect. For me, finding a metaphor for research meant confirming one already used for teaching and counselling, and understanding it more fully.

Finding a voice through writing

Writers of auto/biography start out as readers and forget these origins at their peril.

(Liz Stanley 1992/1995, 157)

Our way of telling our narrative history of experience is extremely important. This brings me to writing as a way of finding out, of learning, of knowing, of discovery and analysis, and of telling. The multi-layeredness of my current research process has been tangible and visible to me all the way through: when I am attempting to re-story the students' experiences I am writing about my own experiences as a learner and teacher, and about my experience of listening to, watching and reading the documents and data collected. It is the writing that becomes the site of all the processes coming together.

Anni Vilkkö (1997) has described her writing process as a way of looking for a voice for her whole experience. I understand that 'voice' in this context means a self-reflexive way of researching and writing, and an attempt to give a form and a visible and audible interpretation to what has been researched, in my case the phenomenon of learning English. Like Vilkkö, I have looked for various ways of representing the experiences and voices in the data: with some turnings and shakings of the kaleidoscope I have left the pattern to speak for itself, with others I have interpreted and coloured it through my reading. The Deweyan idea of experience as a continuum can be seen in these paragraphs in which I am trying to get to the roots of my understanding of the data the way I have understood it.

When I was starting my research I came across a collection of stories that, like many other texts mentioned before, I read as if they were my own. This was *Writing and Research – Personal Views* (edited by Saarnivaara et al. 2004), an interesting collection of writing autobiographies that story the writing lives of Finnish researchers. They wrote the texts in English, the language they all have to master in order to publish in their field. Exactly like these researchers, I have carried my writing baggage with me: my school memories of writing are reflected very accurately in the words of Saarnivaara et al. (p. 156): writing was a "gift" to the teacher, not a source of pleasure and not even

done for purposes of communication. I would claim that the discursive practices of school are always with us when we write: we do not want not to be excluded, we do not wish to produce texts that are not considered worthy by our perceived readers, especially by readers who so often count as the significant others in our educational histories, such as teachers.

The connections between school memories and my current academic writing bring me back to Stanley and her idea of the auto/biographical *I*: I am peeling off layers of meanings woven around the idea of what counts as an acceptable research text. The history starts from very far back in time and place. I have to go back to a primary school in Northern Karelia decades ago. Like many of the writers contributing to the collection mentioned above I learnt that one needs to be able to write on supplied topics, in other words about any subject whatsoever. It was always with mixed emotions and only sometimes with joy, if not pride, that I received my good mark as a “return present” (Saarnivaara et al., 2004). This joy was mixed with shame, particularly if I had to stand up and read my composition in front of the class, which seems to be a long-standing tradition in mother-tongue teaching in Finland.

A much more recent layer of autobiography and writing to be peeled off comprised the learner stories I wrote for my licentiate. I look upon the writing of these texts as ‘doing biography’ (Stanley 1992/1995), which changes how one sees oneself. This change initiates another change: one understands the subject differently. There are far-reaching analytic consequences, then, in ‘doing biography’ for further work.

I am fortunate in doing my research and writing at a time when the conventions of scientific writing are being gently shaken by many researchers in the realm of qualitative research (see Latvala et al. 2003, Saarnivaara et al., 2004, Richardson 1997, 2000, Ellis and Bochner 2000). A major driving force in looking for alternative ways of writing is the fact that the traditional research report fails to bring to light many aspects and stages in the research process. The whole researcher experience into, say, language-learning experiences, would be inconsistent with the writing mode if at the end of a process full of slippages, inexactness, indeterminacy, ambiguity and changes of plan the researcher ended up neatly writing an objective, precise, unambiguous and non-contextual report. I believe that our writing should reflect the way we have researched: in conceptualising knowledge and knowing as partial, local and situated we have given up on the role of an omniscient narrator. Hence my commitment to a personal and subjective narrative.

If we regard writing as a way of finding out about ourselves and our topic, as a way of knowing, as a method of inquiry (Richardson 2000, Vilkkio 1997), we have to keep struggling on and developing our approach. This is also related to language: the changes, new insights and learning need to be reflected in the language. My claim is that this thesis is a quest and a struggle also in the sense of trying to find a way of bringing together the two languages, English and Finnish, and of using these two languages as carriers of the stories told, stories that are slightly different, slightly re-enacted.

The role of language in this kind of writing is central. If we understand language not only as reflecting social reality but also as creating it, we are faced with language as a place where our subjectivities are constructed. Language thus provides competing ways of giving meaning, and experience and memory can be constructed in various ways. The researcher, like the people studied, becomes “both the site and subject of these discursive struggles for identity and for remaking memory” (Richardson 2000, 929). Then again, I am now more critical of what language can do: some sensations and wordless experiences in the past are probably beyond its reach and yet I as a researcher, and the students as learners and as research participants, were sincerely trying to convey our perceptions of the past via the medium of language.

How can we overcome language as an obstacle in the writing? Experimental ways of writing (see Richardson 2000, Saarnivaara et al. 2004) in which lived experience is re-created through forms of writing that are evocative, that evoke emotions, that share personal and even revealing stories told by the authors have been put forward as a possibility. In particular, autoethnographers (Ellis and Bochner 2000) have used forms of writing that are meant to give the readers the possibility to relive the events described with the writers.

When it comes to experimenting with writing, the close link between my own being in the world and the mode of narrative inquiry becomes central. Carola Conle (1999, 17) writes:

More and more I come to see this kind of interconnectedness between the inquirer and her personal context as a new door in the world of educational research [and teacher education]. Not that each and every one of us must, or would want to, enter by this door.

The latest paragraphs of my teacher history would have to include stories of what happened after I chose to enter by the door Conle writes about. Most importantly, my teaching and counselling is more geared towards the reflexive self-study that characterises this research. One aspect of this

self-study is the question of my two languages, Finnish and English. For me, moving back and forth between the two adds to the struggle, especially when writing. It has added to the struggle of the students involved in this research as well: like me, they have moved between the two languages, English as the language of the programme and Finnish, our site of the research interviews. The students have been involved in two types of boundary crossing all the way through: they have adopted the use of a foreign language in various situations as listeners, as speakers, as writers, and as readers, but they have also moved from their student roles into being research participants, again changing the language. It is not a small issue that language, two languages, were “our constant companions on the journey” (Conle 1993, 165): learning is registered through language and so are all of our experiences.

The data or materials collected for the thesis are in two languages, English and Finnish, although the thesis is in English. Translation thus has a major role in the interpretation and analysis. For me, it all comes together under the umbrella of dialogue and under the broad idea of interpretation. I look upon translation as rewriting, writing again by shaping the text on the basis of my reading, interpretation and recreation of the original text. The texts that I have translated for this work were mainly transcripts of research interviews. To a lesser degree, I have translated excerpts from research literature and fiction in Finnish.

Significantly, translation always starts with reading and the reader goes through a process of interpretation and recreating the text for herself, always looking for relationships between issues and making conclusions. Reading starts with an intention, a purpose, and with a motivation, a willingness to understand. One could say that reading means translating, because when we read we are engaged in analysing and emotionally participating in the text (Oittinen 1995). Harold Bloom (1980) emphasises reading as an intertextual activity in which we read stories based on other stories, which are based on yet other stories. Bloom takes all reading and interpretation to be a positive misreading, or reading otherwise or differently.

Reading is also something that undergoes changes with time and when new experiential horizons come into view. Rosenblatt's (1976) aesthetic and efferential ways of reading are perennial and describe very well my reading of the interview transcripts: the aesthetic impression of the first reading of my documents lingered on and prepared me for later efferential readings with a more analytic eye. In translating the documents I took my reading and also my listening experience as a basis. Listening to the recordings was an equally important part of the interpretation and translation:

I listened to them repeatedly and at various points in time, also going back to parts of the texts, to the episodes or fragments I finally decided to quote and re-story. I did not forget other voices, the ones ventriloquating in me, in that I planned and carried out the interviews on the basis of my reading thus far of the research literature, fiction and documents gathered. Very clearly, translating was a dialogic process in the sense that I was in a dialogue with the texts, listening to the ventriloquating voices. Oittinen's (1995) idea of the importance of the whole and of the details in the service of the whole suited me as well. The translations I produced are texts that have a different function from what was originally produced; they are selective and only comprise bits of the interview texts, episodes and fragments.

Translation is a big part of my (E)FL history because when I started studying languages as a youngster the grammar-translation method was in use all the way through school. The idea of translation as a way of producing the exact equivalent of the original text was what was aimed at, and what the teacher appreciated. Translation was used both as a method of practising our foreign-language skills and testing them. It was a way of showing our skills, especially vocabulary knowledge (words were thought to have exact equivalents in the two languages) and grammar knowledge.

Translating was not perceived as interpreting or being in dialogue with the text; it meant finding the one equivalent that corresponded to the writer's intention. The meaning of the text was definitely not seen to arise from the dialogue between the writer and the translator, and further the teacher as the reader of the translation. The translator did not contribute to the meaning. The text meant what the writer had intended it to mean and the teacher was the one in the know of the writer's intention. So the multilayeredness of the process of translation was not part of my learner's role. There was little emphasis on the whole of the text; translation proceeded word for word. As translators we were not expected to take any responsibility for the text we created: how could we anyway because the whole intention of the exercise was to carry out a task in order to give proof of certain specific language skills. We never thought of the source text as anything more than a sequence of words to be expressed in the other language. We were in a marginal role as translators both from our mother tongue and into it. The role was not created by us, it was created by the teacher.

As an introduction to the kaleidoscope that follows, I need to take up one issue that is absolutely crucial to the whole work. Christine Pearson Casanave's words guided me in this:

Part of the struggle involves figuring out what I want my relationship to the field to be (and understanding that this relationship probably changes over time, and in my case at least that it is wrought with ambivalence. Casanave (2003, 131)

By 'struggle' Casanave refers to the process of researching, and in particular to writing for publication. The 'field', (E)FL, is what we both depend on, and we have to define our relationship with it. Casanave and Vandrick (2003) emphasise Lave and Wenger's 1991 notion of peripheral participation as a positive approach to defining the lesser degrees of engagement in the practices of a community. The metaphorical periphery of the (E)FL research community is how I perceive my own location. My mind wanders back to various points in my career as a teacher, and I picture encounters with researchers in (E)FL and applied linguistics that strengthened the existing, if not fair, dichotomy between practitioners and researchers in my mind. Research and writing were not what teachers did. Teachers taught and consulted the researchers about classroom practices and their relevance and efficiency.

It follows from this bit of history that I have never been a full insider in the community of researchers in (E)FL. This is, in fact, a very good place to be for a "late-blooming" teacher-researcher (see Vandrick 2003) who is practising writing in "Language Learning" and using her own idiolect of (E)FL in a quest for a pedagogically motivated form of researching and writing, not linear but fragmentary, cross-disciplinary and profoundly intertextual. In writing one begins to gain insight into what the implicit goals underlying the inquiry are. One of them could be phrased as finding a way of existing and being in the margins of academia and thereby acquiring an academic voice of one's own.

As stated earlier, I look upon teaching as research, and I also equate counselling with teaching. Counsellor autobiographies come into dialogue with learner autobiographies in exactly the same way as a researcher autobiography will meet the autobiographies of the other research participants. There are always two histories, there is always the telling of those histories, two constellations of experiences, influenced by the very situation of telling and interaction, and there is always the projection into the future. This report is a collection of research and teaching stories. It is also an inquiry into stories (cf. Heikkinen 2001). It is inspired by and devoted to the idea of action research as a form of autonomous learning for teachers developing their teacher autonomy, the learners being active partners and beneficiaries of the research. However, it is not geared towards perceived

problems and change interventions as such: the idea is to foster an understanding of the narrative processes in language learning and teaching, and of the narrative language used in these processes.

The middle part of the thesis, the kaleidoscope of ALMS stories, is meant to be read and interpreted through experiential and imaginative eyes (Phillion et al., 2005) and minds. I hope there is enough room for the reader to move, and to look beyond my words and interpretations to imagine what we, a little community of autonomy in autumn 2004, experienced.

PART B

THE KALEIDOSCOPE OF ALMS STORIES

Through the eyepiece of a kaleidoscope, one sees a multitude of fragments, forming patterns that shift with the movement of the viewer.

(Kali A.K. Israel 1990, 40)

Story meets story

At the beginning of my inquiry I was intrigued by how I kept encountering what I felt were separate learner and teacher stories, both in the research literature and in my own every-day-life and professional experience. Very disconcertingly, many of the stories told by learners depicted the teacher, also the (E)FL teacher, as a person with inhuman qualities, either for good or bad. Many of the teachers seemed to be obsessed and occupied with language as form, and with getting pupils through the matriculation examination with the best possible results. In quite a few of the stories the learners came through as having suffered or gone through a transformation in the lessons given by the teachers. As Minna Uitto (2007) has suggested, teacher memories are always in relation to the students. When language teachers (see e.g., Kalaja and Dufva 1997, Kalaja et al. 1998) told their own stories they were much less occupied with the learners, and many did not particularly consider them at all. I wanted to look into the possibility of bringing the voices together, helping them to come through infiltrated with the other, voicing the experience of the same encounter that might have appeared different to the partners, or might have assumed a different meaning in their minds.

I was convinced that in many cases, for both learners and teachers, the source of discomfort and frustration, or of learning less effectively, had to do with acting and interpreting new learning encounters from a past framework of meaning. I was convinced that both groups would benefit from reframing their stories in ways that would empower rather than victimise or blame or ignore the other participant in the encounter. Alternatively, in the less dramatic cases I felt it would be beneficial for the participants to analytically look at the narratives that shaped their learning encounters and possibly coloured them with the same shades that they had seen and used before. I

was also keen on looking at stories about meaningful and positive experiences, and felt that sharing these might help in reframing the negative ones. In short, I considered it necessary to bring the two separate scripts into dialogue, and to look at the patterns of the kaleidoscope with both partners in them. I felt that this would be a way of matching the existentially lived curriculum with the academic one.

The kaleidoscope of the research puzzle

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest that wordings like ‘research problem’ and ‘research question’ tend to misrepresent what is at work with narrative inquirers. Problems imply solutions, clear-cut qualities and definability. However, narrative inquiry is characterised by the continual reformulation of an inquiry, and not so much in terms of defining problems and finding solutions. At the stage when I was starting to look into my kaleidoscope of ALMS stories I was trying to understand what was already appearing slightly differently compared with when I wrote my proposal. As Clandinin and Connelly say, life was not standing still and it was getting in my way. After spending a lot of time reading and rereading my *Book of Stories*⁹, in other words the field texts and various interim texts, I reformulated the broad problem-field, or the kaleidoscope of the research puzzle (cf. Clandinin and Connelly), of my thesis as having to do with the following four areas:

1. the nature and meaning of learners’ and counsellors’ past and present (E)FL experiences in an autonomous learning context;
2. language teachers, autobiographical elements and emotions in the personal narratives of learners and counsellors;
3. ALMS encounters as the sharing of stories and co-telling;
4. the development of (E)FL methodology with a view to incorporating auto/biography, autonomy, dialogue, experience and narrative.

⁹ This document contains all of the field texts and many interim texts: every course and research document, the email exchanges, transcripts of the interviews, writing stories and drafts of various sections in the final work, conference and seminar presentations given during the process, journal articles and two book chapters written in the midst, and the unwritten stories of students encountered whilst the thesis process was progressing on the side.

When I am looking into the kaleidoscope of ALMS stories my basic motivation is to describe how the past and present learning and teaching/counselling experiences of the participants organise themselves into texts and into talk, both counselling talk and interview talk in the context of an ALMS module. I also want to describe how the ALMS researcher reads these texts and the talk. In this re-storied part I am aiming at a method in which I pose questions to my data at various points in time and place, and address different aspects of learner/counsellor experience, i.e., the intra-individual and/or inter-individual aspects of their experiences. I proceed through the data at various angles, placing different bits in the kaleidoscope and I test and retest the new emerging patterns and the old ones against each other. This means that certain story fragments and episodes appear in more than one pattern. In this way I hope to use the idea of the three-dimensional inquiry space to capture the complexity of experience and experiences, their temporal aspects, the social-personal dimension and the effects of place.

A dialogic relation to my data will appear in the way I write about these shakings and turnings of the kaleidoscope: my writing is fragmentary but I try to show the links between the fragments and how these links have come about in my reading: the stories are presented in their experiential context. The crucial one is the researcher's story, which emerges as a thin line of emplotment all through the stories in the various patterns of the kaleidoscope. I am re-storying and giving myself the relevant place in each pattern and its episodes or fragments: an interpretative context is thus created in which I hope to show meanings that readers will be able to interpret from their own contexts. Each pattern is a story, or an episode in the researcher's ALMS story, but also in the collaborative ALMS story, constructed from a point of view guided by the questions posed to the data. Each story is placed in the context within one ALMS course and this research, and was written with an audience in mind. Each story also has a setting, characters and a plot.

There is no single story that would encompass the individual experiences of the participants. The ones I tell should be viewed against the background of my intellectual and pedagogical autobiography, as should those that remain untold. The choices that I make as to which stories to tell reflect first and foremost my burning desire to understand the teacher's role in my students' narratives. Still, I might have chosen different stories from the ones somebody else looking at this data with the same motivation would have chosen. I have been guided in my quest by a strong professional belief in the (E)FL teacher as a counsellor or facilitator rather than a controller or examiner. Thus I also focus on understanding the ALMS counsellor's role in the narratives.

My other purpose in choosing is to illustrate the inter-narrativeness of my stories: by showing how they come in various patterns of my kaleidoscope I hope I manage to shed light on different sides or even layers of meaning-making, and to show how an experience evolves and becomes a new experience. My third purpose is to highlight the role that autobiographical elements and emotions play in language learning: how we use them, hide them, but act on them no matter what we say, or write, and how it is often difficult if not impossible to interpret them in the short episodic encounters between learners and teachers and/or counsellors. The intertwining of emotions with the rational has been my concern all the way through the research process, not stopping short at the data collection and preliminary stages of the analysis and writing as it did with my licentiate thesis.

Data or field texts

When I was planning my research my aim was to make the data-collection procedure a relevant reflection process for the learners. I wanted to make the documents suitable for memorising, reflecting and telling a story. On the whole, as I see no conceptual difference between teaching and research, I carried out the data collection with the processes of learning and reflection on learning in mind. I collected two types of data: course documents and, from the autumn 2004 ALMS students' point-of-view, additional research documents. It would be interesting to know whether the students stopped to think about the difference between the two types: this mainly concerns the pre-course questionnaire¹⁰ and the reflection text¹¹ because they were fairly similar in content. The ones who took part in the interviews were obviously aware that the pre-course questionnaire was extra. In particular, it is interesting to reflect on the perceived differences and/or similarities between the interviews and the counselling (see Kaleidoscope patterns four and five) in terms of learning and gaining from the course. The videoing of the group sessions and the individual counselling sessions most clearly potentially caused disturbance, or even anxiety in the students and the counsellor.

The question of data collection also touches upon the ownership of the learning documents, which has been an issue in the ALMS programme as counsellors have felt differently about this. Some have objected to collecting documents such as reflection texts, learning diaries and logs, which are personal in nature, while others have felt that students, in fact, want their counsellors to acknowledge the work by taking it and keeping it. There has been agreement on keeping a copy of every student's learning contract and SILL profiles because the former has been seen as a shared

¹⁰ The questionnaire appears in English in Appendix 1. Originally, it was written in Finnish.

¹¹ The instructions given for writing the reflections texts appear in Kaleidoscope pattern 1.

and negotiated document with a high record-keeping value and the latter as a piece of information that is of practical use at the end of the course when students are asked to do it again and to compare the results. So, in fact, different documents have had different fates in the hands of the counsellors: on a normal course there is always variation in what is kept in the student records and what is kept by the students themselves. On this occasion I asked the counsellor to keep copies of all the documents.

The data collected, in other words the research materials, could also be called narrative field texts (Clandinin and Connelly 2000). The Language Centre and the ALMS programme constitute the field in which I collected the material, the field texts, that I pose questions to and which I bring into the three dimensional narrative research space. Figure 2 lists my field texts and shows where the elements forming the patterns of the kaleidoscope have their origins. The data collection is presented in chronological order, and the context and the purpose as I pictured it at the outset are both given. I thus give some theoretical background in the columns, and also present rough some methodological solutions. The figure emphasises the overlapping roles of counsellor and researcher.

DATA	CONTEXT	PURPOSE
Pre-course questions (in Finnish) (research document)	Oct 6, questions sent to 20 students, 13 replies by Oct 13, 2 replies after first session (email problems)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • permission for videoing • selecting students for interviewing • to get background information and initial ideas on learning histories • part of overall story
Videod first and second group session (sessions part of course)	Oct 15 and 22, 16 students (one extra from the theology group) and ALMS counsellor, ALMS room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to aid memory in interviews • to authenticate experience for researcher and interviewees • to catch all student voices • to capture the complexities of learning in a group • part of overall story (counsellor training?)
Reflection texts (in English) by students (part of course but instruction worded differently for research purposes)	14 student texts (one student dropped out after first group session, ill)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to initiate meaning-making • to reflect on and to narrate experiences, histories, memories • to get in touch with the autobiographical elements • part of overall story
1st individual counselling videos (counselling part of course)	Oct 22/25/26, 14 students and ALMS counsellor, SA counselling room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction and meaning-making together • sharing experiences, histories, memories • negotiating of plan, contract and self • evaluation in focus • part of overall story (counsellor training?)
Reflection texts by counsellor and researcher (research documents)	2 counsellor texts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to initiate meaning-making • to narrate experiences, histories, memories • to get in touch with the autobiographical elements • part of overall story

Figure 2. ALMS field texts

DATA	CONTEXT	PURPOSE
Memory session with students, (audio) (research)	Nov 8, 5 students and researcher, ALMS room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reminiscing • collective memories, sharing • listening to and reflecting on other students' experiences • reflection as a process • catching ventriloquating voices • part of overall story
Memory session with ALMS counsellor (audio) (research)	Nov 9, group counsellor and researcher, office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher voices • listening to and sharing memories, histories, experiences • catching ventriloquating voices • part of overall story
Individual interviews (audio) (research)	Nov 17, 23, and 25 and Nov 1, 8 students, ALMS room/office	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • student voices, whole persons, emotions • narrating experiences, histories, memories • past, present and future: constructing experiences when narrating • interpreting experiences • listening and sharing • part of overall story
2nd individual e-mail counsellings (part of course)	deadline Nov 20, 14 email exchanges between students and counsellor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction • focus on learning • how the story develops
3rd individual counselling videos (counselling part of course)	Dec 1, 2, and 8, 13 students and ALMS counsellor, one counselling only on audio, SA counselling room	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • interaction • focus on evaluation • part of story (counsellor training?)
Records, contracts, logs and diaries, e-mails by students and counsellor (course documents) emails by researcher, research diary (research documents)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • documentation • to deepen understanding • recording various processes • to assist analysis and interpretation • deepening understanding of the autobiographical elements • giving chance for the unexpected to come out • reference material • research diary as a way of recording tensions between inquiry history and research at hand • part of story

Figure 2. ALMS field texts (continued)

Most of the materials were part of the course independently of this research, but many had become part of the course on the basis of my previous research: all of them are based on action-research into the programme by the ALMS team. The kaleidoscope then presents my solutions as to how to fit each individual field text with its own narrative qualities into the overall narrative. The individual texts present different degrees of being storied. In some of them the story quality is only implied; in particular, this concerns the texts that are part of the course, such as the student records and learning contracts, and also many of the emails, including the second counselling emails.

Although I happily refer to ‘data’ and ‘data collection’, I am aware of the not-so-innocent nature of these terms. In fact, this use of language reflects the many layers of understanding and constructing meaning in narrative inquiry. The way the data are presented in Figure 2, however, already reveals that I am not looking upon data as objective facts that were collected in an impartial way (Elbaz-Luwisch 2005). There is a purpose given that is the researcher’s, my own purpose for selecting these particular texts to be studied. Furthermore, the students and the counsellor taking part in the research had purposes of their own. My transcribing and translating certainly adds to the complexity of the issue and makes the texts even less innocent.

Joan Swann (2001) noted how a transcript is already an interpretation of the event it seeks to record. My choice of a very simple transcription system followed from the focus on storytelling rather than on making a difference between various features of spoken language. I have chosen to use the most commonly used layout, a ‘standard’ layout that is set like a dialogue in a play and thus presents the speakers’ turns as following one another in a sequence (Swann 2001). I wanted to present all the dialogues in the thesis in a similar transcript and layout, and I thus make no distinction between interview and group dialogues, or between dialogues in English and the ones translated from Finnish. As my transcriptions of the group session only concern the parts in which the counsellor was in charge of the discussion, I have not had to worry about bits of talk that are collaborative in nature. This solution definitely shadows many aspects of classroom interaction, as does my decision not to highlight non-verbal information systematically. Initially I was not using even punctuation excessively. In the final version I added some punctuation to the transcripts to make it easier to read them. I am fully aware of the interpretative nature of this activity.

A type of data not mentioned in Figure 2 at all is what Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre (1997, 179) writes about: “data that escaped language, data that were uncodable, excessive, out-of-control, out-of-category”. She singles out three non-traditional categories: emotional data, dream data and

sensual data. She also mentions a fourth type of non-traditional data, response data, by which she means various types of feedback given by colleagues and research participants. These are elements that have a role to play in knowledge construction, but they are not texts as such that could be listed. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe how narrative inquirers proceed from field texts to research texts by asking questions of meaning and social significance. In this process, different field texts are held in relation to other field texts. Research texts grow out of the asking of questions, as happens in the kaleidoscope here. There is a process of selection and linking going on within the three-dimensional inquiry space in order to form an overall narrative text. I am aware of the many instances in which there was a possibility of non-traditional data creeping in, but I am also aware how modest my attempts at accounting for them are.

I also read 115 reflection texts produced by ALMS students from the other groups running in the autumn 2004 term. These students were counselled by four different ALMS counsellors, and my only connection to them is via these texts written for their first individual counselling sessions. The counsellors asked for the students' permission for me to read and use the stories in this research. These students have not had the opportunity to give their comments on my text, unlike those in the research group. When I was reading the texts I came across quite a few stories that put a lot of emphasis on the teacher's role in learning. I also came across stories in which feelings related to past learning encounters were vented. Moreover, the stories were wrought with a multitude of autobiographical detail, many layers of foreign-language-learning history.

I wanted to include two of these stories in the thesis (Tero's and Markku's) without weaving them into my interpretation in the kaleidoscope because the writers were not part of my research group. I did not talk to them, and could only rely on the texts they wrote for getting close to their experiences. However, my interpretative solutions are to be read in the selection of these particular student texts and in the context in the thesis in which I chose to place them. Another reason for including these texts is that I felt the need to show how a counsellor's reading and a researcher's "reading" are never-ending and forever unfolding processes: their work is thoroughly intertextual in nature. I have edited the texts to make it impossible for the students to be recognised.

Basing my interpretation and reading only on the texts would have been a valid solution as well, but I feel that it would have been different from what happens in teaching and from what has happened in this research. Then again, I trust that they will resonate with my readers' experiences as they are and that will also resonate with what I have written about other stories, both the reflection texts and

the other narratives. These stories were written by students who were members of the ALMS community, and thus, I would like to claim, are not totally detached from their experiential moorings when brought to this text. My one reason for including them is resonance: to give the readers an opportunity to feel how it was to start the research, to read these stories as I have encountered them as a counsellor.

In fact, there was a two-year-period of reading reflection texts behind the readings in this thesis: as a counsellor I had read at least a hundred other texts not touched upon here. Moreover, I read another 40 to 60 reflection texts and/or Kaleidoscope profiles (which, since autumn 2005 have been an alternative for students to reflect on past learning experiences) every term during the thesis process. These texts are echoing in my interpretation in this work, and the topics, themes, and ways of expressing emotion, experience and happenings are part of my counsellor experience and practical personal knowledge. They are also part of my listening as a counsellor: I came to these two hundred counselling sessions to listen to all these students and to talk about their texts. Before I started this research I had developed ways of listening to students talking about their experiences. I had also developed ways of reading the texts, sometimes very quickly as they were handed to me, sometimes more thoroughly. They are my field texts as well.

Narrators in the stories, patterns and fragments of the kaleidoscope

The story of the course starts with a counsellor-researcher reading of the reflection texts produced by the students (pattern 1). It continues with a description of how the texts became counselling talk (pattern 2), and then the story moves to the students' and counsellors reminiscing and sharing past learning experiences (pattern 3). The next pattern re-stories the research interviews (pattern 4), and this leads to experimenting in writing student biographies (pattern 5). The story winds its way through teacher memories (pattern 6), emotions (pattern 7) and autobiographical elements in (E)FL, and touches upon autonomy (pattern 8). It does not come to an end. However, some loose ends are tied together (pattern 9) in part C of the thesis. The way the story winds its way through the massive amount of textual data and stops to describe short episodes and fragments, goes back and forth, is a simulation of how I see (language) classrooms and the world of learning (languages), even at university level (not different from learning in primary school in this sense, cf. Salo 1999). The narrators in the various stories are listed in Figure 3.

NARRATOR	FACULTY	YEAR	OWN WORDS FOR DESCRIPTION AS A LANGUAGE LEARNER	KALEIDOSCOPE PATTERNS
AINO	BEHAV	1999	I'm a perfectionist	1, 3, 4, 5, 8
ANNE	SCIENCE	2001	I've never been particularly sensitive to criticism	3, 4, 5
JOHANNA	SCIENCE	1996	I've had bad experiences as a language learner	1, 3, 4, 5, 6
JUUSO	LAW	2000	Being a lawyer makes me slightly different (as a language learner)	4, 5, 7
KATJA	SCIENCE	1995	I was reasonably good and very conscientious	1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8
MARIA	ARTS	1993	I've always felt that I've been somehow very visible to the teacher (in language classrooms)	4, 5
MIA	BEH	2000	If no one else says anything, I'll try	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
PÄIVI	SCIENCE	1999	I'm silent and shy and I don't socialize much in Finnish either	1, (3), 4, 5, 7, 8
TIMO	SCIENCE	1999	-	6
ULLA	THEOL	-	-	7
JOAN	GROUP COUNSELLOR			1-8
LEENA	COUNSELLOR-RESEARCHER			1-8, 9

Figure 3. The narrators in the stories

The student narrators came from different faculties at the University of Helsinki. This particular ALMS group is called ALMS All Faculties and thus differs from the other groups that are faculty-specific. Students in the faculty of Science were not offered a faculty-specific group in 2004, which partly explains the fact that the All Faculties group tended to have quite a few students from this faculty. This varies from term to term, though. We offer two ALMS groups like this per term, and the group taking part in the research was what we call 'late' or 'short' ALMS because it starts four to five weeks later than the other English courses, including the other ALMS groups.

These groups were only recommended for students working for one credit (40 hours), but Maria was a student working for two credits (80 hours). Faculty requirements in the old degree system differed, as they do in the new system introduced in 2005, in other words a year later: Maria's faculty, the arts, required two credits for oral skills whereas the other faculties presented here required only one. All of the students were working for the other half of the language requirement in the old degree system that focused on oral skills; they had all done a course in academic reading or had passed an exemption test. The English courses are no longer split in the new degree system and the students are expected to take one integrated course (or two in some faculties) that covers academic reading, writing and discussion skills. The line between the four skills areas has always been much more blurred in ALMS, and the areas on which the students focus have always depended on their own needs and goals.

The counsellor in charge of the group, Joan, was responsible for the two group (awareness) sessions and the individual one-on-one meetings, including the email counselling in mid-term. She was also responsible for giving the credits at the end of the programme.

Counsellor/researcher reflections

The problem of collecting data in a way that would not appear distant and separate from the students' course work occupied me a lot during the months before the course began. From my work as a counsellor I knew that that any reflection process needs and takes time, and that depending on the context, time, place and the participants, the process could take various forms and go in different directions (Karlsson 2002). My starting point in the data collection was to develop what I tentatively called a narrative-biographical view of the ALMS course work. I was influenced by Hannu Heikkinen's (2001) ideas on the use of autobiographical methods in teacher education and his way of building a narrative-biographical approach into student teachers' portfolio work in order to enhance students' personal and professional growth. Heikkinen used memory work in small groups as a method of action research. He suggests that sharing one's own and other students' texts in groups by listening and discussing is an effective way of working with autobiographical memories.

In ALMS we have always conceptualised the students' language work as a kind of language portfolio, although we have not used the actual term, at least not officially: portfolios tend to have connotations that make them seem fairly fixed in form and content. My one concern was to better

understand the meanings given to the writing and reading of the reflection texts in the programme, and to develop new insights into how they benefited the students in their planning and evaluation. At this stage I was still looking at research mainly in terms of action research, and even as promoting potential change interventions in the ALMS programme and the documents used. I was hoping to look into how the texts were discussed in the counselling sessions. I was also interested in seeing how the students were using the fruits of reflecting on their past experiences, and if and/or how they were integrating these reflections into their planning and self-evaluation.

With Heikkinen's work and other reports (Bochner and Ellis 2002) on using autobiographical writing as a self-help device in mind I planned my data-collection process to include both the written reflection texts (the equivalent of the student teachers' autobiographies) and a group session on memories with time spent on discussing the actual texts (the equivalent of discussions of the autobiographies in the group). As mentioned earlier, I found Susan Rubin Suleiman's (1994) idea of autobiographical reading fascinating and I was planning to incorporate the reading and sharing of the written histories, that is the reflection texts, into the process. I pondered on whether the sharing of histories would lead to further writing, and how that further writing about one's own history could be a language-learning experience. Thus my counsellor mind in September 2004 was set to go further with the writing: have students work in groups, do memory work and write further educational life-stories. My researcher-self was convinced that autobiographical writing was a good methodological tool for analysing the ways learners explain their actions to themselves and others. I had also asked the group counsellor, Joan, to write a reflection text, and I wrote one myself as a basis for our discussion, or memory session. Obviously I had not yet planned either of the memory sessions in detail but they were part of my research script. I will show in the kaleidoscope how my research took a slightly different turn.

At this point I was expecting to see glimpses of what other Finnish researchers (Tolonen 1999, Kosonen 1998) have called 'routinely tragic' experiences. I was also expecting stories in which the meaningful learning experiences might have taken place outside of formal teaching (Karlsson 2002, Laine 2000), and stories in which the ambivalence of school vs. real life experiences would surface (Karlsson 2002). For these reasons I wanted to use the idea of reframing the participants' language-learning histories narratively, and to carry on working with the texts in a memory group. I also reworded the instructions of the reflection text partly for these reasons. The main idea behind the rewording, however, was to better encapsulate the notion of a learning history in general. I also wanted to make sure that the individual learner aspects (personality, style and motivation) were not

brought to the surface as possible causal factors, and to embed them in a list of various aspects from which the students could choose. This was in line with my idea of learner differences in motivation, for example, being socio-cultural rather than psychological in nature.

In my researcher mind the role of the pre-course questionnaire in Finnish was clearly different from that of the reflection text in English. It was a research-only document in the sense that I used it to ask for permission to video the course sessions, to get background information and initial ideas on learning histories, and also for selecting students for interviewing. I saw the reflection texts as the students' own documents, which they would use to get in touch with the autobiographical elements, and would continue using when planning their programmes and reflecting on the role of their past learning experiences. As it happened, the two were mixed up by the group counsellor and also by some of the students. I had discussed the pre-course document and its role with her, but as I was determined not to have her follow any overall plan of mine I failed to make the difference clear to her. In fact, it was much more interesting and important that she followed her own plan, her own script for getting in touch with the students' background and history.

After the students had answered the pre-course questions and returned them as emails (most students), or handed them to me at the beginning of the first session (two who had problems with their email), the two documents started to live lives of their own, and in some minds were interpreted as one and the same thing. The group counsellor became aware of the problem after she had counselled two students, and she then changed her approach. In the end, all the students wrote the reflection text as well, although of the eight students participating in the interviews two did it after the first counselling and discussion with Joan, which then was based on the pre-course questionnaire. On the whole, the two who thought they had done enough but were asked to write another text in English afterwards might have seen this as yet another teacher-required and labour-intensive document. Because of the research, I became more prominently the recipient and the reader of the reflection texts: on a normal course there would not have been such an extra reader.

As an explication of the context of the research, Figure 4 shows an imaginary programme followed by a typical ALMS student. The same figure appears on our ALMS homepage¹² as an illustration for potential students as to what they can expect if they decide to enrol on the course. No two

¹² To view the ALMS homepage go to: <http://www.helsinki.fi/kksc/alms>

programmes are identical, and not everyone chooses to join the support groups, for example. The individual counselling sessions are obligatory, however.

WEEK 1
7 hrs
Opening group session: we talked about our past experiences of language learning and I started to think about writing my personal history. Looked at Kaleidoscope and the list of Skills Support Groups. Thought about my needs and made a draft programme. I have to plan for about 80 hours of work for my 2 credits.

WEEK 2
3 hrs
Second group session: Talked about groups and my independent work. Looked at examples of ALMS Logs and visited the Self Access Centre. Formed a DIY group with students from my Faculty. Fixed my first counselling meeting. Finally finished my ALMS plan!

WEEK 3
4 hrs
Met my ALMS Counsellor for the first time and we talked about my history and study plan. It was good to come up with a plan that suits me and my needs. Later in the week our DIY group met and made plans. Started my ALMS Log and tried to reflect on what had happened so far.

WEEK 4
5 hrs
Started reading the text books I have chosen for focusing on language. First meeting of the Presentation Skills Support Group. We planned our programme and set dates for meetings for the rest of the term.

WEEK 5
5 hrs
Went skiing in Austria. I wrote a travel journal and tried to use English as much as possible.

WEEK 6
10 hrs
Our DIY went to the cinema and then discussed the film. Carried on with my reading and looked through the Reading Room website for tips with reading strategies. Reading seems to be getting easier. Made notes and a vocabulary list and wrote a summary. Went to the Self Access Centre and watched a BBC podcast.

WEEK 7
6 hrs
Presentation Skills Group meeting. I gave a 2-minute presentation of my studies. Watched a DVD at home without subtitles and wrote a review. Attended a lecture in English in the Faculty.

WEEK 8
5 hrs
Met my counsellor for the mid-term meeting. My plan hasn't changed much. We talked about log-writing and ways of evaluating my skills and learning. Our DIY group came to my flat and we spent the evening cooking in English.

WEEK 9 1 hrs	Had a really busy week with exams. Wasn't able to work or reflect on my English much but tried to watch the news in English in the evening.
WEEK 10 8 hrs	Practical Writing Support Skills Group began. Talked about writing CVs and letters. This will be very useful. More reading. Brought my Log up to date - it seems to be changing into a Learning Diary.
WEEK 11 10 hrs	DIY group met in the ALMS room. We had all read a difficult article and so we discussed the language and the topic. I practised my presentation with a video camera. Wrote the first draft of my CV for the Practical Writing Group.
WEEK 12 10 hrs	Gave my presentation to the group. Got feedback from everybody, which felt good. Last meeting of the Practical Writing group. We discussed our CVs and letters. Wrote summaries of my academic reading. Went to the Self Access Centre again - worked on listening skills and pronunciation.
WEEK 13 6 hrs	Final DIY group meeting. Discussed what we had learned and wrote reports. Prepared for my final counselling meeting. In the meeting we went through my Learning Diary and discussed what I had achieved, how I have changed as a learner and what I plan to do after the course. ALMS Module completed!
80 hrs	

Figure 4. One student's ALMS journey

In the patterns of the kaleidoscope, starting with pattern one, I hope to show how my role as a counsellor-researcher produced moments of chaos on the one hand, but on the other hand, gave me deeper insights into various parts of the course and the experiences of the participants.

Kaleidoscope pattern one: Learner stories

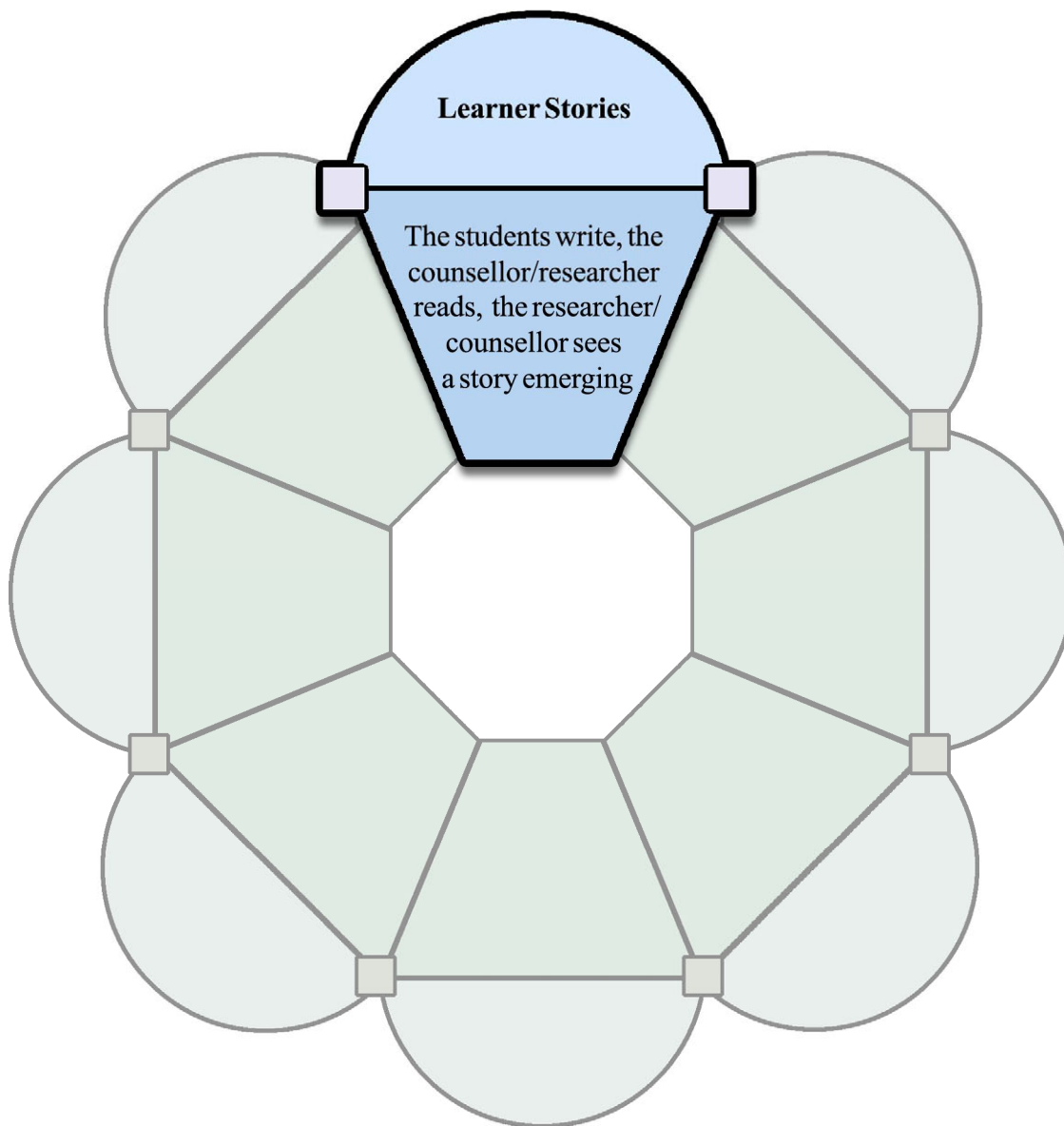


Figure 5. Kaleidoscope pattern one: Learner stories

How can students use their learning histories, experiences and memories to support their learning of English in ALMS and beyond? How can we support them? How do we invite reminiscing? Who are the documents for and who owns the histories? The first pattern of the kaleidoscope is a restorying of what could happen when the counsellor reads the reflection texts written by four students in the group, Aino, Johanna, Katja and Päivi. I initially chose these four texts because they all differed a

little in terms of level of language, length of text, and degree of keeping to the instructions. The instructions given to the students were the following:

ALMS REFLECTION

Now that you have spent some time thinking about the process of language learning, it is time to sit back and reflect. Use this page to put down your thoughts about yourself as a language learner. Think and write about your experiences, your feelings and memories, your personal beliefs and views on yourself and your learning. You can give your story a title if you want to. Remember that you are the hero of this story and that you own this story!

Reflect and write about

YOUR LANGUAGE LEARNING HISTORY – for example, teachers and teaching; classmates and fellow students; materials and methods used; testing, assessment and feedback; support and encouragement; easy/difficult aspects of learning; your personality and learning style; learning different languages; language courses, self-study, learning outside the classroom; successes and failures and how you felt about them.

A SIGNIFICANT LEARNING EXPERIENCE – any experience (positive or negative) in language learning that you remember well and that affected you as a learner, and/or as a person.

YOUR WISHES AND EXPECTATIONS – for example, your main goal for the ALMS module; your expectations of yourself as a learner of English; your expectations of the programme.

FINALLY, YOUR CURRENT SKILLS. Begin the process of SELF-EVALUATION. Try using the grid from the Common European Framework¹³ to assess your English language skills. Read it carefully and decide where you fit into the levels.

Bring your text and your self-assessment results to your first counselling meeting.

These instructions placed the text in the genre of autobiographical writing in the researcher's eyes. But what about the students? How would they have interpreted them? In my own counselling I have often found that students need to explain their texts: they have either added an accompanying note or have made a verbal comment when they have given their reflection texts to me to read in the session. They often tell me how they wrote the text, or else comment on the language they used, or

¹³ The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment, or CEFR, is a guideline used to describe achievements of learners of foreign languages across Europe. It was put together by the Council of Europe between 1989 and 1996 and one of its main aims is to provide a method of self-assessment which applies to all languages in Europe. The Common European Framework puts learners into three broad divisions which are sub-divided into six levels: A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. The CEFR uses "can do" statements to describe in detail what a learner's skills are in listening, speaking and writing at each level.

describe the difficulty of the writing process, or even ask for confirmation: was this what was wanted.

Anni Vilkkö (1997) writes about accompanying notes or covering letters attached to autobiographies written by ordinary people as a way of reaching towards the reader, as if beyond the actual text. She sees these notes as meta-texts that show how the writers are, in fact, aware of the particular purpose of their texts, of what an autobiography is seen to be in our culture, how they know what rules and regulations are thought to govern its production, and what it means to reminisce via writing. Moreover, these accompanying notes often indicate why people feel it is important to reminisce. I share Vilkkö's interest in and emphasis on these bits of metatext from my own particular context and point of view: I feel that students want to make it known to the counsellor that they are aware of this being a different writing task, and that they have taken liberties as regards school assignments.

The fact that students often add an accompanying note could also be interpreted as uncertainty in the face of a writing assignment that, after all, is set by a teacher and thus should be carried out following the instructions given. It could also be interpreted to mean that the teacher's instructions were vague, or hard to understand. It is also possible that as they were asked to write about themselves and about their own learning experiences, about something that had happened only to them, it could have produced in them further uncertainty about how freely they could move in and around the area of autobiographical writing. By the time of their writing, however, the students have become familiar with the ALMS programme and environment to a certain extent. They have a better idea of how the teacher's and student's roles are understood by the counsellors, which is probably very different from teacher-fronted classroom situations at school.

The students wrote the texts after the first group meetings, when they had met their counsellor twice. I had not yet established personal contact with them. I had met them briefly in the first group session to introduce myself and tell them about my research; in particular, I explained why the group sessions were being videoed. Apart from that, they wrote the document more as part of their course work than as part of the research. It was only after the first individual counselling meeting that they might have started to see this document also as an important part of the research. Thus they made their own interpretation of the instructions; some probably interpreted the first sentence "Now that you have spent some time thinking about the process of language learning" to mean the beginning of their course and related it to the ideas discussed in the learner-awareness sessions,

others not. Joan, their counsellor, was the one reader they had in mind and she had made it clear in the first group sessions that she was not, on the whole, eager to catch them making linguistic mistakes, or to assign them into a narrow student role in which they are expected to give predefined correct answers.

Leena Vaurio (1995) suggests that writing in foreign languages is probably the least focussed-on skill in Finnish curricula for secondary and upper-secondary schools. The goals set in the curriculum are fairly vague and modest. She writes that the lion's share of class time is dedicated to weeding out colloquial expressions from students' writing. She admits that the traditional composition text required in the matriculation examination directs the teaching of writing in schools. Other types of writing such as portfolios, essays, projects and working-life documents are being introduced to the teaching, however. Sinikka Raappana (1997), drawing on her experience as a school teacher, claims that the tradition of "teaching for the examinations", which seems to be a survival strategy for teachers, is very strong in Finland. She writes that this tradition is definitely hard to break as a lot of pressure is put on teachers, in particular with regard to English, the grade for which in the matriculation examination is very influential in future university entrance examinations. The students taking part in my research had all matriculated before 2000, many in the 1990s and one even in 1976, so they fitted within Vaurio's and Raappana's framework.

Anni Vilkkö (1997) positions autobiographies written by ordinary people in the mid terrain between written and spoken language. This is interesting when one thinks of the reflection texts and the genre as perceived by the students. Because any writing is always context-bound, it is important to think about the genre models available to the students. However, it is evident here that their modelling was not copying but using various elements from various models and adapting them to the task. Reader-writer pacts (e.g., Lejeune 1989) direct our self-expression, as do speaker-listener pacts. In the case of the reflection texts the expected reader is normally the counsellor¹⁴, but on this course the students knew the researcher would also read them so the reader expectation included her as well.

Vilkkö suggests that the text is always also directed to the autobiographical writer herself. This would have been ideal for the orientation into the learning and reflection process. The first

¹⁴ During the thesis process I wrote a chapter together with Felicity Kjisik for *Reconstructing Autonomy in Language Education. Inquiry and Innovation* (2007) edited by Andrew Barfield and Steven Brown. In our chapter 'The Role of Autobiography in Fostering Learning and Reflective Thinking' we describe these student perceptions and reader expectations in ALMS, based partly on my research students' texts, and partly on texts from Felicity's ALMS group.

institutional context for the students' writing cannot be ignored here, however. As far as their school writing background was concerned, these students could be likened to a group of Finnish researchers who wrote about their writing experiences in the collection of writing autobiographies (Saarnivaara et al. 2004) mentioned before. They remembered writing at school as an impersonal activity that was not used for self-expression or understanding one's feelings, thoughts, or experiences. There was a strong inclination to write for the teacher. The second institutional context of writing, university undergraduate writing, would mainly have been book reviews, summaries, essays and seminar presentations in Finnish. I did not ask in detail about the students' writing experiences at university level, but there is research to suggest that, on the whole, Finnish undergraduate students do not write as much as their British peers, for example. The writing assignments seem to favour research-oriented rather than reflective or argumentative texts. In comparison to the British essay-writing conventions, the emphasis is on the presentation of facts, not on one's own point of view (Mauranen 1995, Ventola 1995).

No matter how much I wanted to see this writing task as an opportunity for the students to do private, reflective work on their learning experiences and to use the writing to explore and explain their actions to themselves, it is likely that they compared and modelled their writing at least partly on the tasks familiar to them from English classes at school, or then Finnish classes. The students in question, apart from one, had written little or not at all in English after school. There is no denying the circumstances in which these stories were written, and the power relations between the writers and the teacher/counsellor and researcher. Nevertheless, I would claim that the invitation to reminisce was read by the students, and that it is reasonable to interpret the texts in the light of Lejeune's autobiographical pact: he suggests that autobiographical writing is not only a question of a person telling or writing his or her story, but also of another person reading it (Lejeune 1989).

The ways of reading autobiographical texts are part of our cultural history, and when we write an autobiographical text we always anticipate these reader expectations. This is also what my argument about the justification of inviting students to reminisce, and then insisting on reading their texts is based on. Consequently, I read the reflection texts with this ambivalence in mind: I took the writing to be for the language teacher, but also a way of giving meaning to the educational and life history of the writer. I will also follow up my claim that the texts produced show that the students did see the other possibility and took it: they did go a bit further and started a process of exploration and, to a certain extent, wrote to the Other in themselves, not primarily to the Other as the teacher.

Reading for learner voices

The starting point in my reading of the reflection texts was dialogic. Such a reading aims at a dialogue between writer and reader, and assumes that autobiographical elements can be found in the meanings that the writer has chosen to include as well as those found by the reader (Vilkko 1997). I was after the learners' voices in my reading, hoping to be able to "hear" them in the texts. I take 'voice' to refer to both what the students wrote and how they wrote it (Dufva 2004). This reflects the Bakhtinian idea of the need to see beyond the formal side of language: 'voice' is not only language but also meanings, opinions, attitudes and emotions, personality and views. I also take language to be heteroglossic (Bakhtin 1986) in that it is to be found in many voices, and these voices come through in the texts we write and in the comments we make. Students' texts and my reading of them ventriloquate our individual voices, and also our social and institutional experiences and beliefs.

I also followed Claire Kramersch's (2003) suggestion to read the students' autobiographical texts not literally, but metaphorically in order to capture the dynamism, ambivalence and conflict in their beliefs about language learning, which is also what these texts appear to give testimony of. It is with the help of metaphorical processing that I would like to hear the learner voices come thorough. Kramersch draws on Gibbs's work (1998, 1999) in suggesting two ways for researchers to approach metaphor: processing metaphor and metaphoric processing. There is work on Finnish students' and teachers' (separate) views on their roles collected by explicitly eliciting metaphors and examining how students metaphorically construct their experiences (Turunen 2003, Turunen and Kalaja 2004). The other alternative, that is processing learners' and teachers' everyday discourse metaphorically, has been covered to a lesser degree as far as I know. I am attempting such an analysis with the four student texts.

I take Lakoff and Johnson's definition as my starting point: "The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (2003, 5). Moreover, I consider metaphors to be not only stylistic devices and linguistic products but also ascription processes bringing together two mental spaces in a linguistic phrase (Kramersch 2003). When seen as a cognitive space, a metaphor can be expressed in multiple forms, which is the case with the students' texts. A metaphor also seems particularly suited to expressing ambiguous and contradictory beliefs and emotionally laden experiences. Metaphorical processing is an inviting way for a counsellor to read student texts because it does not strive to predict learner behaviour or to

confine interpretations of the texts in a problem-solution model. The aim is rather to acknowledge the complexity of learning and writing about learning, the conflicting nature of beliefs, and the potential in choices available to students when formulating their ideas about learning. Like Kramsch, I feel that statement-completion tasks, which have been used in research to elicit metaphors, are not rich enough to lead to an understanding of learner identities. Moreover, in my particular research setting they would not have been suitable as a data-collection method because the whole research process was meant to follow the learning and counselling script of the ALMS programme.

Instead, I feel that examining the student texts, not all of which necessarily or explicitly invite such an approach, through metaphorical processing could yield deeper insights into the learning process and how it is linked to memories and emotions. In particular, reading the implicit metaphors in the texts in the light of the other data from the students, most importantly the pre-course questionnaires in Finnish, helped in opening up the potential scenarios of learner development for open discussion between learners and counsellors (Kramsch 2003). I will try to show how the students created a belief space of what it is to learn languages in their individual situation. This way of looking at the texts could be linked with the interpretation of experience as three-dimensional (Clandinin and Connelly 2000).

Metaphorical processing allows one to read texts in a way that focuses on the mental spaces beneath the surface. The linguistic choices in organising them are looked at in the light of life metaphors or focal metaphors (Vilkko 1997), which are presented by writers as a framework for their stories. I see a link here to the way Hannele Dufva et al. (1996) defined everyday knowledge of language in foreign language learning. I am proposing a way of looking at learners' stories in the light of a focal metaphor or an "almost metaphor", which has to do with the way learners use mini-theories of language and language learning, and the way they combine these theories with their autobiographical stories and experiences in order to evaluate their learning. As Vilkko suggests, these theories are ways of emphasising, summarising and presenting in a pointed way. The metaphors are capable of combining analytical sharpness with an emotional touch. For the reader they are a way of getting into contact, getting close, touching, "shaking hands", as Vilkko puts it.

Laurel Richardsson (1997, 185) writes: "We become the metaphors we use. We construct worlds in our metaphoric image". I will be asking about the worlds constructed by Johanna, Päivi, Aino and

Katja when writing about themselves as language learners in the reflection texts. I will be moving between the reflection texts and the pre-course questionnaires¹⁵ they wrote, for three reasons:

1. the confusion about the role of the texts
2. the similarity and overlapping content asked for in them
3. the code switching from Finnish into English.

Combining the above approaches in my reading is an extension of an auto/biographical reading: the auto/biographical *I* enters the discussion on all four texts.

Johanna's reflection¹⁶

I suppose to think myself as a language learner – we will see how the story will be.

I have always liked to learn languages. I'm social person so I need as many ways as possible to communicate. I travel a lot and I feel lost if I don't have any common language to express myself with local people. That's also my biggest motivation to learn languages.

In all the languages I found it easy to learn grammar. Simple, almost like mathematics. I just follow the rules and everything is going perfect. At school they don't pay any attention to the communication. I never said any word at school. Actually I felt that we never had time for that. As a learner I was lazy I admit. I did my homework but nothing more. Its partly cause of the teachers. They were horrible in every languages. If someone didn't know the answer they made her cry in front of everybody. It really killed something inside most of us. That's also why I didn't want to learnt any language for a while.

Its always hard to start to do something. But when I start I enjoy and its hard to stop. And this not only about the languages its my personality. But I try to learn to do the things now not tomorrow or next week.

If I'm thinking myself now. I'm speaking and writing in English everyday. It doesn't matter anymore if my language is perfect and correct or not. Everybody can understand me and I can

¹⁵ See Figure 2 (pp. 57-58) for the context and purpose of collecting these documents.

¹⁶ The reflection texts are unedited student English.

express my thoughts easily in English. Its enough for me. Of course it is good to know the rules for language. But it doesn't help if you are too shy to use your language.

At first I was really too shy to say anything. But years have been teaching me not to be too shy. At the moment I feel fine with my language. I know my weak parts and try to improve them.

My biggest problem with English is hearing - news, words of the songs, recorded voices... It has always been the most difficult part of the all languages.

From ALMS I hope to find reason for my problem. It would help me a lot to solve it.

I hope to find the answer by myself but if I cant, I hope to get an idea to which direction to go. I'm using English everyday, but now I will really concentrate on the language and try to estimate if there is any changes after that course.

I think my English is fitting into the level B1 and partly B2 at the moment.

My reading

Johanna: The Teacher as a Tyrant (explicit use of the metaphor in the pre-course questionnaire)

[The very prominent and visible mental space in Johanna's text is created by her memory from school involving a teacher who made her pupils cry]

You start your text with an accompanying note: "I suppose to think myself as a language learner – we will see how the story will be". Your beginning sentence reminds me of other types of autobiographical writing in which the focus is not on language learning but on childhood memories or life events in general. You clearly position yourself in an autobiographical writer position, and you also place me, the reader, by including me in the process: together, we shall see. Your story is not yet told, it will shape itself in the writing. I knew to expect the tragedy from school, which you had already mentioned in the pre-course questionnaire. When asked about a significant learning experience you had written about a language teacher who, in your words, "was a tyrant who made every student in turn cry during her lessons/opettaja oli tyranni, joka itketti tunnilla vuorollaan jokaista". The memory stung me, it became one of the stings of memories that I have repeatedly felt during this research. Yours was the first that had me go back to my own school memories. You come back to this memory in the reflection text when you describe yourself as a learner: "As a learner I was lazy I admit. I did my homework but nothing more. Its partly cause of the teachers.

They were horrible in every languages. If someone didn't know the answer they made her cry in front of everybody. It really killed something inside most of us".

You talk about your school memories through this experience that hurt you deeply. Your memory of the one teacher becomes a memory of other teachers. Your choice of metaphor, 'Teacher as Tyrant', is the same as many students have made, students in other cultures included. Teachers everywhere seem to have a role almost beyond comparison in people's lives. Your metaphor carries the indications of power relationships in the extreme. Tyrants kill people or have them killed. What was the something that died inside you, or your classmates? A desire to learn German, to learn foreign languages? Your experience has had consequences and you have avoided learning languages. But you seem to be moving on. You say that you use English a lot, that you do not worry about making mistakes anymore. You are a social person and you travel a lot and you look for opportunities to use foreign languages. You seem to have a clear idea of your skills. You have found your way out from the cage of doing things by the book. Maybe you have understood more about learning by remembering.

You have a big problem with listening and you say you want to solve that in ALMS. You address me, the researcher-counsellor, again when you write that you hope to get an idea of where to find the solution if you do not manage on your own.

It is as an afterthought almost that you go back to the instructions and give the self-evaluation. This makes me wonder why we have the self-assessment result question on the same document. Eagerly applying rules ourselves?

Päivi's reflection

When I was at school I never spoke any foreign language, as a matter of fact I almost never spoke at all. I was very shy and I felt the whole school system ridiculous so I thought that being silent was the best way to protest. During English lessons I used to whisper the right answers to my boyfriend who was sitting beside me and he always put up his hand. This of course annoyed our teacher a lot but there was nothing she could do. I always got the best marks in tests and when I got laudatur in matriculation examination (points 60/60) my English teacher came to me and suggested that I'd come to take an extra test with her and she could give me 10 in my diploma. I never went.

Learning languages has always been quite easy for me, it requires labour but I like the work. being a very introvert person I never have spoken them a lot after al. I'm very silent and antisocial also in Finnish, so why would I be speaking foreign languages? I use languages for reading and listening; ie. for understanding other cultures and finding out interesting things. I nevertheless also like to practise pronunciation so I have the habit of talking to myself in English when there is nobody to hear. I also like to read out loud texts in any language I know.

After school I went to study at Helsinki University of Technology and there I was able to study French which was denied me at school (being a math student). I enjoyed very much learning a new language. Now that I'm in this age studying for a second degree and my memory is not anymore so efficient I thought it wouldn't be possible to learn a new language. But last summer I took two elementary courses in Spanish and I was astonished how much I still could learn. So I decided to start studying Chinese this autumn and that has really been fun.

I have already reached a part of my goals for this ALMS module for I wanted to know the state of my language skills after so many years of no evaluation. I did the self-evaluation test and got C1 for listening, writing, reading and vocabulary and C2 for structures and I'm quite satisfied with that. What remains is to find out my skills in spoken interaction and spoken production. I would evaluate them to the level of A2 and I would like to raise them to the level of B1. I don't know what the requirements are in the compulsory English oral test and I don't know if I would pass them. But I don't set my goals very high because I'm not very good at conversation in Finnish either.

My reading

Päivi: The Silent Language Learner (implicit)

[Päivi's visible mental space is silence]

In your accompanying note (as I saw your answer to question six in the pre-course questionnaire) you talked about yourself as presumably different from the rest of the students: "I don't think I fit your profile". I have no profile, I thought. Or do I? You thought I did and in this way you reached beyond the text to me.

Your visible mental space clearly has to do with your personality that you describe using words like ‘shy’, ‘introvert’, ‘silent’, and ‘antisocial’. You ascribe this Finnish characteristic to your personality and make it very clear that it is yours in every language. I am reminded of the classic article on *The Silent Finn* by Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1985). You tell many stories about your silence. It has a long history and has been a way of rebelling and a way of just being yourself. When you rebelled at school, it was against the teachers whose role as the ones asking the questions you queried. You believe that at your age you do not remember as efficiently as before. What are you then, not my age surely? In the pre-course questionnaire you use my old enemy, the word “mutu”, to describe self-evaluation. The Finnish word ‘mutu’ means a hunch, it has very suspicious connotations, the same as ‘wild guessing’. Testing, you write, is needed to really learn to know about one’s skills. You take me back to my licentiate research and I want to interview you. I am puzzled by the somewhat paradoxical stories you tell. You have studied many languages, different languages, English, Swedish, French, German, Spanish, and also Chinese. You must be very goal-oriented and obviously hard-working. How have you gone about the silence when learning these languages? After skillfully weaving an answer to my question about your CEFR levels (it should not be here, I think again) into your story, you go back to the silence: in the coda I get to read about the silence again. You evaluate the possibilities of speaking on this course and extend it to the improvement of your oral skills. You do not expect much.

Katja’s reflection

Language learning history:

I have always had very personal and good teachers in both English and Swedish. They have been able to encourage me to learn languages. Although I must say that at school I didn’t learn to speak, I only learned grammar and how to write in foreign languages. I didn’t like to speak out loud in the classroom either, because I was quite shy. But I always worked very hard and wanted to be good in foreign languages I also had couple of friends with whom I studied English in leisure time. I cannot remember any particularly significant learning experience.

Wishes and expectations:

I hope that participating this course will help me to find my English again (smiley). It has been quite a while when I have had to use my English skills as often as and as widely as I do now, during

the course I hope that I can better my listening and understanding skills – and most importantly my pronunciation. I also hope that this will effect my self-learning in English in the future.

My reading

Katja: Motivation and encouragement (implicit)

[Katja's visible mental space is a positive and pragmatic approach to learning]

You are pregnant I think¹⁷. Another ALMS baby! I immediately think of another encounter in ALMS: somebody cancelled a counselling meeting from the delivery room. You mention that your teachers have been “personal” and this rings a bell: many students seem to remember warmly the teachers who have given something of themselves in the classroom. You use the word ‘encourage’ quite a few times. I would like to know more about what you mean by it. What is an encouraging teacher like? When you write that you expect not to be “abandoned”, I think of all our support systems with joy and pride. The master narrative comes through: you feel that you need more practice in oral skills as the school did not give enough of this. There is something very dialogic in the way you describe your past learning and how you draft your course plans: you are prepared to do your share and expect only so much from the counsellor!

Aino's reflection

When back at school, I was quite good at English. It was – and is – the easiest foreign language for me. I had one good teacher who inspired me. That was in high school. Before that I had teachers who were not that skilled in teaching. What I remember of studying English in mainly learning new words and verb lists by [hart], trying to succeed in tests and avoiding speaking in the class room. It was awful to wait for your turn to answer. I guess I am a perfectionist. I was afraid of making mistakes and still am, but not as much as before.

I don't know if the basic language courses can be taught differently. The teacher has to teach certain things. It's probably easier to teach more advanced groups: no basic grammar etc. Then it should be possible to put pressure on oral exercises – the skill only few seem to have unless they have had to use English a lot.

¹⁷ In her pre-course questions Katja had written that she would be on maternity leave towards the end of the course.

My style of learning has been the one I have kind of been given, ie. reading and memorizing wordlists etc. Not such a creative way to learn. Schools “produce” people who know English but don’t know how to use it. It’s sad, really.

One of the first significant learning experiences for me was being able to read a novel in English. I realized I really CAN use the language. Not just in classroom, but in real life. At that time I was still shy to open my mouth. When I went to [Sweden] as an exchange student, I finally learned to communicate in English. That was the second significant experience. And the most important one!

My expectation of this course is to become more aware of myself as a learner of English and that way be able to improve the areas I’m worse at (and also find the areas I’m best at). My weaknesses, I think, are relatively poor vocabulary and poor strategies in reading [academical] texts in English. At least those affect my studying the most.

After assessing my English language skills using the self-assessment grid I realized I’m quite good at English. Maybe not that fluent or talented, but I can communicate in English. I can [interact], discuss, explain, read and understand relatively well. Sometimes when using English a lot, I even start to think in English. That’s good, because then I can discuss more fluently: I don’t have to translate everything in my mind before opening my mouth.

My reading

Aino: Dichotomy Classroom vs. Real Life Skills (implicit)

[Aino’s visible mental space is a widening perspective of language learning]

You paint a somewhat grim picture of learning languages at the Finnish school: schools “produce” people who know English but don’t know how to use it. It’s sad, really. You were good, though. In your text, the word ‘shy’ figures as an important word. You also write about being a perfectionist. You describe routines from school: you remember how awful it was to wait for your turn. Here is a confession: I have done that in my classes as a safe democratic way of going through and checking exercises. I see my reading-comprehension course masses from the 1980s and 90s in front of me: we are going through exercises on affixes. My throat gets dry. I remember having hated it as a teacher as well. The routines, I never knew how to go about them. Am I standing in the right place, should I be sitting down or standing up, is my handwriting OK, should I be taking notes on every answer, need I...? I remember angry faces, I remember disappointed mouths, I remember critical gazes. Some moved from learning the way they were “kind of given”, which was not such a

creative way to learn to my classes and I had not developed a personal way to teach my courses, I was trying to do it the way the routines led me to. Guilt! You move on to talk about your significant learning experiences. Both are from real life, not classrooms, routines tend to stifle meaningful experiences, I remember, there is a reason for this. You bring me back to the present moment, back to reality: “My expectation of this course is to become more aware of myself as a learner of English”. I think, yes, that is one thing that is good about ALMS. I calm down. I think we have something for you on the course, Aino!

A neutral counsellor reading of the texts

It is my conviction that (E)FL teaching often employs a microscopic approach to teaching in general, and to particular activities on courses (cf. Jaatinen 2003): the starting point and the goal is only a slice of the foreign language to be learnt, the level of skills, effectiveness, and fairly narrowly defined learning outcomes. To me it seems that this kind of spotlight or microscopic approach can lead to the separation of the foreign language to be learnt from the human being and her autobiography. One way of approaching the reflection texts would be to skim through them quickly which would reflect the time limitations of a practising counsellor. The counsellor could focus on facts, starting and even staying with linguistic facts. This reading would take a problem-solving-oriented approach to student histories with a view to discussing their study plans in consecutive face-to-face counselling. This kind of reading gives no time to consider the dialogic openings in the students’ texts towards the perceived reader. It would proceed in a linear and distancing fashion, picking up the main points from the text.

The counsellor opting for this kind of neutral reading would not be worried about the student’s learner voice and how it appears in the reflection text. She would not be aiming at a kaleidoscopic effect by trying to see each text in the light of the student’s autobiography, and also in the light of the rest of the texts. This kind of reading would not shed light on issues that were my original interests in the research, namely teachers, autonomy, autobiography and emotions. It would not be concerned with the dialogical relationships between the two focal participants, student and counsellor, and of yet others echoed in each participant’s text or comments. Moreover, a neutral counsellor reading would not reflect the initial reasons for introducing the reflection texts into the programme. We started asking our students to write them after my ‘strong’ autobiographical reading, reading a story as if it were one’s own, of Alice Kaplan’s language memoir *French Lessons*. It is important, I feel, to keep this ‘strong’ reading experience as an element of our

counsellor readings of students' texts "for the sake of self-recognition, an expanded historical awareness, and a sense of at least potential collective action" (Susan Suleiman Rubin 1994, 8).

Coda¹⁸

You can start writing

*The desk is dented, full of names
and pictures and stains, had someone bitten bits off it, as they said,
get set!
the teacher says and opens the huge envelope with the Temperance Writing Competition titles
I feel anxious when the teacher starts to write
the titles on the blackboard*

*go! you can start writing
the teacher says in a loud voice and
taps the blackboard with her pointer
and in three months
a bit before Christmas I get to hear
that I win
the story about a drunkard of a father is so convincingly awful
that the members of the board and others are beyond themselves
with amazement and delight
what an imagination
what a joy of narrating
that is what they tell me
and when I am handed the prize, a book, I make a deep curtsy
so that the scab on my knee splits open*

(Anja Snellman, *Saa kirjoittaa*, 2004, my translation from Finnish)

¹⁸ This is Labov's voice. His model of narrative analysis is not used in this work, however.

I would like to finish this section by bringing into the kaleidoscope the above poem by Anja Snellman, which highlights and brings together many of the interpretative strands in my research. First of all, it opens up my own writing history: I took part in Temperance Writing Compositions at school. To be able to do this one had to be considered fairly competent at writing compositions in Finnish. This meant that one had to master the typographical and technical side of writing, including producing neat handwriting. Writing was a curiously impersonal activity in that although one shyly expressed one's thoughts and maybe even feelings, it was always clear that censoring happened: one wrote for the teacher, one wrote as a "gift" to the teacher (Saarnivaara et al. 2004).

The poem describes a piece of Finnish school history from a fictional point of view. The beginning lines describe school routines in a very pointed way. These are the kinds of routines that permeate school practices for long periods of time (Laine 2000). It relates to my thesis work in the sense that it describes some of the trends in teaching writing that have contributed to my own and my students' ideas of acceptable writing and writing circumstances. It shows writing in its ambivalent role as a deeply personal but strongly institutionalised activity, which is one of the issues concerning my interpretation of the students' texts.

Secondly, the poem describes experience in such a way that it is possible for the reader to access the writer's experience of what she supposedly went through, not only observe and get a factual description of it. It is an example of writing that many qualitative researchers have had as a model in their minds when they have decided to experiment with alternative ways of writing research reports in order to better capture experiential sides of human learning (see e.g., Richardson 2000).

The poem is also an example of how intertextuality works: I read it in the light of the author's other autobiographically oriented fiction and am indeed tempted to interpret the story she wrote as a more factual description of her life than the board in question. This relates to a counsellor reading student texts: an infinite number of texts will guide her interpretation, both other ALMS reflection texts and yet other professional and fictional texts. I am convinced that every utterance in an autobiographical text, the ones that are inaccurate or distorted as well, still characterises its writer. The factual truth status is not of such great importance as the idea of an autobiographical truth as an intersubjective exchange between narrator and reader, learner and counsellor (Smith and Watson 2001). I believe that it is the experience that counts, and that the counsellor's approach to reading should not be oriented towards marking and correcting students' reflection texts, but should focus on "shaking hands" and getting in contact with the student.

Kaleidoscope pattern two: Counselling talk

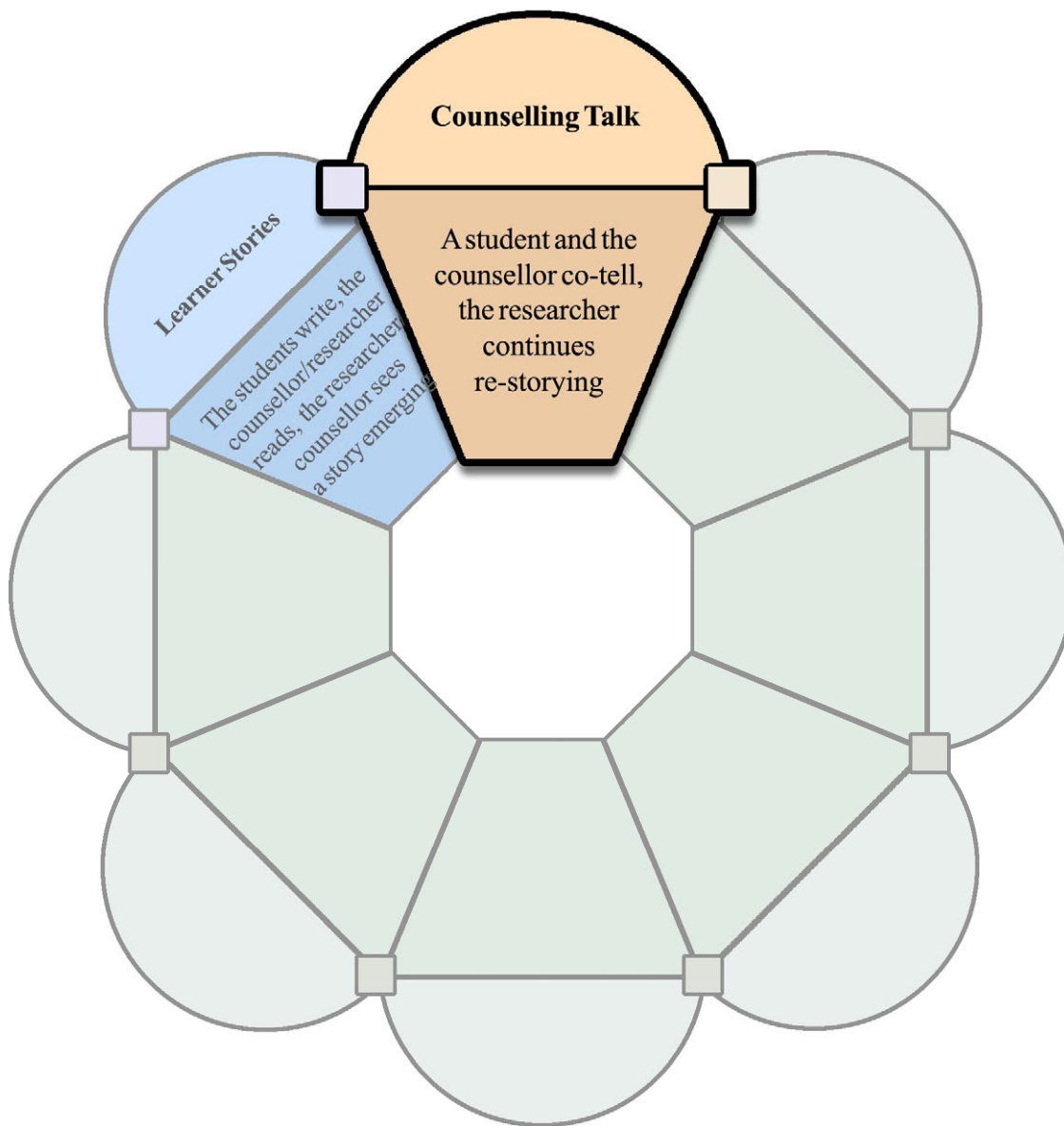


Figure 6: Kaleidoscope pattern two: Counselling talk

How does experience grow out of experience? How do the reflection texts become counselling talk in the first face-to-face counselling session? What kinds of stories are shared in counselling? How does the relationship between learner and counsellor develop? Like Brown and Gilligan (1992) I am convinced that if a researcher (which converts into a counsellor in my situation) wants to learn something from another human being, it is necessary to stay in connection with that person. As the researcher has access to a massive amount of material and, more importantly, is in the position to

freeze many of the learning encounters for detailed analysis and interpretation, staying in contact is prolonged beyond the relative shortness of a counselling session. The researcher, however, faces the danger of taking a microscopic approach to interpreting the data because of these possibilities. The counsellor runs the same risk of only looking at a few details, but for different reasons: many stories may go unnoticed because of the very brevity and haste of the learner-counsellor encounters. If the narrative desire is there and if the narrator is given a chance, however, stories can and will be invited and shared, even in a brief counselling session.

In the following section I will re-story Mia's individual counselling sessions with the group counsellor. These sessions are the very backbone of the ALMS programme and also a didactic solution that is probably slightly different from what the students have experienced on their other language courses. This is how we describe the counselling meetings on our homepage, which the students may look at when choosing their course of study:

Individual counselling meetings with the ALMS counsellors in the beginning, middle and end of the programme. These are fifteen-minute face-to-face meetings which provide students with support and opportunities to discuss and re(E)FLct on their choices, plans, self-evaluation and progress with their counsellors.

In an article published in *System* (Karlsson, Kjisik and Nordlund 2007) we write:

Thus the counsellor's role in ALMS is best described as a dialogic approach to learning and learners, and a willingness to commit oneself fully to the multi-faceted job. For us, a dialogic approach means openness: on the one hand, openness to the other person, and on the other hand, openness to the learning tasks. There needs to be a readiness in the student to engage in an internal dialogue with his or her learning. The counsellor's responsibility is to help this dialogue come about and this can only happen if the discussion is genuine, be it counselling or teaching. Our approach involves a belief in authentic questions in counselling: we do not envisage the give-and-take in terms of predefined answers by students. Our counselling strongly stresses learner needs as a starting point, and this involves accepting individuality and emotions. We believe in counselling as open dialogue and, in fact, consider many of the basic questions educational and pedagogical rather than linguistic. Such personal learning encounters do not benefit from an approach that has predefined problems or techniques as the starting point. Consequently, the counsellor's role is to

initiate open dialogue with every student in every counselling session (Lehtovaara, 2001), and to be prepared to give enough space for the student to do his or her own planning and decision-making.

In the individual counselling sessions, ALMS counsellors meet students in a situation that is normally novel for the students but still bears a resemblance to former experiences from school with language teachers. We are aware of “membershopping” (Riley, 1999) problems when students expect us to take on a teacher’s role. Consequently, we re-negotiate the roles with each group and each student entering ALMS. In particular, the students often find it hard to accept the right to use their own planning and evaluation, which have so far been decidedly the rights of an external expert. Our approach is to suggest and offer advice and insights based on the individual student’s situation, learner history and attitude to learning, and not to prescribe or give ready answers to problems. We also show a willingness to “co-tell”, and devote time to looking into the student’s past experiences together and sharing with him or her a bit of our own history, if appropriate. Together, we try to decide how the student’s written reflection, [...] projects into the future: it is looked upon not simply as a writing task to be handed in to the counsellor for checking, but as the student’s own document.

In order to avoid a monolithic (Roth 1999) account of counselling, I will attempt to produce ‘bricolage’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994, Roth 1999) of texts from firstly, my data¹⁹, and secondly, from the article in *System* that I wrote together with my two colleagues, one of them the group counsellor involved in this research, during 2006. The article is not quite an interim text (Clandinin and Connelly 2000) because it does not directly draw on my field texts. The *System* article was written for a different purpose and our voices in it ventriloquate a slightly narrower choir, mainly counsellor-as-reporter or manual-writer voices. The article still represents a we-story (Clandinin and Connelly 1994, Conle 2000), which I feel to be of utmost importance for my thesis. It is the latest collaboratively produced description of the ALMS programme. The quotes in this section are from parts in the article for which I was mainly responsible for.

In this story on counselling I will be looking in particular at the experiential and autobiographical elements emerging in the learner-counsellor interaction. I will tell a story about counselling in

¹⁹ The reader might want to go back to Figure 2 (pp. 57-58) for the context and purpose of collecting the bits of data used in this section

ALMS based on Mia's first videoed²⁰ face-to-face counselling, her mid-term email counselling report (which is the way we have organised the mid-term counselling in the short ALMS courses), and the last counselling session, again on video. In this story about Mia and the counsellor, Joan, I am aiming at a descriptive rather than evaluative use of language. There is a plot, a mood, a milieu, identifiable characters and an explicit moral in my story (Conle & Sakamoto 2002). To bring in the collaborative ALMS voice, I will be using voice-over boxes from the article for *System*. In particular, I hope to give the reader an opportunity to create his or her own representation of what counselling in ALMS might be, and to give a taste of how two texts, written for different purposes, succeed in describing it.

My English, oh, my English (Mia's title for her reflection text)

In the individual counselling sessions, ALMS counsellors meet students in a situation that is normally novel for the students but still bears a resemblance to former experiences from school with language teachers.

It is late on an October afternoon. The counselling space in the Self-Access area in the Aleksandria Learning Centre has been arranged to accommodate the camera. There are two comfortable chairs, a nice turquoise in colour, a table and a beautiful print by Outi Heiskanen on the wall. This space is much more comfortable than the ALMS group room. It should be as well, because counselling is such an intimate encounter. And this space is an improvement on our first years in ALMS when two counsellors used the counselling room we had then as their office as well, and we often counselled two students at a time. Trust needs peace and listening if it is to grow. Now there are only the two participants, Mia with her ALMS folder, and Joan with her records. This is Mia's first individual counselling session and she has now been working on her programme for a week.

The focus of the discussion [in the first counselling] is on the learning process and the aim is to ensure that they have understood the basic principles behind ALMS, have prepared a satisfactory programme, and have started on the reflection and self-evaluation process. As a basis of this discussion we use their reflection texts, CEFR self-assessment grids and learning contracts.

²⁰ I only transcribed Mia's individual counselling sessions word for word. With the other students I made extensive notes and partial transcriptions. I watched all of the individual counsellings three times (some of them four times), at different points of the research process.

From the very beginning there is great rapport between the two. They first talk about practicalities and the confusion created by my research: Mia needs to send her reflection text to me as well. Joan starts by asking Mia to tell her about herself as a language learner as she has not read Mia's text. Mia first explains that she has not used English extensively since she left school quite a number of years ago. She says that her English is "rusty", then checks with Joan if this is a word used in English when talking about language skills. She says that she was really surprised how easy it was to talk in the introductory group session although her English is so rusty. She then proceeds to talk about her time in South-East Asia, which she included in her text as a significant learning experience. It was, in fact, not particularly good for her English because she learnt to use a simplified version of the language. Mia says that, all in all, writing the reflection text felt very difficult because she was struggling with her written English.

Mia has put herself on levels A2-B1 on the CEFR scale and Joan comments that she does not seem to have a lot of self-confidence. They agree that maybe at the end of the programme it will be easier to do the CEFR self-assessment. As an education major, Mia is familiar with the ideas of self-evaluation and reflection as an integral part of studying but has not experienced planning and analysing her language learning before. She is going to write a learning diary because she likes them. She also finds it very useful to be a student, or a learner, for a little while longer because that means knowing how it feels to *not know*. She hopes she won't forget the experience but will be able to recognise it in her own pupils.

<p>We aim at a [more] holistic approach in which students can participate in the programme in a way that is meaningful to them and enables them to use their autobiographical knowledge as a source of insight into their learning and the planning of it.</p>
--

Joan then asks Mia to explain her plans and go through the contract. Mia does this. She has planned a programme that is personal and, as she says laughingly, "looks like" her. She has had to be realistic in making the plans and has consequently adjusted the language work to fit her life situation. Her plans include watching documentaries, translating children's books, having conversations with her fellow students, and helping her kids with their homework in English. She might want to change her plan slightly and reminds Joan of her promise not to chain them if they do. Joan says that she keeps her promises.

After the first counselling session, Mia starts her ALMS work, keeps working on her Master's thesis, which is almost the only other thing missing from her degree, and comes to a research interview with Leena. At mid-term she sends Joan an email report:

One special thing I noticed in ALMS course (this I told to Leena today) is a holistic attitude to studying. "Normal" way to take a part in courses means presence at a lessons and then homework, time "outside" of this is "free". Now I have noticed that I'm thinking of the possibilities to use the language on my free time, too (Mia's text, not edited).

Joan comments on Mia's programme on the whole and the comment above in particular:

You appear to be well on track and it's good to know you are much more aware of your learning.

Later, in her final counselling she says that her family has been laughing at her because she has become so conscious of all the learning opportunities and will, for example, always jump at the opportunity of writing down a new word from the news.

We also show a willingness to "co-tell", and devote time to looking into the students' past experiences together and sharing with him or her a bit of our own history if appropriate.

When Mia comes to her final counselling meeting it is early December. In the same counselling space as in October, she and Joan sit down in front of the camera again. They talk about their Christmas plans. Mia will have more time to devote to her plans in a few days after a big exam. When Mia talks about her Christmas preparations and looks for a word, Joan shares a personal story when providing it.

Our students produce a learning portfolio in which they collect all the work they do within their ALMS programme, including their histories, SILL, CEFR self-assessment, learning contracts, project work in groups, word lists or summaries, reviews or essays, and other specific pieces of language work. These are the learner's property. In the counselling sessions their work is discussed in the light of their diary entries.

Mia has done almost everything she put in her plan. She had a few concentrated days of work on her English and otherwise two-hour-sessions weekly. She enjoyed writing the learning diary, which took a lot of time to write but was very useful. Joan says the diary shows that she has produced a lot in English. They also look at and discuss Mia's translation work and listening practices. When asked about her English now, Mia says that she has used English quite a bit and that her language is definitely less rusty. But she adds: "But it needs more polishing to shine!" Mia feels that studying is a part of one's life, day and night, on an ALMS course. Her SILL result makes Joan go: "Wow!" as her scores on organising the learning and learning with others have gone up a lot. Mia thinks that she probably did not quite see the point of SILL at the beginning and was much more aware of what it meant this time. There are no big changes in the CEFR but Mia is more confident about not being on level A2.

We do know, however, that not all our students appreciate the researcher presence, for example, in counselling in front of the video camera. We always ask for permission and inform them in advance about our plans if they involve a researcher/camera/microphone presence. On the whole, the more involved the students have become in an ALMS research process, the more they seem to have benefitted from it.

Mia thinks that taking part in the research was nice. "We spoke Finnish but it was thinking about learning and studying all the time. And it was very interesting, because I'm becoming a teacher, to follow Leena's part of this process. We were talking about this with my friends from the other ALMS group when we were having breakfast and then lunch in English: I could tell the others what important part I played on this course²¹". They both laugh and Joan says: "You'll go down in history!"

²¹ Mia's exact words in English.

Kaleidoscope pattern three: Down Memory Lane

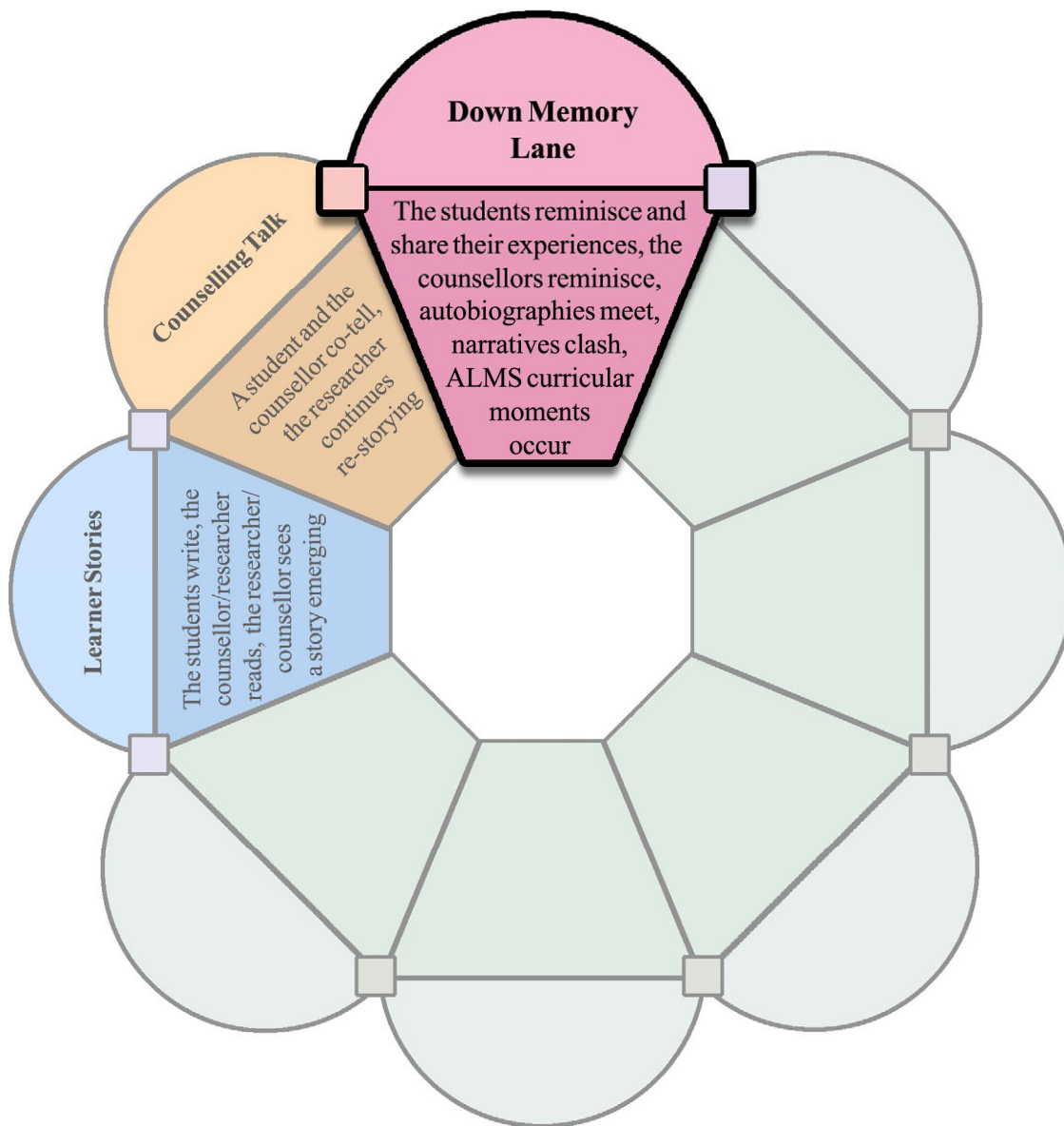


Figure 7: Kaleidoscope pattern three: Down Memory Lane

By the time I write this section the memory session has changed into a text among other research documents. In fact, it has turned into many different texts because I have listened to the recording various times and have transcribed first selectively, and later in more detail. Moreover, I have written other texts about this session, various writing stories in the *Book of Stories* and the research diary. Yet it is still possible, I believe, to convey some of the original sense and feel of the session in writing as a part of the work at hand.

This was the first interview²² that I did for the research. Five students had agreed to come to this group interview. They were all among the eight students whose stories appear in the various kaleidoscope patterns. Finding a time was as difficult as it always is with our students who work and study. Johanna in the end was quite late, but the others sat down for 90 minutes on a November afternoon with me. The students were three weeks into their ALMS programme. They had all met the group counsellor for their first individual counselling sessions and had started the support groups if they had chosen any. I had made coffee and brought buns, which was the most I could manage in terms of cosiness. So there we were, sitting in the ALMS room, the same setting as for the first group session, high ceiling, ugly pipes along the wall, no windows, and suddenly I felt a longing for the old ALMS room, a cosier seminar room with less equipment, dented furniture, and high windows, and I thought of another recording, five years ago, with Mike, Ian and Maire. Aino, Anne, Katja and Mia were present and we expected Johanna to come. Katja and Mia had got to know each other in the first group session, sitting side by side and sharing the communication task. Aino, Anne and Johanna had all been in different small groups in the session but shared the group experience. All in all, they knew each other fairly superficially, as ALMS students do unless they work as a pair or in the same support group.

I had randomly jotted down all the issues and areas I wanted to cover. I cut down the long list of topic areas by combining and focusing on the ones that most suited my purpose. I had ordered the topics chronologically, starting from the earliest contacts with English and other foreign languages and moving up to the present, the ALMS programme. Thus I had the following story line within which I had prepared myself to “listen well and invite stories” (Chase 1995 and 2003):

1. First/early contacts with English and/or other foreign languages
2. English and other foreign-language lessons at school
3. Teacher memories
4. Peer memories
5. Learner role, rights and responsibilities

²² The summary pages on the data collection (57-58) will again help the reader to see the big picture.

6. Learning languages as an adult

7. ALMS “memories”

This story line reflects my research interests in the role of language teachers, emotions and autobiographical elements in learning, and also the role of learner autonomy in the students’ past and present. It is also written with Ukkonen’s (2001) suggestion in mind to reflect on my own experience, not on previous research results. However, the principles of biographic interviewing I presenting and apply in the following pattern when restorying the individual interviews guided me in planning this story line, too.

As I write about the session now I have decided to name it ‘Down Memory Lane’. This English phrase itself is a reinterpretation of what was called a group interview in the email I sent to the students before our meeting. I have also started a group called Down Memory Lane in ALMS with new students. Thus, I am going down Memory Lane with a lot of research and teaching baggage. The narrative in this section is a reconstruction of the group interview, my restorying. I am following Coffey and Atkinson’s (1996) and Richardson’s (1997) leads in writing a dramatic dialogue of the meeting. I use the words we used, but I change the order of speakers at some points, and combine separate utterances at other points. I have to leave out huge chunks of speech produced by the participants, and include only some of the issues raised. These decisions are based on my field notes from the session, which indicate when the discussion was flowing well and which topics inspired the students most. I pay particular attention to my own role in raising the topics and in leading the discussion, which was loosely based on the story line presented earlier. I engage in a short inner dialogue with myself by adding a comment made at the moment of writing in brackets.

Our conversation was in Finnish originally so what follows is my translation and thus a reconstruction of the language used in the session. I aim at a compromise between colloquial Finnish and a neutral version of written English. The transcription on which my translation is based was already subjected to various interpretative decisions and, as Roberts (1997) pointed out, these decisions had to do with the retelling aspect of transcription: every decision tells a story. These retelling aspects were numerous during the process that led to the final text, the dramatic dialogue that follows. I hope that the original feel of the situation, or some of it, is conveyed to the readers of this text.

Whose story are we telling, and for what purpose are we transcribing, translating and retelling? 'Down Memory Lane' is meant to represent the collaborative voice of the ALMS students on this particular module. I am convinced that it also reflects the stories of the broader Finnish community of foreign-language learners, or at least, the community of Language Centre English learners. I am also convinced that the dialogue will ring true to teachers of English in Finland in terms of capturing some of the contextual and social features of language classrooms. Maybe it will invite a personal interpretation of the parts that most closely touch upon various teacher or learner readers' experiences. I am also hoping that this way of presenting the session will invite open and multiple readings, which will potentially open up new interpretations and invite a deeply reflexive reading of the text. My aim is thus to offer one way of understanding how our language-learning education provides us with material for stories and memories. The way we use this material is selective: sometimes we make full use of it, at other times we choose to discard it, and at yet other times we transform all or some of it into a new experience when we construct our learner and/or teacher identities. This is also a pattern in the kaleidoscope that will help in understanding the rest of the patterns, and will add to the reconstruction of experiences in the group during the term.

Down Memory Lane in November

Leena: Shall we start with our first memories of English or other foreign languages from the time before school. What kind of memories do you have?

(Plunging straight in. Will my question invite stories?)

Mia: I remember when I listened to the famous Abba. I was a great fan! I had a book of Abba lyrics and thought for a long time that 'I do' means 'I am driving' because that is what Frieda was doing in a picture related to the lyrics of one song.

Katja: I remember that when someone had their birthday, we always sang Happy Birthday to you in English straight after we had sung the song in Finnish.

Aino: I remember when cousins from Florida came on a visit in the summer and I thought I was modelling myself on their English really well. Only after starting school I realised how wrong my pronunciation had been. I was absolutely ashamed.

Mia: This idea of pretending to speak English although you didn't really know it must be familiar to many!

Anne: I remember being really excited just before we started English at school. I was really looking forward to learning the language. And my memories from primary school are good ones. I felt I was learning something new all the time.

Mia: I also think that languages were fun when I was small but school has gradually done its job. It has changed my idea of what it is to learn languages. It isn't necessarily as much fun as I thought when I was smaller.

Leena: What was it like at school? What did you do? How did you feel?

(Will they want to tell stories about teachers to me? It is different when they write and it would be different if they were just talking among themselves.)

Anne: My first English teacher was a very sweet auntie and I liked her a lot. She also gave us English names: I was called Ann. This created a nice atmosphere.

Katja: I definitely feared my first teacher. I was too scared to say anything but fortunately, the effect was not long-lasting. We also had English names and I was Kathy.

Aino: In fact, I first studied Swedish and when we moved I had to study the basics of English on my own during the summer holidays because I couldn't continue with Swedish in the new school. I didn't have problems with that. After all, the two languages are related.

Mia: Well, I started with German and had to change schools after two years and I had problems getting used to studying English. I just couldn't imagine that German would help me in learning English because it was a difficult thing in general to change schools. I felt that I was left alone without any help from the teachers. I thought that the others must know so much more although I didn't think English was particularly difficult. I have positive memories of the German lessons and one particular one when we sang Oh Tannenbaum at a Christmas party. We felt that we were kind of special, knowing this exotic and difficult language!

Leena: What were the language lessons like?

(Great! I managed not to use the term 'routine', not to mention 'tragedy'!)

Mia: It always went according to one and the same pattern, we went through the chapter, read in turns, looked at the new words, did some exercises, and naturally checked them, language classes have always had the same format.

Katja: I studied English, Swedish and German and I can say that nothing ever happened to take you by surprise. Like, wow, we're doing something different today, no, we went through the homework and the new chapter, old homework and new homework, and we always knew how the lesson would begin and how it would end so there were no big surprises. But on the other hand, it was guaranteed that if you had done your homework you were safe. What I think was really bad is the fact that we didn't learn to speak. When you just read that one line in the chapter it didn't help with speech production or with having to think.

Anne: I wouldn't say it was all that bad!

Mia: You're younger, this was the 1980s!

Anne: Could be. My first teacher always used to ask us to tell her about our day when we started the lesson so we got to speak and also to think about how to say it. Later, I have to admit, the lessons became much more boring. Somehow, especially in secondary school, the teachers didn't seem to think about what would suit the pupils' age at all.

Aino: I remember language classes at secondary school just like Mia and Katja do, they were absolutely awful! Always the same pattern and translating the text in turns. And that turn was the one and only time you got to say anything so you were under awful pressure. You had to get it right that one time because if you didn't then the whole day was ruined because that was the only chance you had. And if you goofed it, you were immediately corrected. I just couldn't take it when I was corrected.

Mia: What I remember as particularly nasty was when others were targeted, some kids who weren't that good and didn't manage to say a word the way it should have been said and the teacher kept pronouncing the word as a model and the poor kid was trying to repeat it. That's when I felt ashamed myself and I felt humiliated and the kid was in a panic and kept putting the stress in the wrong place. So I felt like stop it now and it wasn't even me repeating the word. It's easy to imagine that these kids never went to university. We are all probably people with positive learning experiences because we made it so far.

Leena: Mia gave an example of feeling empathy for others. Any other memories related to the classmates?

(I probably won't be getting "a classroom full of Mika Häkkinens" from these students)

Katja: I was too shy to pay any attention to how the others were doing, I only tried to cope myself. I hated being in a big group and had to just focus on surviving the lessons myself.

Anne: For me, the others didn't really have much significance. You obviously got to know everybody and their skills well. So, sometimes when somebody started their bit I knew it would take a long time... Not that I thought I was particularly good myself.

Aino: I guess I was quite good and didn't have to be afraid but I never reached my own goals, which were set so high.

Mia: I remember that girls were allowed to like languages. It would have been downright odd if a girl didn't like English. It was a totally different matter with Swedish in secondary school: you were obviously supposed not to like it. The peer group was significant in that way, I think.

Anne: I always thought that one noticeable feature at school was that the teachers, also the language teachers, gave more attention to the ones they liked and these pupils also got better grades. And they bullied the ones they didn't like. This, in turn, affected the others.

Aino: What was ridiculous was how some female teachers were giggling at some boys who were their favourites!

Mia: I don't in fact remember boys being favourites although there's a lot of research now that suggests that boys are given more time and attention in class. We were all expected to behave ourselves.

Katja: My language teachers never had any favourites, especially my Swedish teacher who was very motherly and absolutely fair. Unless I was one myself ...

Anne: I clearly remember how it was just certain boys in our school who were recommended to do an exchange and they were supported a lot in applying, and it was only them who went in the end.

Leena: Many students have memories of being tested and how that affected them. Do you?

(This bridging doesn't work well. New meta-cognitive division of labour in ALMS, I almost used the term!)

Mia: The only role we had in evaluation was to check that the teacher's corrections were right in our test papers. We went through them carefully, not that I learnt anything from those corrections.

Aino: I remember how the teacher would hand us back our test papers and comment on the individual results at the same time: well done, Raija and oops, Markku, what happened?

Katja: Some teachers put the papers in ranking order and we knew when she started handing them back exactly which ones, the best or the worst, were the first and it was painful. Grades, somehow, were public knowledge.

Mia: I remember we had an oral-skills test in German in the very beginning and it was different because we went into the corridor with the teacher, individually, and got to talk to her for a while. But then it wasn't considered a real test because it was fun.

Aino: I found an old test paper the other day and was shocked when I realised the teacher hadn't corrected every mistake in my paper.

Leena: Was the matriculation exam somehow visible in the English lessons?

(I know the answer to this one!)

Mia: Are you serious? What else was upper-secondary school but preparing for the final exams?

Katja: We started in ninth grade in fact. We always wrote "matriculation examination compositions" and we were always listening to "matriculation examination tapes" for listening comprehension.

Anne: Test results were always related to the matriculation exam: how well or badly we would have done if this had been the real thing!

Leena: But you did learn English as well?

(This sounds defensive!)

Aino: Well, you didn't think about that at all

Mia: What you learnt was words, I remember having a large passive vocabulary at the time. I used mnemonics, both for learning words and grammar rules. Not that I remember them any more!

Aino: I remember learning words from the bilingual word lists at the back of the book by going through these lists covering one side at a time and if I made a mistake I punished myself and went back to the beginning.

Anne: The order the words appeared in was very important for remembering them in the vocabulary test.

Aino: The other thing I did was to memorise words and idioms for the composition. Then I tried to fit as many of my brilliant words in the composition as possible in the actual exam.

Mia: I did that, too. I also prepared some model sentences that were grammatically correct. In the exam I would then adjust my sentences to fit the topic of the composition by changing some words in them. It was really time-consuming to try and decide where my great sentence would fit.

Leena: Has studying languages changed now that you are adults?

(What am I after now? The way they have changed as learners? Or if the courses offered to university students are different?)

Mia: Absolutely, my attitude has changed from school times and I'm much more ready to humiliate myself, and in the university Swedish course, for example, I messed up quite willingly! What's more, having studied to become a teacher yourself makes a difference. It's very healthy to observe yourself as a learner from time to time.

Anne: I started my university studies in Sweden and so my Swedish course here was fairly easy for me but I enjoyed the fact that we did a lot of speaking.

Katja: I do observe teachers these days and always know what I would not want to be like myself.

Aino: But often it's still the same old methods that are used in the university courses. It's still checking homework in turns row by row so you don't learn to speak now either! And so you find yourself discussing with your neighbour what the correct answer would be for number four.

Leena: Do you have ALMS memories already?

(Is it fair to ask them?)

Anne: The first impression was really positive that maybe learning English will be okay now. I can decide myself, I can assess my level and decide where I need practice. How could the teacher know anyway in the beginning?

Leena: Do you remember something concrete?

(Why do I press? They didn't have time to say anything!)

Mia: I got excited about the approach to mistakes and I said it out loud in the group as well that it was fantastic not to be continuously corrected.

Katja: I liked the first session although I normally hate group situations and get anxious in them although I'm a teacher myself. It's just that when I'm thrown inside four walls with a group I normally panic. So this time I wondered how I was able to quite calmly discuss in a foreign language and it was very nice when I felt a need to say something.

Aino: I also felt really good and felt that Joan wasn't listening for our mistakes but to the content of our comments. I think it's really a good way for us to learn because we have studied English for a long time and so having freedom and being able to think for ourselves is good. When you start a new language then probably certain things need to be gone through. At this stage this is really suitable and would have worked a bit earlier even!

Johanna [has quietly come in]: For me, this kind of course that is fairly free is very good. It would have been awful to start repeating sentences after the tape again! And it's good to take this course right now after I have had a lot of experience using English in the real world. When I came to the university, the student tutors and the faculty staff kept saying that we should just go and "do the languages", to "do English and Swedish" whilst we still remembered them from school. I didn't obey and I think it was good. Now I know what my real language needs are so I can plan my studies much more effectively.

Leena: Can you tell us a bit more about your history as a language learner, Johanna.

(Interesting. The 90 minutes are almost gone! How to include Johanna?)

Johanna: Well, during the past few years I have, in fact, learnt not to use the English I learnt at school! I have lived in a country where people speak fairly bad English so I have learnt to adjust and simplify my language. So I have actually lost the English I once had.

Mia: I had the same experience after school when I learnt to use simple English for shopping in a country in which a kind of pidgin English was spoken by, say, shopkeepers. I learnt not to even dream about producing long grammatically correct sentences I learnt at school.

Johanna: I'm now using English for most things in my life and find myself even thinking in English. I guess, in a way, I needed a fresh start with foreign languages because my experiences from school were downright awful. [Anne apologises and leaves] So in that sense it has been okay. But what happened when I was at school is something that I'll never forget. But you have been through all that, haven't you?

(The story will continue, I guess.)

Down Memory Lane, again

What is the role of the interrelated student and teacher autobiographies in ALMS? How do we as counsellors enhance students' own expertise in language learning by supporting not only their reflection on their linguistic biographies but also their experiential life histories? How do we help them with the ventriloquating voices, and how do we deal with these voices ourselves? What is the drama in the language classroom that so often sets off strong emotional reactions? What makes a teacher memorable? Is a counsellor role different in this respect? The last three questions had been on my mind when I went down Memory Lane with the students. My original idea had been to continue with the reflection texts and experiment with a memory group. That, however, would have required more time than the students could spare. The idea of writing further stories on the basis of the discussions was left to be done with later ALMS groups.

What I did not do with the students participating in the research I did with Joan, the group counsellor, though. We did not write further stories either, but we discussed the reflection texts we had written using the same instructions as the students. What follows is a re-storying of the two counsellors reminiscing about and reconstructing their experiences as learners, and as teachers and counsellors. It is not only reminiscence about our own language learning though; it is also a curricular discussion on ALMS and an inquiry into our practical teacher knowledge. It is a collage of two sessions and forms the bottom half of the kaleidoscope pattern Down Memory Lane. I had the storyline I had made for the students' group session at the back of my mind and I wanted us firstly to reminisce, and secondly to talk about the use of learning tools and documents, in particular the reflection text in ALMS. These two 'interviews' as I called them in some of the interim texts I wrote, or 'discussions' as I called them in others happened at different times, November 2004 and March 2005²³, in our shared office. Other groups had started by the time we had the second discussion, and for Joan an equivalent All Faculties group was in progress, which was a more problematic course for various reasons.

When listening to these tapes a third time in 2007 after having done a preliminary analysis and produced a tentative narrative in 2005-6, I was paying much more attention to the overall story in the discussions and to the inherent reflexivity. I am now aiming at a kaleidoscopic effect again, trying to show various fragments that build this particular pattern and to indicate its connections to

²³ The second discussion was not planned and is not shown in Figure 2.

the whole of the kaleidoscope. These discussions stand out as solid starting points for curricular development based on sharing our practical teacher knowledge and experiences with each other. It was through this third listening that the importance of the blurred lines between research and counselling/teaching that it indicated became evident. This probably happened because listening dialogically and listening for stories and, most importantly, for what was in the stories was getting easier.

By 2007 I had become firmly rooted in the idea of revisiting one's data (Kohler Riesmann 2002) and the justifiability of the process, and was struck by how little emphasis I had, in the end, put on the teaching-as-research approach in this section of the kaleidoscope. The discussion, however, is a valid example of collaborative teacher reflection and research into ALMS. I rewrote the text keeping to the earlier narrative structure but tried to convey the teaching-as-research aspect in the plot more clearly. I also included a few theoretical insights at this point, which I felt were missing. Joan has read and approved this final version. I draw on Bakhtin's (1981) idea of polyphony or multivoicedness (see also Elbaz-Luwisch 2005) in my narrative because I feel it supports my interpretation of auto/biography as a relational activity: stories are always constructed in dialogue and through dialogue both with ourselves and with others (Conle 2006). Quite a few different voices come into the picture in my reading of the counsellor talk: the "beginning researcher", the "professional language teacher", the "practising counsellor", the "hurt pupil", the "adult language learner", but also the "theatre director" and the "counsellor at the crossroads".

Our Fragile Stories

It's funny how you remember these things!

(Joan, November 2004)

Joan's school photo with its rows and rows of tiny faces and bodies in school uniforms of children and teenagers from Woodhouse Grammar School: this is where her foreign language learning and teaching story has its beginnings. My school photo from the third grade in a North Karelian primary school has fewer tiny faces and a collection of jumpers and skiing-boots: this is where my learner and teacher history goes back to. Her language teachers and mine whom we wrote about in our reflection texts: "At grammar school, the language teachers were a mixed bunch...", and "I remember my first English teacher very well...". We wrote much like the ALMS students have

written in the texts presented and analysed in this thesis. In our texts, as in the students' texts, teachers evidently are what have been called, 'significant others'. They are textual others through whom our autobiographical *I*'s are narrating our stories in relation to these others, indicating how our stories are bound up with those of these others (Smith and Watson 2001). It is through these significant others that we seem to understand our own self-formation, and in my interpretation, our identities as learners and teachers.

In our written stories we had both explored our histories as learners and now we were continuing this inquiry by sharing more stories about learning and teaching. We first talked about teachers and tutors in general and their tremendous influence on students' thinking, and in some cases on what students become interested in and even decide to pursue as careers. Or their influence on how some might lose all interest in a subject for the rest of their lives. Very evidently, teachers spoke to us from the past: we remembered their names and faces, ways of dressing, smells and make-up, what they taught us and how they did it, and how they treated us as learners, and as human beings. Both of us had experienced some hurt in our lives as learners, but also enjoyment and satisfaction.

For me, one of the struggles in my teaching career was, as I formulated it in our discussion, surprising myself as much as Joan: "I've always seen myself as a memory in somebody's head²⁴!" Up to this moment, this struggle had been unspoken. I heard myself telling Joan that I had always hoped that it would be a positive memory, but also feared that it might be negative in some students' thinking. Was it for this reason that I had read about teachers in students' texts with a special sensitivity? At this point in my research process I was becoming convinced that teachers bring to their teaching not only their personal biographies, but also their implicit institutional biographies, the cumulative experiences of school and academic lives (Weber and Mitchell 1995). I was still a few months away from the realisation of what a "frozen story" or a "portable story" (Conle 1999) means but I was expressing a fear of having ended up in one as the main character. This was a personal key to meaning-making.

Neither of us had taught in schools for long periods of our lives; we had been University Language Centre English teachers for more than 20 years. Our histories differed in that I had experienced life at Finnish secondary schools from a teacher's point of view, although this was only for a few years at the very beginning of my career. This is the life that our students write about in their texts. I had

²⁴ I have since thought a lot about this comment from the self-translation point of view because it is very difficult for me to imagine what exactly I would have said had I used Finnish.

always known that the experiential line between being a learner and being a teacher was blurred in my mind but I had not dared to speak this out loud. It was becoming clearer to me now and I was finding support for this intuitive feeling in the research literature on teachers' practical knowledge. I was beginning to have the courage to express how much I thought that our current pedagogies were influenced by our early experiences as learners, teacher trainees and new teachers. I had not fully realised the blending of individual and collective life history and of images from popular culture that also constitute our everyday knowledge. They are evident in our teacher memories and even in our pedagogical choices and approaches as teachers.

I said that I had pictured ALMS as a way of minimising the negative learning experiences students may have. For Joan this seemed like a different approach, but pondering on her own history in ALMS, she related how the rethinking of the teacher's role indeed was the biggest change at the outset. We agreed that it is not the only way we try to give room to people's individual differences in learning: many different ways of organising learning are acceptable in ALMS. But we, the counsellors/ teachers still run the programme and shape the learning environment, and it is in relation to us that the students will experience the programme. I showed a reflection text that had struck me as a teacher memory that was very familiar and very strange at the same time. The following excerpt from this experiential narrative was written by an anonymous ALMS student in autumn 2004:

I've had many English teachers. The teacher I best remember demanded very much of us. It was terrible if some task was too difficult and she got angry. I was really scared of making mistakes. On the other hand I learned well because I couldn't have taken part in lessons if I hadn't trained enough.

I had been wondering about the controversial nature of the student's teacher memory. This student was not the only one writing about "demanding" teachers, either for the good or for the bad. "Demanding" teachers were remembered in many instances of my research reading. Many of the significant learning experiences seemed to move through the landscape of what is demanded and how it is demanded.

What about ALMS where the teacher's role has been seen as that of a counsellor or facilitator? Joan had repeatedly talked about ALMS as being different from other language courses in terms of the role of the teacher in her introduction to the programme and Mia, one of the research students, had

commented positively on this. Joan said that she did it because some course evaluations mention the teacher in ALMS as a somebody who does not push enough, or demand certain things, or control the group work: “Some say that the teacher should have been there more”. Joan related this to “false” expectations as regards the role of the teacher on a course based on autonomous principles, and said that she wanted to reinforce the nature of the ALMS course by talking about the difference and how it was up to the students to decide on and choose the ways they work. She talked about the reasons for students taking up ALMS and said that those who take it up for expediency are the ones who might otherwise choose the teacher-directed mode and are thus the ones more likely to complain.

Joan said that she had often wondered what made a teacher seem effective to her. She definitely felt that she could not learn from a teacher who did not treat her right. She also thought that teachers often had the attitude that if something was fun then you did not learn. You have to suffer to learn and to be successful, which for her did not seem right. We also talked about the mistakes aspect. Joan said that her experience as a learner on the ALMS module for learning Finnish, which focused on the language and functioning and talking about one’s learning in the foreign language, made her realise what it was like for ALMS students. When she is using Finnish and somebody repeatedly points out the mistakes, it makes her feel insecure. These preferences as a learner have resurfaced in how Joan feels that it is more important that the students in their mid-term counselling emails, for example, tell the story than that they tell the story correctly. We discussed this area of language use, in other words talking and writing about their learning, which is new to the students, and how important it is and why it deserves a place in the programme. We shared the belief that making English the official language of the programme was justified. We also talked about students who are keen on correction and feedback: experiences differ, some students seem to thrive on correction.

The way we talked about these matters gives expression to the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ of teacher knowledge. Elbaz-Luwisch (2005) describes it as personal and unique, yet in part shared with other teachers. She sees it as being shaped by the particular biography and life experiences and the way the teacher undergoes and interprets her work, as resting on the same educational theories, pedagogical approaches and teaching techniques acquired alongside other teachers during teacher education, and as being reworked through interaction with the events of the classroom, which are themselves particular and yet recurrent. For Elbaz-Luwisch, giving attention and listening to teachers’ stories, to the language and imagery, will help the researcher to explore this multifaceted knowledge. She joins Clandinin and Connelly (2000) in suggesting that narrative inquiry makes

educational inquiry a fully relational and educative endeavour. In the research conversation (cf. Etherington 2004) with Joan we were telling our own and listening to each other's stories, and thus engaging in self-study as a form of relational autobiographical work and teacher development (Conle 2006). This research conversation also turned into a better understanding of our ALMS curriculum.

A curricular moment

ALMS students engage in various forms of oral and written self-presentation: they are asked to write reflection texts, which are experiential autobiographical narratives done in English; many write learning diaries, which are free-form accounts of their learning and reflection on learning; and in Joan's counselling sessions, for example, students tell their personal narratives based on these documents. When we talked about ALMS learning documents, Joan emphasised that she looks upon them as owned by the students. She never collects them on normal courses. She sees logs, which are an alternative to learning diaries, slightly differently, but respects the privacy of diaries. Diaries are "for pouring out your heart". In her counselling sessions she asks students to talk about the content, not to show the diary. The same goes for the reflection texts.

For me, asking students to write a text on their learning histories and experiences has always felt like a justified action. From my licentiate work I came to see it as a way of looking at past experiences in the light of the present moment, as a way of approaching the new beginning with a reflexive gaze. In the course of the current thesis work I started seeing an opportunity in the text for the reader's auto/biographical reflection that might help bring the two autobiographies into dialogue, into fuller contact. For me, the reflection text is an opportunity for peeling off layers of meanings that might potentially prevent dialogue in counselling. I totally agree with Joan that the very writing of the text is significant for the learning, and that the text is owned by the student. I perceive its potential slightly differently for counselling, however: I am beginning to read a lot of meaning into the counsellor reading and the reader's reaction for the learner, whereas Joan suspects that many students see it more as a requirement than anything else and fears that it is sometimes taken by students to be just another document for the teacher. She also questions the number of topics that can be brought into a short counselling session.

We nevertheless share a worry about the students and their learning from the writing or via the writing: we both worry about writing as a "gift" for the teacher. I read our difference of opinion as

a clash of narratives that turned into “a precious curricular moment” (Conle 1993, 326): our worry led us to discuss the wording of the instructions on the reflection text and how we introduce the writing task in the group meeting. Joan thought the instructions should be as short as possible. We wondered, however, if something could be added about the need and possibility to use the document as a basis in the planning of the programme. Joan suggested that we make it clearer to the students that the text is a discussion document. We both felt that the CEFR could and should be separated from the reflection writing²⁵. This interpretation of our reflections as a curricular moment became very important to me, although I do not claim to have a complete interpretation even of this clash.

The discussion with Joan, and also this text I am producing about it, are data in my ongoing teacher-research, in and beyond this thesis work. I will leave our discussion as if unfinished, but will show my appreciation of the narrative clash and the writing that has followed it using Elizabeth Adams St Pierre’s (1997/1995, 408/22) words:

[In another kind of field, this textual space], I use writing as a method of inquiry. I consider the words of this text to be data and will treat this writing experience as ongoing data collection. The research continues.

²⁵ The instructions for the reflection texts have since been changed and reference to the CEFR has been removed.

Kaleidoscope pattern four: Interview talk

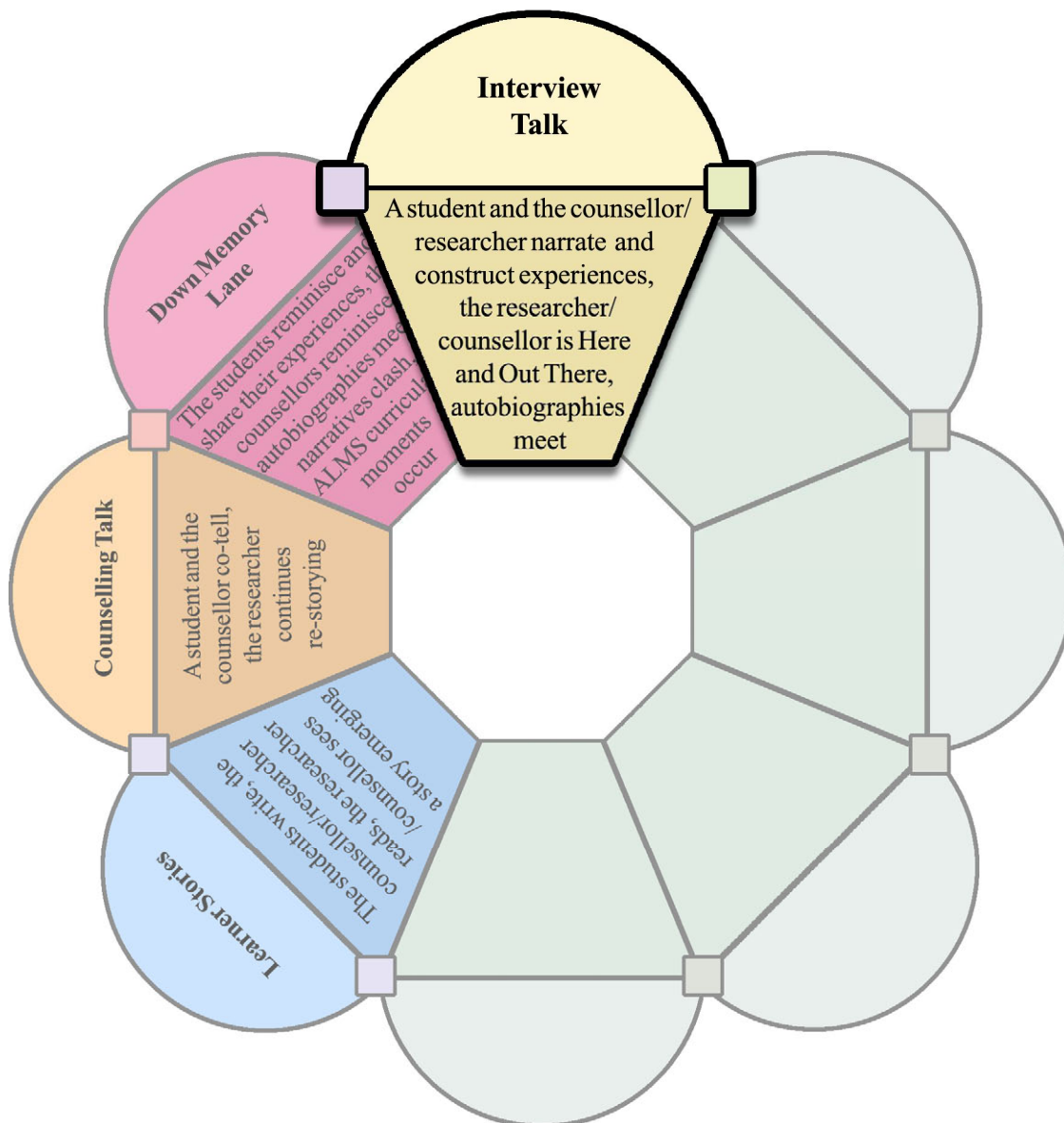


Figure 8: Kaleidoscope pattern four: Interview talk

How does one autobiography meet another autobiography? How do we use emotions, or hide them in learning encounters? How do we co-tell in ALMS? In my licentiate thesis I show a strong conviction for the centrality of the in-between, atopus, between learners and counsellors, myself among other counsellors. I do not, however, focus on the atopus in the research interviews enough in the sense that I keep relatively quiet about many voices in it: the autobiographies, the multiple

roles available to and taken by the participants, the researcher experience including emotions, the story-like quality of the interaction, in other words the whole complexity of the atopos.

Erkkilä and Mäkelä (2002) describe their way into biographical interviews by showing how it became evident during the research process that personal life is inseparable from professional growth, their research topic. They were involved in a cycle of interviews and these repeated interviews convinced them of the need for and inevitability of a genuine interest and confidentiality on the part of the researcher. When I was working on my licentiate thesis I was almost ashamed of my genuine interest in the students and any lapses into confidentiality or the sharing of experiences. This was because, first of all, I did not appreciate the necessary connection between the counselling we do in ALMS and interviewing. I still had to make the full conceptual shift from seeing the interviewees as persons providing answers to research questions to treating them as narrators with a complex story and a voice consisting not only of linguistic elements. I also lacked a full appreciation of what listening means in a story-telling situation. This was probably also connected to the fact that I carried out focussed interviews, which are more likely to illustrate an existing story but do not necessarily give space for creating in the telling. Moreover, I did not have the courage to legitimise my own role as a co-narrator, or the interview narrative as a joint production between interviewer and interviewee.

As I have conceptualised teaching and counselling as research in this current project, it seemed justifiable to aim at the same kind of open dialogue in the interviewing as we would aim at in counselling. Because face-to-face counselling in the ALMS programme is seen as multi-voiced and appreciative of views and meaning-making by both partners, I was reluctant to construct an interview situation that would have been counterproductive in this sense. I did not want in any way to undermine the trust we base our programme on. As for the counselling in the programme, we ideally aim at as much and as many of the following as possible:

- openness to the Other, the other person and also to the subject matter
- readiness to engage in a genuine discussion of views
- inter-subjective and intra-subjective episodes
- authentic questions
- recognition of the voices in-making of the learners
- appreciation of both voices as saturated with other voices.

Preparing to interview

With the work at hand I made the decision to interview the participants very early in the planning process. My purpose was to elicit stories that would shed light on the (E)FL experience, and to create a space for interpreting that experience by sharing stories. The full significance and nature of the interviews became clear after I realised that the group counsellor was looking at the reflection texts from a slightly different perspective. In a way, she was making space for my discussion with the students and apparently inviting me to share the counsellor role concerning this part of the session, seeing the texts more as research documents on this course. The way the interviews grew in importance also had to do with my own need to take the reflection further. Staying in an external researcher role would have been a contradiction in terms to my normal role in ALMS: as a counsellor, my autobiography meets the students' and the reflection texts lead to co-telling.

For me, being 'out there' when I was watching the videoed counselling sessions was not enough: I wanted to involve myself more in the histories. Thus the individual interviews seemed like an opportunity to invite storyworthy narratives on learning experiences in (E)FL, and also a way of appreciating the writing process and product, of offering a reader's response and listening further. They offered an opportunity to look into the first part in counselling, the history and background, in an extended discussion. Narratives as a way of understanding and knowing and as a way of interaction (Hyvärinen and Löyttyniemi 2005) were slowly beginning to take shape. I was on the lookout for stories when I prepared the interviews.

At this point I started thinking more critically about the language to be used in the interviews. I thought of offering the students the choice of either Finnish or English. We have adhered to the use of English as the programme's official language from the beginning, and share Little's belief in the use of the target language for all activities be they organisational, reflective or communicative (Little (1999, 2001 and 2007)). I was convinced that the reflection on learning that I pictured this interview to enable for the students would happen no matter which language we used. There were, however, considerations that made Finnish seem the more desirable choice. The students had gone to school in Finnish. Most of them supposedly did not have long-term life experiences in English. Their main experiences would probably be from the language classrooms, and even these might have been bilingual environments with English used only for certain exercises and activities. It

would probably be beneficial for them to speak about their past learning in Finnish, the emotional language of these experiences²⁶.

I decided that I would suggest carrying out the interviews in Finnish, but that the students could still choose to do it in English if they wanted to focus on developing their language skills in reflecting on their learning. I felt that this was a fair solution even though the programme's official language is English. Using Finnish would make the interviewing less hierarchical and make it possible to better explore the effects of emotions and personal chemistries. Given the connection between experience and language, this would probably provide a better chance for the students to get in contact with their past.

I also felt that using the three-dimensional inquiry space would be more straightforward if we spoke Finnish: when I was preparing the interviews I based the story on documents that made it possible to look at the students' stories as evolving over time (temporal, backwards and forwards), within contexts (specific concrete places) and as involving the personal and the social (inward and outward), and many of these stories had been lived mainly in Finnish. In the actual interview I wanted us to move within this space together and to pose questions pointing each way. As Clandinin and Connelly (2000) suggest, positioning oneself on this inquiry landscape means asking questions, deriving interpretations and writing a research text by addressing personal and social issues, which also include the relationship with the researcher; by addressing temporal issues and looking not only to the event but also to its past and its future; and by attending to the place or sequence of places.

My starting point was to take up issues that had shouted loudly from the documents or, on the contrary, had seemed to hide themselves behind other, less relevant issues. An example of a loud voice from the past was Johanna's recurring story about a foreign-language teacher at upper-secondary school who made students cry, every student, somebody during every lesson, all through

²⁶ Long after I made these decisions I found out about some interesting research conducted on the relationship between a story and the language of the telling: bi- and multilinguals may, in fact, tell slightly different stories in their respective languages. Studies on bilingual performance (Koven 2007) and translingual writing and writers (Pavlenko 2007) suggest that the same event may be told in different ways. There is research on bilingual autobiographical memory (Pavlenko and Driagina 2007) indicating that different languages may be linked to different memories. The main differences seem to be related to the amount of detail, the interpretative frames, self and Other positioning, and the levels of emotionality in stories told in the two languages. For example, bilingual patients are known to be more emotional and anxious in their first language. The linguistic insecurity can be seen in the smaller amount of detail that bilinguals produce in their second language.

her upper-secondary-school years. I was also prepared to invite what I presumed were untold significant stories, or more precisely, stories given less emphasis than they deserved. In Aino's and Mia's stories I heard a quiet whisper about the routine tragedy and grand narrative of a Finnish language classroom. Susan Chase (2005) writes about the paradox of narrative interviewing: a researcher prepares to invite particular stories on the one hand, but cannot, in fact, predict, or know, or prepare for a particular story on the other. This paradox is what characterises counselling as well: the counsellor would like to hear the particular story of the particular student, but predicting what it will be is not possible.

An interesting interpretative phase in my work was when I edited the video-taped first group sessions (six hours and two hours). The reason for videoing the sessions had been to back up the students' memory of them in the interviews. For reasons of convenience I cut out sections that, although not by any means irrelevant to the students' experience and learning, were not absolutely essential for my purposes. Thus I had already interpreted the sessions by selecting certain episodes rather than others for inclusion in the two-hour-video. I further selected the individual episodes from this video to be watched in each interview. By an episode I mean fragments of interaction in the group situation to which I was alerted because they felt significant or appeared to me to be dialogic moments for the participants. I gave two of the episodes names (*The Mistakes Episode* and *A Non*), which describe my interpretation of their central elements (cf. Salo 1999). I ended up watching three to four episodes with most students. I chose the episodes on the basis of the students' story and the significant elements in it, and the relation these elements had to the session episodes. However, I was prepared to talk about anything that they brought up in connection with the video.

In my first approach to the students (see the pre-course questionnaire in Appendix 1) who had signed up to do the ALMS module I already started shaping our story. By the time we met in the interview situation²⁷ I had attached myself to them with many bonds: in my working document *The Book of Stories* I had collected and drafted various impressions and readings of their stories in different documents. Before the interviews I put together a storyline consisting of four to five areas of interest that I hoped we could talk about. I wanted to check my initial understanding of their stories, and to weave the story on the video into them. This storyline functioned as a kind of interview guide: it was not a collection of random impressions but a preliminary narrative inquiry

²⁷ The interview stories are, again, examples of how I placed the narrative field texts (pp. 57-58) in the three-dimensional inquiry space.

into the students' stories. It was through this interpretation of their experiences, memories, written texts, answers to a questionnaire, recorded and videoed speech and appearance, interaction with the counsellor and others in the group, their messages attached to their emails and their questionnaires that I hoped to continue reflecting and rethinking.

I should add that five of the eight students interviewed had already taken part in a group interview, or 'memory session' as I called it in my interim text (see pattern 3). My approach to the data collection was based on cycles and on the idea of reflection and students' everyday knowledge of language as a process, in which understanding deepens gradually. I was thus assuming that the students would be going through stages of reflection on learning both in the course-related encounters and in those related to my research. Moreover, I was convinced of the need to approach memory and recall from a similar point of view: even an autobiographical memory is a process and, moreover, a social process.

Very clearly, this first drafting was a way of questioning my readings and interpretations, of trying to remain critical of the text I was producing. As Susan Chase (2003) advises her students, I was not going to use my guide in the actual interview as such but I wanted to ask questions that followed from a close listening to the students' stories. This was my biggest challenge, and had also been my concern regarding how I conducted my counselling sessions: am I listening well and asking questions that invite stories? I foresaw the interviewing as leading to changes, or reconstructions of the stories, and did not exclude the possibility of having to start again from scratch. In particular, I saw my autobiography as a shaping influence on the stories.

Here and out there

I started each interview with a brief background to ALMS research, and the place and relevance of my licentiate and the work at hand for the programme. I discussed how the students felt about possibly being recognizable in the final report and the use of pseudonyms. Most of them said that their names and background information could be freely used. Two of them, however, wanted me to change some detail in their background information and one asked me to use a different name: I have done this in all of the stories I have written about them. On the whole, they felt that what we were going to talk about, namely learning and studying languages, and school memories, was nothing particularly private or of such a nature that it needed to be covered up. I told them that I

was going to use the background information sparingly. They were all very enthusiastic about getting a draft version of their story to read and comment on during the following term.

In my licentiate thesis I wrote about ‘membershopping’ problems in counselling. I was referring to situations in which students want the counsellor to act as a teacher, or an external evaluator, or as a controller of their learning process. What about the expected roles of the participants in the interviews? What were my motives? How did I negotiate the roles? In both studies I had a double role, that of a counsellor and that of a researcher. This was particularly evident in my licentiate in that I was counselling some groups, one of which included one of the students I interviewed for the research. In the context of the present work I met the students briefly as a group in the first (videoed) group session. I wanted to introduce myself and the research, and I also wanted to be the one to whom they handed back the pre-course questionnaires in order to locate the document part of their interaction with me. Moreover, I wanted to help them to locate me both as an ALMS teacher and counsellor and as the researcher responsible for the extra documents, the videoing and the interviewing. I wanted to make it clear to them that I was cooperating with the group counsellor, but that they could choose not to participate in what would follow.

Still, I felt on slightly shaky ground during the interviews with the depth of my involvement revealed to them. They had given permission for the use of all their (learning) documents and for the videoing, but I could not be sure that they had understood the extent of the process. By the time they came to the interview I had accessed all their documents, read them and analysed them, and had watched their face-to-face counselling sessions, which are private situations by nature. From this perspective, the fact that I did not hide or remain silent about my own history and experiences as a learner and teacher of languages, or my interpretations of them, is justified in terms of aiming at true dialogue. It was a conscious effort to diminish my initial power as a teacher-researcher.

Inevitably, the research interviews shared features of the counselling sessions the students had had with Joan, and to an even greater extent, features with the counselling I normally do in the programme in my counsellor role. In some of them we spent time discussing issues related to the students’ questions about their learning and queries about the programme. These parts of the interviews do not necessarily stand out in the transcripts or shout out loud to the listener of the taped interview. It was all done in the framework of the learner’s past, present and future. Certainly, I was in a different position from an interviewer who is interviewing a large number of people and meeting them perhaps for the first time at the time of the interview.

Using a close personal method was definitely more in tune with what the students had already experienced on the course, and I would claim that some influence of what my colleague has called 'a community of autonomy' (Kjistik 2004) helped me in this. Some rapport was there without my making a huge effort. In broad terms, my research could be looked upon as an ethnography. In a way, I am working "in the field" all the time, doing research into the experiences of learners and counsellors. Yet I am very much of an insider in the programme, and I am an insider in the university setting. Jaana Saarinen (2003) talks about her researcher position as being one in which she is neither "here" at one time nor "out there" at another like a traditional ethnographer. Instead, "here" and "out there" are intertwined. This is very much my position, too. When I was talking to the students I was listening as an ALMS counsellor, as a teacher in the Language Centre who is and has been responsible for certain faculty groups (behavioural sciences, law, agriculture and forestry), and as a researcher of ALMS modules, past and present.

This type of interview model is widely used in women's studies, in which interviews and interviewing traditionally have an important role: it is non-hierarchical and involves investment of the researcher's personality, even to the extent of becoming friends with the interviewees. It is also in the context of women's studies and the related research literature then, where the moral issues and doubts about using the model have been raised. One of the major fears associated with this kind of research process (which does not necessarily involve biographical interviewing as such) has to do with revelations made by the participants, encouraged by the good rapport and cosy atmosphere, that they would regret later. Another danger comes from the confused expectations of the participants: can the empathy of the interviewer extend to a caring relationship beyond the interview situation? Conscious of the possibility of confused expectations among the students, I tried hard not to ignore my counselling responsibilities for the ones interviewed in case there was a need. I feel that this is a legitimate approach for a teacher-researcher (cf. Jaatinen 2003).

The interviews were carried out within two weeks on four different days. Given the choice, all of the students wanted to speak Finnish. I started transcribing within a few days, but the process took several weeks in all. I consider the transcribing an important part of the interpretation process. Before embarking on the co-constructed stories from the interviews I will tell a brief story of how I grew into narrative biographic interviewing as a researcher. This story emerges from my field texts, in particular the notes written at the end of each Finnish transcription. It also shows the chronology of the interviews with different students, and embeds Päivi's interview, which I will re-story in more detail, in the context of them all.

When I started interviewing the students, I was so full of energy and eagerness that the first interview, Aino's, is almost dominated by my enthusiastic efforts. This first interview is more mine than hers, she does not get enough space and time to tell me about her history, or how she felt about and experienced the sessions, it is focussed on questions and answers, I am not asking her to "tell me": "kerro" is missing. I am not always inviting stories. And still, the rapport is there, Aino is seemingly relaxed and tuned in and manages to tell stories almost despite of the eager researcher, not because of her.

With Mia, the rapport is there again. Her autobiographical telling gets going from the very beginning. She is a teller who very clearly takes responsibility for the story. She is not reporting but mostly narrating. There is a lot of laughter and we talk about mothering and we talk about doing research in education.

Päivi, my third interviewee, had not wanted to take part in the group interview. When the two of us met for an individual interview she was very relaxed, and also said that talking about oneself was okay, something that anybody would like "if only there is someone who listens". She was easily prompted into telling and told various autobiographical stories.

I had looked forward to Johanna's interview but also dreaded it slightly because I was aware of some elements in her story that troubled me deeply. I brought up her school experiences and she very obviously wanted to talk about them at length. But we also talked about the whole of her history as a language learner and focussed on some problems that she wanted to solve in ALMS. This was also a very warm interview in which I felt that contact was made and kept.

With Katja, her advanced pregnancy at times caused me to talk to her tummy! Being a mother-of-three myself, I felt warm and protective towards her as she was expecting her first baby. The fact that she works as a teacher in her old school definitely gave a certain flavour to her telling and through that to my questions: it was also a discussion about teaching between colleagues. Katja accepted responsibility as a story teller and her telling was very thorough.

With Juuso the beginning of the interview was slightly problematic when the tape-recorder suddenly did not work. After 15 minutes of frenzied looking for help, we started. Unexpectedly, I feel that the extra hassle made him feel more relaxed. I suffered from getting nervous and did end up asking questions that were too general in nature, and I also had difficulty discussing the video with him because I felt embarrassed about having asked him twice to come to the interview.

In contrast, Maria's interview went very smoothly. She had interviewed people for her Master's thesis a few years' previously, and seemed to take her role as an interviewee very seriously. She took responsibility for her storying and seemed to enjoy it. I asked fewer questions than in the other interviews so maybe my listening skills were improving.

Anne was the last one. She had a terrible cold and so I decided to be efficient and quick. Her interview, in the end, was shorter than the others. Anne's way of approaching my questions was very matter-of-fact and uncomplicated: she was not much into storying at length, but I did not feel that she was only reporting. In fact, I managed to be fairly personal and did not ask for generalisations.

In what follows I present a restless text based on a number of co-constructed narratives (Cortazzi 1993) emerging from the telling in one of the interviews, Päivi's. I do not take the whole interview as a story; I understand an interview as a collection of small stories, story fragments, and episodic tellings of experiences by both participants. The text that I have written is an edited and re-storied version of the interview discussion. By 'edited' I mean that the text here has gone through various stages of de- and reconstruction: our discussion in Finnish was taped and transcribed, the transcript was read, analysed and made meaning of, story fragments were chosen, and these were translated into English. It is an inquiry into how I have used my two languages in the process: I had been reading student texts in both Finnish and English, and I had been listening to classroom and counselling talk in English. The text is a blend of English and Finnish translated into English, which probably makes it a slightly different story. Moreover, I have added self-reflexive comments on how I had planned the discussion, how I acted in the interview, and how I influenced and shaped the interview story. I have also written about emotions: how I felt and how I dealt with them.

Some interpretative beginnings of Päivi's story in "Language Learning" are to be seen in the text: in pattern five I represent the re-storied narratives of all the students I interviewed. These narratives are based on the story fragments, the telling of lived experience and events that mainly arose in the interviews, all of which were carried out with the same principles and concerns in mind. I hope that this story about Päivi's interview will also highlight my work as a biographer using various types of data, one type being these interviews. In the following re-storied writing I focus on my understanding of narrative biographical interviews as a way of sharing experiences and constructing knowledge about (E)FL. The essential aspects of narrative biographical interviewing that I take to share with counselling in ALMS are:

- 1) "Listening well" to students' unique multi-voiced experience
- 2) Auto/biographical construction of the student's story.

The idea of “listening well” is based on Susan Chase’s guidelines to using narrative principles in in-depth interviewing. Her approach to planning narrative interviews reminds me of Riitta Jaatinen’s (2003) suggestions of what we can plan in advance and what not as regards our teaching. Chase (2003) advises her research students to jot down all areas of issues in advance of an interview, and to write questions for each area. She also asks them to organise the questions, if possible, to give them a chronological flow. Yet, the questions should closely follow from listening to the narrator’s story rather than being read from the guide. Chase argues that this preparation will make the interviewer open to a wide range of stories that might be told and, when combined with inviting stories and listening well, will provide good qualitative data.

With my storylines I was prepared to listen well, which corresponds with the idea of planning one’s teaching. However, I was prepared to go along unplanned paths. The crucial aspect of listening was slowly opening up to me through the interview experiences, namely the one that Ruthellen Josselson (1995, 31) writes about: “When we study whole human beings, we are aiming to interpret others who are themselves engaged in the process of interpreting themselves”. The students were engaged in making sense of their experiences and thus an empathic awareness of these efforts was needed. I am fully convinced of the narrative working of interviews. The jointly constructed narrative that emerges shows and reflects the whole history of the interview discourse and its development (Cortazzi 2001). This is how it went with Päivi.

A restless interview story

As it was important to position myself as a researcher but also to place the interview in the context of the whole research process, I spent some time explaining what I had done so far and how my understanding had been developing. In opening up the work I had done so far I was trying to include Päivi in what was coming. This was the way I started the interview:

Leena: I have collected all the information about each of you: pre-course questionnaires, reflection texts, videoed counsellings, and I have watched the video of the first group sessions and your emails to Joan. I got your second counselling email from Joan yesterday so I have everything so far and on the basis of all that I have constructed a sort of loose profile [sic!] of you for myself, and I think that every profile has features that have emerged through my interpretation of you, so I thought we could talk about these three or four areas.

My interview speech was in colloquial Finnish and contains false beginnings and looking for words, which I did not always find in the end. I speak very quickly and my being a woman of many words is evident. I am also prone to repeating words and ideas.

Ukkonen (2000) has suggested that a biographic interview should be seen as a memory session and a commonly constructed story of the researchee. She focuses on what she calls the centrality of the narrator: the whole interview is based on and always takes as its starting point the researchee's life and experiences. My guiding idea was to formulate the questions so that they would be personal and not about learning in general (cf. Chase 1995), which was what I often did in my thematic interviews for my licentiate. Thus I used types of questions such as "Tell me what you did. Tell me how you felt. Tell me what you thought, Tell me what happened to you.". The starting point was the uniqueness of each student.

Päivi had written two accompanying notes to her emails and texts to me stating that she saw herself as different from the rest of the group. She wrote: "I don't think I fit your profiles!" Interestingly enough, although I prepared the interviews in writing with the heading "Ideas for X's interview", I did use the word 'profile' for the whole of the background of each student when I explained it to Päivi (and some of the others) at the beginning of the interview. The word resonates negatively but it is convenient somehow as research language, I always speak it with the idea in "brackets", but I use it. So Päivi's interview was based on four areas, memories or flashbacks, experiences and episodes, which made up the 'profile':

- 1) Being different/autobiography
- 2) ALMS and other language courses
- 3) Testing vs. self-assessment
- 4) Ideas on language work from Päivi's ALMS plan.

The point-of-entry into Päivi's story was when I encountered her idea of being different, and in particular her use of the words: "I don't think I fit your profiles/En taida sopia profiileihisi!"²⁸ This was one of my very first readings into the students' texts and I was struck by the presupposition that I had somehow decided what sort of students I wanted to interview. I asked Päivi to tell me more about why she perceived herself as different.

²⁸ With a couple of Päivi's comments I have given the Finnish as well in order to evoke the particular feeling her very words carried for those readers who know Finnish.

Päivi: *Well in this group it's clear that I'm different because I'm of such a different age but that's not the only reason that explains my... it's the story of my life that I am slightly different. It's my life in its entirety that my experience of almost anyplace, I mean group, that I have very seldom found a group of my own where I felt that I belonged the same way as the others did.*

Päivi's way of speaking is much calmer than mine. From the very beginning she assumes narrative responsibility and starts telling. Moreover, she is obviously interested in what we are talking about.

I showed her an excerpt from the reflection text she wrote in which she describes her upper-secondary-school experiences in the 1970s:

When I was at school I never spoke any foreign language, as a matter of fact I almost never spoke at all. I was very shy and I felt the whole school system ridiculous so I thought that being silent was the best way to protest. During English lessons I used to whisper the right answers to my boyfriend who was sitting beside me and he always put up his hand. This of course annoyed our teacher a lot but there was nothing she could do. I always got the best marks in tests and when I got laudatur (the highest grade) in matriculation examination (points 60/60) my English teacher came to me and suggested that I'd come to take an extra test with her and she could give me 10 in my diploma. I never went.

I was prepared to listen to how each student engaged in retrospective meaning-making in his or her own personal way, and I was not looking for common trends in their tellings. For example, Päivi's protest at school was not something that I would have wanted to categorise, but I definitely felt that it was a significant time in her life, something to come back to. I am also convinced of the crucial shaping effect of the questions on the answers and the whole narrative. Narratives are not simply answers to questions posed, but are also instances of retrospective meaning-making and, as such, interpretations of one's own and others' actions. The direct and indirect elicitations and transferring of the narrative responsibility (Chase 1995) from the interviewer to the interviewee all shape the narrative. In the following Päivi takes the narrative responsibility concerning her text and its content:

Leena: *This is a story of what happened. Can you tell me more about this how it was and what happened?*

Päivi: *I was a very quiet pupil, and as I write in the text I was very quiet in all lessons. It was like a sort of timidity in big groups, but in upper-secondary school I started to protest and that was my way of protesting: I don't like school and something is really wrong with this system and I don't want to open my mouth at all. But I did show that I knew what it was that I had learnt and I whispered to the person sitting next to me but I never put my hand up, not even accidentally. That was my protest against the system but I did want to show that I managed, and I always did my homework carefully and did well in my tests. That was just my way of annoying the teacher.*

Leena: *Was this in all subjects not only foreign languages?*

Päivi: *Yes. The only things I was interested in were the most difficult maths tasks that I put up my hand for, and went and did them on the blackboard. That was the only thing I participated in.*

Leena: *Yes was it that there was no challenge in the language classes for you or...?*

Päivi: *Yes, that was one of the problems, and there was this awful controversy in it because I thought that the teaching was mostly about the teacher asking questions that most pupils didn't have the answer to and didn't put up their hands for that reason, and the rest thought it was too easy and a stupid thing to ask. So to me the teaching really only met with very few people's needs and that was what I wanted to bring up, that the teacher talks and some have no idea of what it is and others feel that it's stupid to answer those questions. I would have liked school to be so that pupils were enthusiastic about what was taught and would ask the teacher who knows and not the teacher asking those who don't know. That didn't make any sense and so I didn't like school.*

My mind went back to instances as a learner and instances as a teacher: I have protested myself and I have had pupils protest against my doings as a teacher. This led me to ask Päivi about the teachers, and if any of them commented on or reacted to her protest. I did not do this so much to learn the facts of the story but to stay close to the experience by expanding it to include the teachers. In conceptualising my interviewees as actively creative in their telling (Chase 2005) I was distancing myself from the factual nature of what they told me and focusing on what kind of versions of their experiences they were producing. It seemed that Päivi's story had not come to an end, but now she could continue and then finish it.

Päivi: *Yes, I remember that very vividly. In fact it was the English teacher who once got angry about my whispering in the lesson and she said this wouldn't do anymore and she didn't know who was the one who knew the answers, because this classmate, who was my boyfriend at the time, he just kept putting up his hand all the time. He didn't understand that he was exposing himself to the danger that the teacher had difficulty knowing if he knew. So how could she possibly give him a*

grade or was it all my knowledge. So she got angry that once but as she couldn't do anything about it just continued, and what I actually was surprised at was that clearly the teacher had such a bad conscience afterwards that she came to ask me if I wanted to upgrade my grade, although I felt myself that I didn't deserve a ten [the highest grade]: that part of the grade was what you did and showed in the lessons and I did NOT deserve a ten, but she came to say that she wanted to give me a ten and that it would be possible if I took an extra test, but I didn't go.

As my starting point was mutual construction rather than merely listening, by now I had shared a lot of autobiographical experiences with Päivi. I definitely would not have wanted her to feel observed or used for an external purpose; I even wanted her to be able to benefit from the interview in terms of how her approach to language learning developed. This was a point of hesitation for me: was she getting anything out of her telling? Had she felt pressured to take part in the interview? She had firmly refused to come to the group memory session, but when asked the second time she agreed to come to this individual interview. I had asked the students about their willingness in the first email, and later contacted them again. Päivi's reply had been an intriguing comment about not fitting in (see above). When we met outside the counselling room as she was waiting for her counselling with Joan and I was organising the camera we began to talk, I asked her again and she agreed to come.

It was clear from her documents that Päivi was shy and not into social situations. When I was preparing to watch one group situation with her from the video it felt as if I was intruding upon her privacy. I was hesitating slightly whether to show the episodes but decided to continue as I had planned because the discussion had led us to this particular one. Päivi, in fact, referred to the "somebody" watching the video in the unforeseeable future and noticing that she was not speaking, so I felt that I was already a character in the story at this point:

Leena: At this point it's even more interesting or disconcerting to show this episode on the video to you, knowing more now about this group thing, but could you still think back a bit and tell me how you felt at this point in the ALMS group session?

Päivi: There I am with my back turned towards the camera.

Leena: Was that on purpose?

Päivi: Yes.

Leena: What does it feel like sitting there?

Päivi: Oh no, I have nothing to say to these people (both laugh).

Leena: Well, did you say anything to them then?

Päivi: *No. I remember I didn't open my mouth at all.*

Leena: *Did the others try and make you talk?*

Päivi: *No. It must be because I'm so much older than the others so out of respect or for some other reason they left me alone.*

Leena: *Did this change at any point?*

Päivi: *Well, at one point I forced myself to join in the conversation. I thought okay this is being videoed and somebody will certainly say hey that one didn't say anything at all so now I simply have to think of something to say. We were having a free discussion on kids, there were a couple of mothers at the table and then I took part. I said a few words about my son so that I had said something at least!*

Leena: *Yeah (laughs), you did your duty. Okay, you didn't participate much but did you feel like protesting, did you feel as if you were at school again?*

Päivi: *No, not at all, not a feeling of being at school at all, but just being an outsider and having to try to join in but feeling that it was really difficult.*

Päivi's history as a foreign-language learner is remarkable. She had studied Swedish, English, German, French, Spanish, Chinese and a bit of Russian. She had always been good at languages. She surprised me slightly when she described an audio-visual course in French that she took as an adult and that she liked. Her description of the course gave me food for thought as a teacher who believes in the personalised use of language as a learning goal and in bringing students' own lives and experiences into the classroom activities. I also found myself referring to the other students I had interviewed when listening to her story. In the following Päivi and Leena talk about Päivi's ideal language course, which she had taken at the end of the 1970s:

Leena: *You have studied foreign languages since leaving school, as an adult, haven't you?*

Päivi: *Yes. I did, well, to go to the beginning of upper-secondary school, we had to make certain choices and I had difficulty choosing between more maths or more languages, and I would have wanted both but it wasn't possible, so I was really disappointed and sad that I couldn't take French at school, but I so much wanted to study maths. I did try when I saw the others starting French, they got this new language and I was denied it so I dug out my mum's old Russian textbook and started studying Russian on my own, and I made progress, studied a couple of units, but it was hard and I had to give up. It was a good try, though. I felt so annoyed not having any French and so when I started my university studies I took a French course immediately and I felt now I can do this, now this is not denied to me.*

Leena: *What was the course like?*

Päivi: *I got 12 credits and it was real fun and we had no textbook. In the first year we studied audio-visually and we had a native speaker as a teacher, and we had a language lab at our disposal, which was all such luxury compared to school. It was really efficient compared to school because we students had good tools and I really enjoyed it a lot.*

Leena: *Well, were there any group situations on the course? I'm sure there were.*

Päivi: *Yes, there were and that was again ... but luckily we didn't have conversation or group work but rather... half of the time we spent in the lab and worked on our own and the other half was in class, and the teacher asked questions and we took turns in answering them, but it was geared towards grammar so we didn't have to think of something to say we just had to come up with the right answer.*

Leena: *Did this system work? This is interesting, you didn't feel uncomfortable in it?*

Päivi: *I think it worked much better and I was really motivated to learn (French) because I hadn't had the opportunity for so many years, so I was really motivated.*

Leena: *This is very interesting, what you describe with grammar in focus and question-answer sequence, this is something that some other people I have talked to would describe as boring and would say that there was no discussion or group work, but for you it's different you don't agree.*

Päivi: *No, I really thought that we had the opportunity to practise our language skills, pronunciation in a safe environment where we knew how it goes and didn't have to think about and make up something to say ourselves. What should I say now, but it was clear because it was all in the sentence, the thing was to say it so that it was grammatically correct and to know how to pronounce it that is much safer.*

Leena: *So you don't want to be personal and talk about yourself?*

Päivi: *No, I absolutely don't want to give of myself, but I want to work with the subject matter.*

Although I feel that this overall interview story is an honest attempt at a co-construction of Päivi's story, this might well be contested: Richardson's (1994, 523) warning is on my mind: "... desires to speak 'for' others are suspect". My active role and my need to ask certain questions definitely led us to linger on topics that I had a burning desire to understand as parts of Päivi's story. When we talked about Päivi's Spanish studies I was the one to bring up the group problem, which had disturbed me. I was thus giving direction and shaping the story.

Leena: *After the French course you studied Chinese, but that was quite recently and before that you studied Spanish. Tell me about that.*

Päivi: *Last summer it was just a sudden idea, it was because I was going to travel to Cuba with my daughter, to a children's conference or festival, so I thought that it would be nice to be able to speak at least a little bit of Spanish, and I thought I'd have a go at it and see if you can still learn a new language at this age and how would it go. I wanted to learn the numbers at least. But it turned out to be a really good course and I was surprised about how much I got out of a new language, it was amazing that first I understood absolutely nothing and all of sudden I did! It was a fantastic experience. It was an intensive course and I worked hard. I worked through the whole textbook, all the exercises. It was three or four hours two or three times a week, this was at the beginning of the summer, and then I went to Cuba and did the next course after that. We covered the whole of Spanish grammar.*

Leena: *Did you have group work?*

Päivi: *Yes, we did a bit, and it was quite an effort mentally when I had to say something about myself, to give of myself. It was very easy to do the exercises, have the correct answers, it was easy and it was fun reading them out loud, but when it came to talking in a pair about something or the other it was... but I did it. But then I had a setback when the teacher asked us to continue our studies on a course of practical Spanish. She said that we had learned so well so she was going to have another course, and I did go to the first lesson. I had to back off! I sent an email to the teacher and wrote that I simply couldn't do it (laughter from both). It would have been drama, performing little episodes in groups, preparing and acting in front of the others. It was too much, I had to back off.*

Päivi said that for her self-assessment was a very difficult, or even a counterproductive approach to orienting herself when learning. She compared evaluating her own skills with looking at herself in the mirror: how could she decide if she was beautiful or not if there was no one to compare with? She did not feel comfortable with trusting her own evaluation: "... it is just somehow inscribed in me that there has to be testing/se on vaan jotenkin kirjoitettu muhun semmonen, et pitää testata jollain tavalla". At various points in the interview she brings up her way of thinking about assessment and evaluation, and expresses her delight at getting the chance to do the Dialang²⁹ test.

Leena: *What were your main goals that you put in your ALMS plan?*

Päivi: *Well, the first and most important thing that I had in mind was the fact that I had no idea about my level of English at present, and that was the reason why I didn't go to the exemption test.*

²⁹ In the introductory ALMS sessions counsellors introduce students to the idea of self-evaluation. They also clarify to them the relationship between using the CEFRR scales for this and testing their skills with the Dialang testing battery.

Otherwise I might have gone and tried to pass the test. But I just didn't know because I haven't had any assessments after school because my earlier degree didn't include a language component, so I didn't know and that's why I wanted to be sure of what my level was now, and what I should do about my English. And I did know that oral skills are my weakest link, but it was so good when I did the Dialang test and got confirmation that I don't need to work with vocabulary or structures and grammar, or reading or listening comprehension, so it was clear which skill and area I need to focus on and just to think of how to do it. And so the question was again if I had to go to a group to discuss.

Leena: How has that been solved?

Päivi: Well, I thought of this course on calligraphy that I'm doing [in English] and that's a good group for me. I already froze when I thought that being in a group with these students [from the ALMS course] would just not be possible. That I had to find a group that I could in some way belong to so that I could open my mouth at least a bit.

Leena: What do you talk about on the course, and do you talk?

Päivi: Well, for me it takes time to warm up and I take my time in summoning up courage to see what these people are, and it's been easier because we're the same age and that's something to start from, and then you can always talk about your kids and so in fact it's been better than I expected.

Leena: So, you're working on something together not only learning a language together.

Päivi: It has to go so that I NEED to say something, that I'm using the foreign language for that and not trying to think of something to say to be able to use the language.

Päivi had planned to read a novel in English during her course and to analyse and work with the emotional elements in it, and this inspired me to take her back to an episode in the group session where emotions were talked about. Her role in the video extract was fairly small, but it turned out that she remembered the episode well and that along with the other participants she had interpreted it as a significant interactive moment in the group. We watched the episode *A Non* together.

Leena: Do you remember this situation? Tell me how it went with Juuso.

*Päivi: Well, I felt pleased about finding the point in my text and I also managed to convey that to him in our discussion, and although I explained at length he still managed to pick out the main points and then presented them in a masculine way. But then when he told me about this text (*A Non*), it obviously contained many more emotions and so on that he didn't tell me about and I was kind of surprised when I listened to this, so was it the same story that I heard?*

Leena: *Well, what about this situation now when Joan asks if anybody wants to continue? Do you remember what you thought?*

Päivi: *This was also a situation when I thought I'd be caught if I didn't say anything (laughter), that someone will notice if I don't say anything.*

Leena: *What had Juuso told you, then, of this text?*

Päivi: *He just related the main points of what happened without any feelings.*

Leena: *This bit has brought out feelings and this made me ask Juuso to come to the interview. He said he took it as a task, which obviously was a relevant approach. How did or do you feel about this discussion?*

Päivi: *I felt like reading the text myself. I felt I had been cheated in not being able to read the text myself to be able to see what was in it and I only got a summary, that he did the task in his own way, but I just felt that he didn't tell me what I would really have been interested in.*

Leena: *Would you still like to read it?*

Päivi: *Yes, I could if you happen to have a copy.*

As I have stated earlier, my own researcher emotions, “having, using and keeping them” (Holland 2005) in interviews was not a major issue in my licentiate work. During my doctoral work, I came to appreciate an awareness and acknowledgement of the presence of emotions in the research process. I was keen to understand how our researcher emotions show in the way we conduct interviews and in how we understand and interpret the data we are collecting, and again in how we understand the data collected when we read transcribed interviews or, say, watch a video. I now saw the potential in the engagement with our personal feelings (Thompson 2004).

With the discursive turn in social sciences, the research tradition has changed so that it is now possible to look upon emotions not only as internal processes that have to be suppressed in the name of neutrality and reliability, but also as a part of social interaction between people and thus a part of the interpretation process (Wager 1999). When discussing this episode with Päivi I became aware of the inter-narrativeness of her story and Juuso's (as yet totally shadowed) story of the same episode. My confused feelings when watching this particular bit on the video for the first time came back to me. I had recognised this episode in the group as something that had contradictory elements in it: it almost seemed to me that Juuso was having to justify his approach to the task in the session to the others and to the counsellor. There was laughter in the group when he said he had no particular feelings about the text and it was all only a task to him.

Both Päivi and I were now remembering the episode, and we may have done so because, as Crawford et al. (1992) suggest, we remember things for two reasons: on the one hand, we remember episodes that were problematic at the time, and on the other occasions on which the responses of others were not congruent with our expectations.

When we ask our interviewees to retrieve memories we are asking them to try and resolve these contradictions. We as interviewers also remember our own experiences: we connect with the interviewees through what we recognise as something that could have been our experience. Inevitably, our feelings for them have to do with our own history. As interviewing by this time was becoming a fusion of dialogical, autobiographical and narrative thinking for me, the interpersonal dynamics of an interview encounter had gained in significance. The talk shapes and defines the self and Other of both participants and can leave the researcher and the interviewees feeling vulnerable.

In fact, I felt empowered after our talk and in particular after the sharing of our memory of the episode *A Non* in the group session. Päivi had brought up yet another experiential horizon into the episode and this made me intrigued and more determined to continue on my chosen path: maybe the next turn in the road would give yet another insight into how learning encounters are experienced. This is how we finished the interview:

Leena: *How has this felt now, having chatted with me and having spoken about yourself?*

Päivi: *I guess we all enjoy speaking about ourselves. Who wouldn't speak if there is somebody who really listens?*

Kaleidoscope pattern five: Stories written and unwritten

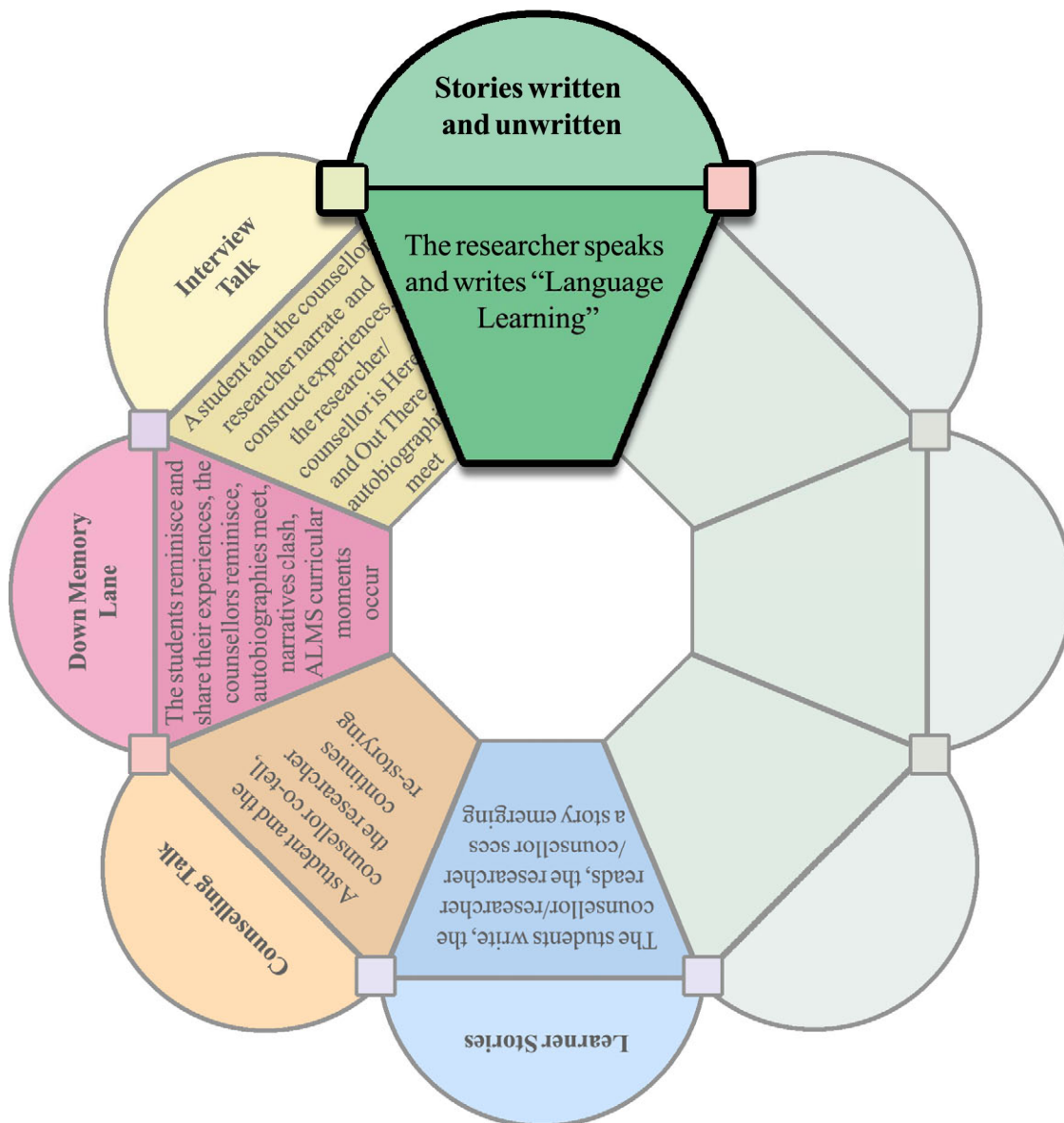


Figure 9: Kaleidoscope pattern five: Stories written and unwritten

We take whatever observations we have made of the external world and, making them part of ourselves, interpret them and tell a story about what we believe we know.

(Ruthellen Josselson 1995, 29)

I have started this part of my re-storying of the data with Ruthellen Josselson's reflections on the multiple relationships that are created in ethnographic research, and which apply to narrative research as well. She claims that, in a way, making research public when we write about the interviewee's life is always about breaking the trust we have built in the interview. She emphasises that in the final analysis the researcher has to admit that the interpretation and result of the research is only the researcher's doing. Quoting Judith Stacey, Josselson (1995, 29) writes: "It is the researcher who is the narrator, the writer of the ethnography. She puts together the document that is based on her purposes and goals and offers interpretations in her voice."

In this section I will present the eight students in stories that I have written on the basis of all the data that I have collected. Whose story is it that I am telling? Who owns the stories? Going back to Liz Stanley's (1992/1995) ideas of a biographer's work and its auto/biographical implications, and applying them to the work at hand, I have to state that these student stories, or biographies, have become part of my own autobiography. Moreover, in the student stories I will be describing an existing but living and thus continuously changing relationship with these particular students. I will be turning the kaleidoscope to show the students and myself, and also others, in configurations that do not stay fixed, not even in the rest of the kaleidoscope of ALMS stories.

I sent these stories to the students to read and comment on, and received replies from all of them. All eight approved them as being eligible for publication as "their stories". For me as a researcher, the fact that they gave the green light to my interpretation of them as learners is obviously encouraging. In particular in this section, I need to touch upon the possible effects of my writing on the students' ideas about themselves as learners of English and other languages, and to a certain extent as persons. This is especially why I want to emphasise the process nature of narrative knowing (Bruner 1985, 1990). Although my interpretations in the stories are written in such a way that the students' past is described in terms of the present, I hope that I have not predicted the future as the one and only possible path, and only described and interpreted with empathy and respect for the particular experiential contexts at which the students' own efforts at meaning-making pointed.

I find it important to reflect on my point of entry into the story, in other words the starting point of the analysis. It varied with different students, and with some of them I had several points. With the kaleidoscope in mind, I would like to call the decisive factor in choosing the point of entry a 'researcher lens' because it hangs between the pattern and myself, and it also colours the way I see myself in the pattern, and what my self-reflexive position is. The researcher lens has to do with my

desire to re-story what I have been told by the student, but to admit and acknowledge having had my purposes and goals in mind. I wanted to insert a pattern or plot into the story in which experience takes the main role and in which the three-dimensional narrative space is visible: the students' past learning experiences, their present context, that is, ALMS, and their projection of these into the future.

It is through the researcher lens that I have looked at the pattern forming, and it has been my hand turning the kaleidoscope. This means that a new interpretative context is formed of all these elements, plus still others that were echoes in our interview talk, shadows of stories, emergent or fading fragments in the kaleidoscope, maybe traces of the non-traditional data I mentioned earlier.

In this section in particular, I speak and write in my idiolect of "Language Learning" (cf. Eeva Jokinen 1996: kirjoittaa "Äitiä"). These stories, written in "Language Learning", should be seen against the background of what I know about teaching and learning English and other foreign languages in Finland, in other words how I have experienced the Finnish master narratives of foreign-language education, teaching and learning. These stories should be seen against the background of my work as a University Language Centre teacher for more than twenty years, and my encounters with students from most faculties of the university. One frequently told story, a "big" story or master narrative, that I remember from early on from both everyday discussions and research literature has to do with routines. This is also a story that has remained more or less unchanged in various tellings at different points in time during the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s and even in recent years. It came up in my data for my licentiate research in 1999-2002. Drawing on my research and interpretation of the learners' experiences in my licentiate, what has been called 'arkitraaginen' (Laine 2000), the routine tragedy, seems to be one feature of Finnish foreign-language classrooms.

My finding is backed up by various studies on the Finnish school system (Laine 2000, Tolonen 1999, Kosonen 1998) that show the prominence of routines and their role in life at schools in general. Routines are probably best seen as an indication of the power of cultural models, and for teachers as a way to try and extend the limits of their set role. Laine (2000) suggests that routines do give protection, but that they are a constraint as well, and that it is difficult to distance oneself from them. His tentative claim is that they protect us from intense moments, and probably also from meaningful learning experiences. Ulla Kosonen's (1998) comment on how "narrow" the teacher's moving space is in schools caught my attention early on in my research reading. I feel that

interpreting any learner-teacher encounter should happen by seeing both partners in the same story, and here I am suggesting that one way of doing this would be to attempt to write in this common language, “Language Learning”.

Auto/biographies in (E)FL

What models did I have as a writer when I produced these stories? What was the genre I had in mind? In fact, I want to look at the stories as experiments in a new genre (cf. Jaatinen for novel ones, Karlsson 2002 for drafts, also Kramsch 2005 and Pavlenko 1998 on bilingual writers), auto/biographies in (E)FL. It is a selective and interpretative form of writing and it reflects various reports on autobiographical writing in other fields, in particular in women’s studies, sociology, social psychology and cultural studies. The aim is to give a fresh perspective on experience, as narratives are said to do. Although the stories are based on all the data and documents I collected, the research interview with each student had a prominent role in how they started taking shape. These interviews gave me the most guidance in my emerging understanding and interpretation of the students. The interview was already embedded in a period of reading and analysing the written documents (the pre-course questionnaire, the reflection texts and other course documents), and in watching and editing the videoed learning encounters with the counsellor and peers (the group sessions and the first individual counselling session)³⁰. There has been a circular motion in my reading and interpretation process. These stories are based on each student’s unique telling of their stories, both on what they told and on how they told it. They are based on stories and episodes that caught my attention in the interview and/or when I was reading the transcripts and listening to the recordings.

My initial aim was to show why the particular stories or story fragments are included by always acknowledging the respective self-reflexive researcher position. The multi-layeredness and diversity of the researcher’s auto/biographical *I* was the reason why certain topics and themes activated the researcher side in me, others the teacher or the counsellor, yet others a language learner, or a colleague, or even a mother. In the end it will have to suffice to say that all of the *I*’s were active during the writing process of each story, and they coloured the process and the products presented below. More voices enter the picture as the researcher auto/biography is linked with the idea of dialogical listening (Bakhtin 1981) to three voices, and often more, in the students’ stories: 1) the

³⁰ I used all the data collected (see pp. 57-58) to form the kaleidoscopic pictures in these auto/biographies

voice of the narrator, 2) the theoretical framework that gives the concepts and tools for interpretation, and 3) a reflexive monitoring of the reading and interpretation (Lieblich 1998).

My reading of the stories proceeded in a holistic-content perspective, as described by Lieblich et al. (1998):

1. I read and listened to the material several times to be able to see a pattern emerging. This pattern could be said to contain the foci of the entire story.
2. I wrote down my initial and global impressions. Here I paid attention to what was, on the one hand, loud and on the other hand a mere whisper; to harmony and disruptive descriptions. These initial impressions are recorded partly in my research diary and partly in *The Book of Stories*. I decided on the special foci (between two and five) of content that I wanted to base my writing on. In doing this I was guided by an auto/biographical and symbiotic reading of the data; interpreting repetitions, omissions, silences and laughter from a dialogical perspective. It was also an effort at inserting signposts into the students' stories, which arose from noticing dialogic moments (Josselsson 1995) in their process of interpretation and meaning-making. I took these to be personal keys to their meaning-making. The topics or foci represent the unique features of each student, but they also represent my unique reading of their particular stories emerging from a symbiotic involvement with the data.
3. I wrote a coherent story aiming at a dialogic voice, one that the student would recognise as a familiar voice, if not their own, and one that would make it possible for the reader to trace my conclusions to the students' experiences.
4. I sent the stories (written in English) to the students to read and comment on, together with the total research interview transcript (in Finnish³¹). I asked them to comment, change and bring out any queries they had. I also asked them if the transcript contained any sections they did not want me to use in the report. Instead of sending the same letter to them all, I ended up writing a more personal letter to each student.

In the following kaleidoscopic pictures of the students I depict the eight student stories in a collage built around the stories I sent to them to read. Each re-storying starts with a few self-reflexive comments on the workings of my researcher's autobiographical *I*. These comments should be read as an indication of a process on the move. I have added section headings in the students' own words

³¹ Three students commented on the "strangeness" or "weirdness" of the transcribed Finnish interview text. They were surely yet another type of narrative, a story buried under layers of interpretation in the thesis.

related to the unique content of each student's story and the dialogic moments and foci in them. These headings were not in the stories when I sent them to the students for approval. They come from various bits of data, mainly from their interviews and reflection texts. Each section in the stories represents one focus of content. Lastly, I have placed the students' comments³² on my text at the end of each story. These should be read as reader comments on a text that was written by somebody experimenting in "Language Learning".

AINO

The self-reflexive position, which in Aino's case most coloured my interpretation and which provided the starting point of my reading, is that of a co-researcher. I felt a researcher's joy when I came across her comment on how she enjoyed being part of the research. This first positioning does not give order to the text and it kept moving during the writing so that when Aino talked about her school experiences and writing learning diaries the teacher-counsellor position was activated in me.

"I guess I'm a perfectionist"

For Aino, English has been relatively easy and she was always good at it at school. Having done the CEFR self-assessment as part of ALMS she realised that her current skills were better than she expected. Apart from English, she has studied Swedish, French, Spanish, German and a bit of Russian at school and at the university. Aino says that she is a perfectionist and many of her memories from school centre around wanting to do well and being shy. She would have felt awful if she had made a major mistake during the lessons: very often it was just once that you got to say something and failing in this would have been a disaster. She says it horrified her when she found a test paper from her school times and realised that the teacher had not corrected all her mistakes.

She remembers language lessons as always proceeding according to the same pattern. Taking turns in reading sentences or bits of text, giving answers to gap-filling exercises in turns, and writing translation sentences on the blackboard were part of most lessons. She says that waiting for your turn was nerve-wracking and you spent a lot of mental energy on counting which sentence or gap would be your lot! Aino feared exercises and translations more than reading out loud because her pronunciation was good and so she was calmer when this was going on. Oral skills and spontaneous

³² I have included only the parts of their replies that were not too personal or revealing in terms of the students' identities.

communication were not part of school work, although she sees them as the most important language skills. You need foreign languages to be able to communicate. Aino is supportive of the idea of including an oral element in the school-leaving examination because this might increase practising speaking at school.

In ALMS Aino has appreciated the fact that students are trusted to take responsibility for their own learning. She is slightly critical of university-level language courses for not always giving up the idea of teacher control over, say, homework. Many routines from school are part of teaching on higher levels as well, for example, doing things in turns. Keeping an eye on students may be necessary with young children but Aino definitely feels that she could have taken responsibility for her learning a bit earlier. Planning and setting goals are still done by the teacher. On the whole, this leads to a theoretical approach to foreign-language learning and the result is a lack of skills in communication, although Finns learn to master the grammar and the structure of many languages. In her future work as a speech therapist she will probably not need to use English on a daily basis

“Nothing new these learning diaries!”

A new routine much in use in many university departments, including Aino’s, is the production of learning diaries. In ALMS, the duty of self-assessment means keeping a diary of one’s learning or filling in a log, which is the minimum in this respect. Aino has written a log that is a bit more extensive than the one provided by the programme, but has not done a full diary. She sees a contradiction in the routine way of asking students to do a diary of an x number of pages on subject y. The need to write and reflect varies from course to course and subject to subject, from topic to topic. If you just have to produce reflections on issues that are more or less mechanical in nature it is counterproductive to the whole idea of learning. Aino has had problems with what to write and how to write about some activities in ALMS. An example of this was the idea of thinking of a language focus for certain activities that she does as part of her normal life. For example, she sings in a choir and has met people there with whom she has used English. Most of the time she has not had a particular focus while actually engaged in the activity. Nevertheless, she has found ways of both reflecting and reporting because in ALMS the log has been presented as a personal document. Still, she wanted to have feedback from the counsellor on her log and on her writing.

“I think it was one of the maybe best things to be part of the research”

Aino felt that it was kind of hard to answer the pre-course questions and write the reflection paper about herself as a language learner, her memories and her approach. Still, she felt that it helped her to start thinking about issues related to how one learns. On the whole, she felt that these were questions that she had never thought about. She ended up writing two very reflective papers, though, and also joined in the research and came to both the group and individual interviews. She was currently collecting data for her Master's thesis and had done some interviewing fairly recently. Thus she had insight into the research process and seemed to enjoy herself in the interview situation. She said that being part of the research process was rewarding because she got to critically think about her learning.

She had difficulty thinking of herself as an expert on her own learning, and found this a funny way of describing the fact that she has learnt many languages and for quite a number of years. However, she did feel that she had a clear idea of her own strengths and weaknesses. At the beginning of the ALMS module she felt that she had no idea of how the teaching would be organised if the students were given a more active role. She had a few problems adapting to the system. Aino's positive approach to life and learning would certainly make it rewarding for her to study in many different types of environment.

Aino wrote: *"I think that you have managed to put together really well the essential points from such a huge set of data. Sounds like me! [...] no one thing seems to stand out but that's probably how it is, there's no drama in me (=."*

ANNE

Anne's matter-of-fact approach to learning, which was immediately evident, activated my counsellor self: She made me think of how straightforward and uncomplicated counselling can be at times.

"I never took it personally "

Anne remembers school as a place where one had to live with routines and learn to rejoice when they were broken, such as when a teacher did something surprising, out-of-the-ordinary. When she started learning English at primary school, she enjoyed the nice atmosphere. This changed in secondary school. Anne is slightly critical of the methods used, particularly in secondary-school language teaching: they were not geared towards the students' more mature way of learning and

their age. She went to a fairly small upper- secondary school and, on the whole, has positive memories from those times. Still, ALMS came as a positive surprise: it has been great not to go back to the old routines that became so familiar at school.

Anne is a person who learns from her mistakes. She thinks that it is good to know one's mistakes and she appreciates being corrected. She has developed a way of dealing with negative feedback: she critically reflects on her performance and tries to learn from being corrected. She then puts the episode behind her and does not dwell on it. She needs a purpose and a goal for her studies. To a certain extent, she feels that tests provide the purpose for learning at school because at that age students seldom have any personal goals. She did not like studying Swedish at school, but when she lived and studied in Sweden she soon learnt to like the language and learnt and used it very successfully.

“I have hugely developed the language knowledge of my own narrow field”

In ALMS, Anne is focussing on developing her academic discussion and writing skills. She has been in Spitsbergen as an exchange student. She wants to be able to use English fluently when giving presentations and writing academic articles as she aims at a career as a researcher. Reading articles in her own field has taught her a lot of academic language typical of the field of geology. ALMS, on the whole, has been a good system for her. She likes the freedom and she likes to choose the focus herself. For her, a good teacher is interested in his or her subject and can apply the theory by giving practical examples. The teacher should also demand an active approach from the students. In ALMS she has really enjoyed an academic writing group in which the students have processed their texts together and edited both their own and each other's texts. Anne gave a presentation at a conference as part of her ALMS programme. She is working on her Master's thesis and knew the subject well. She used language and vocabulary from her sources to put together a coherent presentation in English. She received very encouraging feedback on both the content and the form, and was very pleased. She says that her skills in English are fairly good, and that within her own special field she has an extensive vocabulary. She sees her career taking shape outside of Finland, and English will probably be her working language.

Anne wrote: *“The summary and other documents are otherwise fine but in the summary you mention that I am going to Greenland but in fact I was in Spitsbergen on exchange. So I would appreciate that change”.*

JOHANNA

With Johanna my position fluctuated but the initial positioning as a learner or a pupil never quite vanished, especially as there was such a strong resonance between her experiences and mine.

“But we were all left with bad memories”

Johanna describes herself as one of the oldies in her department. She studies mathematics. She has worked in Turkey on a couple of occasions and will go back again. She studied English, Swedish and German at school and has fairly negative memories of most of her language teachers from upper-secondary school. In contrast, she remembers her teachers from primary and secondary school as having been really nice. One memory has left her scarred for life: in upper-secondary school she had a German teacher who seemed like a tyrant. Johanna remembers her as a teacher who demanded a lot from her students and had difficulty accepting mistakes or less than perfect answers in class. She had strict routines during the lessons and any attempt to digress was unacceptable. Johanna remembers the checking of homework as a particularly oppressive situation: students had to take turns in answering, and if they made a mistake the teacher cross-examined them until they either burst out crying or happened to hit on the correct answer. Johanna still remembers the teacher wagging her finger at the students and is convinced that everybody in the group will have bad memories of her.

She describes various other teachers from her school times. One was quite nice but her temperament was so different from Johanna's that it became a problem. She says that many other students really liked this English teacher and felt she was innovative but Johanna would have needed more peace and quiet to learn. Her Swedish teacher loved performing to his classes. He introduced totally new classroom routines, including a focus on story-telling, in his teaching. The results in the matriculation examination were surprising to Johanna: she did really well in Swedish and got full points for the composition, and her worries about not having learnt any grammar were not justified. She did fairly well in German as well, even though she had suffered all through upper-secondary school and only practised for the exam through the teacher's own exercises, no listening, no reading, no exercises of the type that were expected to come up. English, which she felt was taught with the exam in mind, was a slight disappointment to her. In particular, it was the listening part in which she did not do well. Moreover, the structures and vocabulary part was much more demanding in the exam than she was used to in the lessons.

Johanna chose ALMS by chance. She had decided that if the course turned out to be like the one in Swedish a year earlier she would just not go to the second meeting. She had reacted strongly to the Swedish course because it reminded her of school and her German classes. Johanna felt that she could not cope with another course in which the teacher behaved like a prosecutor. She feels that ALMS is a good chance of learning for those, like herself, who have had bad experiences in language learning. She also feels that learners who are shy would benefit from ALMS: there is help and support available and groups on offer, but the choice is always one's own.

"I am a very social person"

Johanna is a very social person and she is interested in getting to know people, and that is also her motivation for learning languages. She has studied Turkish both on a course and in practice just to be better able to be a member of the community. When she entered the classroom on the first day of ALMS she was struck by people's silence and withdrawal: only one other student said good morning to her. She found a soul mate, though, and worked closely with her at her table. Johanna uses English all the time both when in Finland and in Turkey. She has many foreign friends and keeps in contact with them almost daily – and she makes her Finnish friends use English with her, too! Her skills in Turkish are getting rusty and she is really sorry for that. She uses English now in Turkey because it is easier and faster. The one negative thing in all this has been that her English is becoming more and more like the English her Turkish friends and colleagues use: simple grammar, simple words, incorrect spelling. She chose to take part in one ALMS support group, cross-cultural skills, and her talkativeness has helped her: she has made friends with a Russian student and they are planning to keep in contact even after the group work finishes.

"It almost makes me laugh at times when I think how I struggle"

Johanna finds listening a big problem in English. She describes different situations when it has been a problem: listening at school with a focus on comprehension questions, listening to American English in Miami on a holiday, listening to the radio, watching BBC news on television, watching films without subtitles. She has often tried turning the volume up and that has helped. She feels that she is improving and has developed various techniques, such as turning the television on and not watching first, just having the voice as a background noise and slowly moving in. She thinks some accents give her more problems than others, and that the school experience of putting on headphones easily comes back to her when she has to prove she has understood what she has been

listening to. She has heard a lot of English produced by various speakers and sometimes wonders why she does not understand more. But at times she has clearly noticed that repetition helps so she thinks that practice will help her. And again a more focussed approach!

“After all, the exercises were not the most important thing in the world, a question of life and death”

Johanna describes her development as a learner of languages as a gradual relaxation: she used to like rules and grammar but of late she feels that she has stopped demanding too much of herself. She found Joan’s exhortation in the first session very good when she said that having fun and giving oneself some fun while learning was not forbidden. Johanna had used English for many things and in various situations before ALMS and now feels that the change in her during ALMS has been towards a more focussed way of approaching some language-use situations as language-learning situations. She compares her new approach with reading a book of poetry not just like that, without thinking, but with a focus on what things and words mean in the poem. She feels that it is important to give vent to negative feelings and to look forward with an idea of finding something nice in language learning. In the past she has relaxed when there has been nobody breathing down her neck. Now she seems to have found ways of relaxing in situations in which she is also consciously working towards improving her skills in a systematic way.

Johanna wrote: *“Of course I remember ALMS – how could I forget! I have, in fact, waited for you to get in contact. There is nothing in my story that could not be published. So go ahead! It was really funny to read the colloquial Finnish [in the interview transcript] and what I blurted out!”*

JUUSO

There were rapid fluctuations in my positions with Juuso from researcher to teacher and back.

“Well, I might act like lawyer on this course, I’m a bit different that way...”

Juuso would soon be finishing his studies at the Faculty of Law and ALMS was one of his very last courses at the university. He was going to spend six months as an exchange student in Sweden after ALMS and then graduate. He describes the Faculty of Law as a studying culture based on self-study and mass lectures. He has spent quite a bit of his time at the university cramming in the library.

Whenever he has a seminar or some other small group, he always enjoys the welcome change. Both the Swedish and English courses have given him the opportunity to take part in discussions and group work. During his school years he became used to learning foreign languages by focussing on whatever task he was given and by trying to do it according to the instructions. He had never before experienced a language-learning situation in which the focus was on reflection or analysing one's learning, or on having fun while learning! He also thinks that maybe his background in law makes him take texts as something you have to read and make conclusions about, for example, not to enjoy or let yourself become emotionally involved in.

"It totally depends on the teacher: our Swedish teacher made us have discussions"

At school there was no or very little emphasis on spoken skills. There were occasionally teachers who put more emphasis on conversation. Although at the time being pushed to say something in a foreign language felt like agony, Juuso now thinks it was good. He is slightly critical of the fact that schools concentrate on getting good results in the matriculation examination and neglect the communicative aspects of foreign-language learning. He thinks that it may well be different learners who would do well in an oral- skills test if such a test was introduced. Those who are good at grammar might do less well, and an active group of students who are always willing to speak would have a chance of showing their skills. He was quiet at upper-secondary school and seldom opened his mouth: he remained in the background and did his homework. It has been only recently with more opportunities to use English in everyday situations that he has become more courageous, and has also learnt to get something said in bigger groups. Before he felt it was only possible to talk to one person at a time.

"We have had a lot of freedom and choice"

He has built his ALMS programme around speaking exercises that are fairly informal and free, and feels that he has gained confidence when he has been more relaxed about his speaking and not too concerned about making mistakes. Earlier he was very quiet in situations in which English was used but he is getting more confident now and has had positive feedback on his English from some foreign friends. He still feels that his strong areas are grammar, writing and reading. He also thinks that he has a fairly good command of the specific vocabulary of the areas of law in which he specialises in. He has realised that you can and should monitor your learning. He has started evaluating his own learning and thinks that he is the most critical of evaluators.

Juuso wrote: *“I read through the texts you sent and I definitely approve of all your conclusions. The interview text was quite something to read =>. I have nothing more detailed to add but I can say that I now [having spent three months in a Swedish university] have no problems whatsoever to participate in a conversation in English no matter how big a group it is! I haven’t learnt as much Swedish as I would have wanted to but my skills have improved”*.

KATJA

Katja’s first pregnancy and her job as a maths teacher at a secondary school made my position fluctuate from that of a mother of three to a young teacher and back to a researcher worrying about the effects of the camera.

“When I had done my homework, there were no surprises, ever”

Apart from the very first years of English at primary school, Katja has positive memories of language classes. She remembers that her secondary and upper-secondary school teachers had a personal approach. They were not afraid to give of themselves or to involve their personalities in the teaching process. For Katja, it was important to notice that her teachers were really interested in and committed to their teaching and their students. Yet she felt that the matriculation examination was directing the teaching too strongly. This, in practice, meant that oral skills were not given a chance and that the routine was the same from lesson to lesson, language to language. Katja was a conscientious student and always did her homework. This meant that she felt safe during the lessons: it was easy to keep to the rhythm of teaching when you knew exactly what was going to happen. It was easy to pick up the grammar and Katja feels that she has a solid background in the grammar in all the languages that she studied, i.e., English, Swedish and German. Because she was shy she tried to make sure that she did not stand out in any way among the other pupils. She hesitantly admits to sometimes thinking that she might have been some teachers’ favourite. She was never critical of her teachers at school, and she never really thought of them as human beings, only as teachers.

“It was like entering a whole new world”

Katja is pregnant and will have her first baby in January. She is doing both her obligatory Swedish and English courses at the same time. She starts her maternity leave while still on the course. She

has been working as a maths teacher at her own former secondary school for a few years. This means that she has learnt to combine work and study effectively. It also means that she is now a colleague of some of her own former teachers. This has not been a problem for her, and in fact she appreciates having had the opportunity to get to know them as persons. She loves teaching and has enjoyed both her teacher training and the work at her school. She was not sure at the beginning of her studies that she would become a teacher, and she never dreamt that she would be teaching at her former school.

Both university language courses surprised her positively. For one thing, they did not mean going back to the old routines that were familiar from school. For example, the one corner-stone in language teaching at school, a textbook, is not used on these courses. The other conspicuous difference in ALMS has been the absence of a final test, which was hard for Katja to believe. It has been nice to learn to use the two languages in authentic situations, which she sees as the biggest gain from the courses. From the very beginning, ALMS in particular has required thinking and reflecting and expressing her own ideas and opinions. Although she definitely sees this approach to learning as absolutely justified, she doubts if she could have managed it in upper-secondary school. At least it would have required a lot from the teacher, attitudinally and in the teaching approach.

Katja feels that what started in the first ALMS group session and what she wrote in her contract has really materialised and has become reality for her. She feels that being in charge of the learning process is the reason why she has benefitted. She appreciates the raised awareness of what happens with and in the foreign language and how one can direct and monitor the process. For her the focus has been on oral skills. She and her husband have had lunches and dinners with a couple they know. All their conversations have been in English. Katja's role in the conversation has changed over the past few months. She used to be quiet and avoided anything beyond basic small talk. Now she has become a much more confident speaker and she does not automatically choose to explain all her complex feelings afterwards in Finnish. She has learnt to take her time and to trust her skills in developing her argument. She praises her companions as good listeners and givers of feedback.

“I was surprisingly calm”

Katja commented on “Leena and her camera” having been present in a few situations, but said that apart from the initial awareness the camera did not really bother her. She said she regretted sitting with her back to Joan in the first session, which meant that she was in an awkward position. She

appears very calm on the video and seems to find it easy to take part in the group and pair activities, and she also remains calm when saying something to the big group. She said it was a bit of a shock to realise that she really had to start using English and to speak spontaneously about her own thoughts in the session, which is not what she was used to. She found it surprisingly easy, however, and thoroughly enjoyed her pair work with Mia. She also enjoyed the group memory session and sharing her memories from school with the others. She remembered some episodes from the group session that had involved others, not herself, but that were laden with emotional content. Katja has probably learnt to pay attention to other students in group situations, which she said she never did when at school. Her teaching experience has also given her confidence as a learner.

Katja wrote: *"The texts about me are fine. You can use them as they are. I am sorry for not replying straight away and I hope that this does not cause problems for your research. It was nice to read the texts and remember ALMS! It was one of the most memorable courses at the university (different!)"*

MARIA

Again, many self-reflexive positions when two mothers, two narrative researchers and a student and a counsellor met.

"I guess I always happen to sit in front"

Maria studied Swedish, English, French and Russian at school, and a bit of German at university. She remembers how easy it was to learn vocabulary at school, for example, but now she finds it much harder and feels she has to put more time into it. She did her Swedish course at the university last year and now chose to do her oral skills in English in ALMS because she needed the flexibility. She is taking care of her younger daughter at home and her eldest has just started first grade. Language lessons at school in Maria's memories were fairly neutral situations, lots of routines, nice teachers, nothing in particular. The only thing that she takes up is an image of herself as a somebody who was always called to answer if nobody else volunteered, which put a bit of pressure on her. This was still the case during the university Swedish course, "Maybe I place myself in the classroom in a way that makes me somehow visible to the teacher", she says. Her mother is a Swedish speaker so she had some Swedish from home, rudimentary bilingualism if not fluency. She also feels that her mother appreciated her being good at languages.

“If I have time to get into a state”

In the ALMS first sessions Maria enjoyed listening to English and also found it easy enough to comment on the activities and to take part in the group discussion. She remembers sharing information about her daughters with some other young mothers as a way of socialising. At the moment, Maria divides her time between childminding and finishing her studies at the university. She has already collected and transcribed interview data for her Master’s thesis in ethnography, and is considering a narrative approach in the analysis.

She has developed ways of working with her English at home when the baby is asleep, and she has time to herself. She has kept a diary and recorded her techniques and also her feelings. She feels that she has definitely moved towards a more holistic way of learning and studying. She also talks about having more mercy on herself as a learner. On the whole, it has become very clear to Maria that English is all around her and that there are plenty of resources available although she is very much based at home. She has worked with television programmes and found ways of using the net effectively. Being active is important!

The one situation in which Maria feels anxious and for which she always prepares very carefully is when she has to give a presentation. This has very little, if anything, to do with the foreign language: it is simply a fear of speaking in public. She would like to perform and speak freely without papers, or to base her talk on key points, but ends up writing detailed scripts because that gives her security and she manages better. She has also experienced this in a classroom situation if there is time to prepare and she has to wait for her turn. She prefers spontaneous situations in which things just happen and she does not have time to panic. She joined a couple of support groups in ALMS and had to give a mini presentation, and this was when she again felt the old itchy feeling. She says that she is a shy person and would never want to have a job that required a lot of presenting and performing.

“Like empathy and fun”

Maria’s second daughter has just started school and has also started studying English. She seems to enjoy the learning, which is mainly through games and playing. In the ALMS group session she experienced certain episodes through the eyes of a mother. When one text referred to a child at school she found herself relating bits of the story to her own daughter and to her just having started

school. She also remembers thinking about another mother in the first session and relating her way of approaching certain tasks and activities to her motherhood. Maria recognises the prevalent approach in Finland to learning as being sombre, and admits thinking that learning could not be fun. She has changed her mind now and consciously looks for opportunities to work with materials that give her pleasure and that she can adapt for learning, such as vocabulary from novels and literature or television series. She finds it very motivating to integrate learning English with topics and issues that interest her, and she also feels that this more holistic approach makes it easier to differentiate what is important and what is not.

Maria wrote: *“I should have sent my reply but it got buried under all sorts of things. Sorry! I am giving you the green light! It was fun reading the text. You must have worked hard to get it together. I didn’t remember everything we had talked about any more but did not find any mistakes”*.

MIA

Mia’s own clearly fluctuating self-reflexive position from teacher to student was reflected in mine: we met as two teachers, two mothers, but also as a counsellor and a student.

“Setting goals is an absolute must”

Mia’s idea of ALMS was to have a resuscitation course and get her skills in English back to the level she had reached at the end of upper-secondary school. She would graduate in a couple of months and this was the very last chance to do her oral-skills course. She is busy working on her Master’s thesis and taking care of her youngest child at home at the same time. She hopes to get a permanent teaching job from next autumn onwards as a primary- school teacher. Because she studies at the teacher department she is immersed in the idea of learner autonomy and self-direction, and also with the practical applications used in ALMS, i.e., planning, goal-setting, monitoring and self-evaluation. However, she surprised herself by getting what she calls “a sudden ALMS insight” in the middle of the programme. She realised how holistic the process was: she has been mainly focussing on her thesis and yet she has been reflecting on her English and taking every opportunity to use it both in her everyday life and in her studies. Instead of working on separate course exercises and home- work she has become conscious of English around her and her various possibilities of using it, and she is also willingly taking action in these situations. Mia built the programme around her particular life situation and included activities that she could combine with her thesis writing

and responsibilities at home. She feels that her English is less rusty now so she is moving towards her goal for the course.

“Always a bit weaker than the others”

She was unlucky at the start with English in primary school because she had to change schools after two years of German as her first foreign language, and the change-over was done without much consideration of how she coped or felt about it. Her mother taught her at home but she was given no remedial teaching by the school. She has always felt that she is a bit weaker in English than others, although she has always liked the language and, in fact, has been quite good at it. When she spent a year in South-East Asia after finishing school she realized how good her skills were, in particular in terms of accuracy and grammatical correctness. She mentions her stay as a significant learning experience although she did not necessarily improve her English hugely. In fact, she learnt to use simplified English in many everyday situations such as when going shopping. She had hoped for more in terms of improving her skills. Nowadays she reads academic texts in English with relative ease, but speaking is a bit more of a problem.

She never started studying German again although she has very good memories from those early lessons. Instead, she studied French for a few years. During her teacher studies she has thought back to those times and pondered on how important it is for the teacher to recognise the roots of a child’s learning problems. She was left alone to cope with a totally new language. Moreover, she had to cope with being a shy little girl in a new environment with bullying fellow pupils. She also very clearly remembers the injustice done to others in language classes: she felt really bad when some classmates were forced to “practise” pronouncing some difficult words in front of everyone.

Mia remembers foreign-language classes from school as having had a pattern that seldom changed. In the last few years she has occasionally acted as a substitute teacher of Swedish in a secondary school. She has received instructions to use the model she remembers from her school days: old homework, checking exercises, new homework, listening to the recorded unit of the book, taking up some new vocabulary, reading sentence by sentence after the tape, working on a few new exercises, for example. She knows, however, that pair and group work are much more focussed on in today’s language teaching because she has been closely observing her children and how they are being taught English at primary school. School, on the whole, is changing and self-direction is the buzz word there as well. Yet some routines, such as taking turns and being corrected while speaking,

remain and this makes it so easy to re-live old experiences from school. This happened to her when she was doing her Swedish course at the university.

“If no one else will then I do try”

Mia’s studies in applied teacher education mean that she takes part in group discussions in all subjects on a daily basis. Students at her department are used to learning together, and discussing and negotiating plans and outcomes. They are used to taking responsibility in group situations for introducing topics and keeping the conversation going. In ALMS Mia ended up taking responsibility for initiating the discussion in the first group session. She has forced herself to be active when there is nobody else to do it. She took this responsible role in the first session although she felt that she was actually doing much more than her level would have permitted. She also took this responsible role on her Swedish course at the university and forced herself to speak when needed. She says that “you humiliate yourself more willingly” when you get older. The other thing is that you learn to be humble and to admit that you are not perfect and have problems with the foreign language. She really appreciated Joan’s repeated mentioning of mistakes not being the focus of the ALMS programme because that made it easier for her to relax and focus on what she wanted to say, the message and content, not on grammatical correctness.

“When she gives a bit of herself then it feels much nicer”

Mia sees the teacher as a very important motivational influence in language teaching, particularly in formal learning environments in which the motivation does not come from any real-life feedback or authentic rewards related to the need to use a foreign language for communicating. She thinks that liking the teacher may be more important than one’s own aptitude or skills as a factor in learning success. The teachers she finds motivating are enthusiastic about their own subject, not necessarily overly extrovert but clearly dedicated and motivated by their interest in the language and teaching. She considers it absolutely crucial for the teacher to have the same attitude towards everybody and could not like a teacher who was not fair and who favoured some and treated others badly. Mia likes the teacher to talk about his or her own experiences and thoughts, to come down from the platform. It is easier to learn when you can respect and admire the teacher for a job well done.

Mia wrote: *“It was downright fun reading your text! There was one mistake in it: I only spent four months in South-East Asia. I don’t know what I said myself. I agree with what you have written about school times and everything else”.*

PÄIVI

A very interesting patchwork of positions again, from researcher to pupil and back. The researcher position coloured the beginning of the writing, though.

“I am a bit different”

Päivi is a mature student who is studying for a second Master’s degree in the Faculty of Maths and Sciences. She went to school in the 1960s before the comprehensive school system was introduced in Finland. She matriculated with a laudatur in English, which was a bit of a surprise to her: not because of the laudatur but because she got full points in the examination. She has always found learning languages very easy. She likes to work hard and she enjoys language work. She had two reasons for coming to an ALMS course instead of a normal teacher-fronted course: firstly, she needed the flexibility in timetabling, and secondly, she concluded from the course description that she would not have to take part in a lot of group situations. This is what Päivi means when she describes herself as “different”. Being more mature is definitely one difference between her and the students normally taking courses with her, but the really meaningful difference is her personality: she says that she is silent and shy and that she never socialises much in Finnish either. She has always hated being in a group, particularly if she has not chosen to be a member of it. She calls this the story of her life: she has always experienced that she is different and she has seldom found any group that she feels a part of the way other people seem to do.

Päivi has studied Swedish, English, German, a bit of Russian, French, Spanish and Chinese. She shows determination in her language studies: she has studied Spanish and Chinese only during the past few years and obviously managed to learn the basics in both languages. She took up French when she first started her university studies at the University of Technology for her first degree, and studied extensively with good results. She feels comfortable in traditional language classes: for her it is bliss if the class work consists of routine answering one by one, in a row, or studying in a language laboratory. She praises her French course in the 1970s. Half of the time was spent in the language lab working individually on pronunciation practice and repeating after the tape, and the

other half in the classroom focussing on grammar. The teacher was a native speaker of French and used to organise the teaching around questions and answers with the students taking turns in answering. Päivi positively enjoyed this French course. She liked the equipment and did not suffer in the group because one was expected to “give the correct answer, not to invent something”. For her, this type of learning environment is safe. She can concentrate on the grammar and the pronunciation instead of panicking about what she should say.

When she studied Spanish some time ago she was again very motivated to learn because she was travelling to Cuba with her daughter for a holiday. She was also curious to see if she could still learn a new language at her age. She found it easy again to do the exercises, to give correct answers, and to read out loud in the class. But on this course, there was some pair and group work and that was always a great mental effort for her. She made it, though, and felt very proud of herself afterwards. When she was invited by the teacher to come and continue in a special group, she went to the first session but then had to give up because the group was using drama as a method. Päivi backed out. She says that she just cannot force herself to give of herself as she is expected in a group situation. The first ALMS session was one of these painful situations for her. She said that she thought a couple of times that she would simply have to say something otherwise she would be caught out. She remembered the camera catching her silence and non-participation and squeezed a few sentences out of her mouth, something about her children, which was an appropriate thing to talk about with the other mothers around the table. This unease has nothing to do with the foreign language, not English as such, or her skills, or the teacher. It is just being in a group and having to “invent” something to say, to express her thoughts, or opinions that is beyond her.

“I wanted to protest”

The one memory from school that Päivi has is from the sixth form. She had always been quiet and shy in a big group but now her way of being became her way to protest and rebel. She felt that there was something seriously wrong with the teaching. She never put up her hand but she always did her homework and passed all her tests with flying colours. She started whispering the answers to the teacher’s questions to her friend, particularly in the English lessons. He then put up his hand, he was always putting up his hand now, really eagerly. Päivi remembers how the teacher once became nervous and said that she was really upset and confused and did not know who really knew the answers, and that she did not like it. But she could not do anything and things went on in the same way. When Päivi was about to finish school her teacher came to her and asked her to come and do a

test so she could give her the best mark. Päivi never went. The only school subject that interested her was maths, and in maths only the problems that were the most difficult, which no one else could solve. She protested about a system in which the teacher asked all the questions that he or she supposedly knew the answer to anyway, and most students did too, but the ones who had no idea were asked. She thought the students should have been allowed to ask the questions, the questions they really wanted to know the answer to. Päivi's protest was very visible and audible but she is convinced that the teachers could not imagine why she made it.

Outside classes Päivi enjoyed learning English, however. She read literature and listened to the language on television, and felt that she imbibed it without studying the grammar book or resorting to any other formal method. She relates this to what is called an ear for languages. She never associated this way of learning with her school work: she thought of it as being interested in these matters, just having an enthusiasm for them. She remembers that in the English classes most of the time was spent on checking students' homework. This was also the crucial point in her criticism: the ones who had done the homework were bored and the ones who had not were asked but could not give the required answers, for just that simple reason. Päivi wanted to learn something new in the classes, to get ahead. Now there was simply no time left for this.

“My own children go to a Steiner school”

Päivi's five children go to a special Steiner school. She is a stay-at-home mother who combines her time with her studies at the university with taking the children to school and their various hobbies. The family lives outside town and there is no public transport between home and school. She wanted her own children to go to a different school, a school that would educate them for life and not for exams, which was what steered the teaching at her own school. The Steiner pedagogical assessment and evaluation philosophy is what Päivi really values at her children's school. The idea is not to compare the child with other children. Rather the evaluation focuses on the gap between the child's perceived skills and aptitudes and the quality of the work he or she has done. The focus is more on the child's own exploration of his or her potential. She is slightly worried about her children's language learning. Because the foreign-language teachers are less likely to know the children's skills and achievement level as thoroughly as the classroom teachers, they may not demand enough. Still, they started studying their first foreign language in grade one and Päivi thinks this is very good, especially because it is based on the immersion idea. Songs and poetry are

used in the teaching, no writing is done at the beginning, and language is learnt as a world of sounds.

Päivi has travelled with her children to Canada and Cuba to take part in cultural events. These have been situations in which she has used English in a relaxed way. She has also used English on a course in calligraphy, which she has taken part in during the ALMS programme. It has been very interesting with five middle-aged ladies and a Chinese teacher. She says that it has taken her some time to warm up but it helps when the reason for the group to be together is fascinating. She says she needs to have the need to say something first, then she can say it in a foreign language. Calligraphy has offered such situations. They have also talked about children, which has helped Päivi to improve her spontaneous speaking skills.

“I had no idea of my level”

Päivi is critical of the value of self-assessment. She says it is somehow inscribed in her that a test is what tells her about her skills in using a language. Her mathematical and analytic self needs criteria and a point of comparison to consider an evaluation accurate. She was happy to find out about Dialang in the first group session. She immediately worked her way through all of it and reached levels C1 and C2 in reading, vocabulary and structures. In oral skills, in which there is no test, she gives herself a hesitant A2 on the CEFR. By way of justification she says that she would probably do much better in a presentation situation with a possibility to prepare, but in situations requiring spontaneous reaction in English her level is considerably lower. Nevertheless, she compares self-assessment with looking at herself in a mirror and having to decide if she is pretty: the only way to do it is to have somebody to compare oneself with.

Fulfilling the self-evaluation requirement in ALMS has been a slight problem and Päivi describes her log writing as putting in one sentence to describe her main feelings. She sees this as an exercise in just giving one's gut feeling, which has little accuracy. She has not taken to writing the log at any length. She says that composition writing was always a struggle for her. Again, the demand to be creative is too much for her.

Päivi wrote: *“Thank you, Leena. You have managed to interpret my story excellently. And reading the actual interview text was very interesting, somehow seeing oneself from the outside... Just a few comments [adding one foreign language, and a detail about when she studied some of the languages].”*

I take the words by Michelle Fine very seriously. She (1994, 72) suggests that researchers should try ways of ‘working the hyphen’ in the self-other connection:

Working the hyphen means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is, and is not, ‘happening between’, within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom, and with what consequences.

The shadowed or unwritten ALMS stories

The group starting the ALMS course in autumn 2004 comprised 15 students from the faculties of maths and sciences (8), behavioural sciences (4), humanities (1), law (1) and biosciences (1). Four students said no to my initial request to take part in the interviews. One student became seriously ill after the first group session and had to drop out, and another student was basically interested but for timetable reasons we could not find a time for an interview. The majority of Finnish students work to support their studies, and the reasons for not taking part had to do with being busy. One student mentioned in passing that she was used to language teachers and dissertation work (“We were videoed all the time!”) and did not want to take part. All of them, however, agreed to the videoing of the group sessions and of their individual counselling sessions when they accepted the place on the course. We were expecting 20 students and the reasons why the group was not full remain open. At the time, the students had to sign up electronically and we sent the pre-course questionnaire to the 20 who were accepted on the basis of the number of study weeks/credits already gained. It is perfectly possible that some decided not to come because of the videoing. Some, clearly, had signed up in other groups as well and had a place there. One did not get the letter of acceptance and did not come to the first meeting. One student who did the course but did not take part in the interviews said to Joan that he was affected by the camera and had difficulty relaxing in the group session and the counselling. Katja mentioned “Leena and the camera”, too.

In my research diary I have entries all along the research process in which I ponder on the question of having used the camera, and also on having used another counsellor’s group, not my own, which is a fundamental question related to how the research and writing were changing any easy understanding of what the research was all about. On April 21, 2005 I wrote:

I am thinking over and over again and asking myself if I should have done the research with a group I was counselling and in charge of myself. I am asking myself if I should have collected the data without the camera and, for example, used a teacher diary. Or should I have sat with a notebook at the back of the room taking notes in the group session? Why am I thinking about these issues? Because now I feel as if I were doing something that is a compromise. Because I feel that the research is more about me than I could imagine and now I am, as if, doing research into myself but as another person.

Joan and I also talked about the research arrangement. Joan felt that the fact of being videoed (for the first time in the group sessions although we had videoed the individual counsellings for three previous action-research projects) did put extra pressure on her although it got better as time went on. She was initially very conscious of the camera, probably mostly because of what she was saying and how she was saying it. She did not think that she behaved any differently than in other group sessions, though. Still, she felt that the videoing was a slight stress and worry beforehand. When I asked her how she would have felt if I had sat at the back of the room taking notes she said that she preferred the camera. She thought that she probably would have involved me in the session.

Then again, I am convinced that the team-work approach in ALMS justifies my solution. I have also come to understand my position as a relevant one as it was. My main motivation for having the video was to have something to back up people's memory and to have the whole session available for "experiencing" again. As it probably had an effect on some students' decisions concerning the course, or how they experienced the sessions, I have to ask the reader to keep these shadowed stories in mind. They should be read as one pattern of the kaleidoscope and a piece in the bigger ALMS picture.

Reflective interlude

Stories go in circles. They don't go in straight lines. So it helps if you listen in circles because there are stories inside stories and stories between stories and finding your way through them is as easy and as hard as finding your way home. And part of the finding is getting lost. If you're lost, you really start to look around and listen.

(Deena Metzger 1986/1969)

Two questions have occupied me throughout this inquiry. What is the significance of my own language learner and teacher history and my personal history to how I encounter the students both as a counsellor and as a researcher? What is the significance of my history in crossing borders, from learner to teacher, teacher to counsellor and teacher-counsellor to teacher-researcher, to which pieces are focused on in the data and which fragments are written about in the kaleidoscope?

In the previous patterns I turned my gaze mainly to the individual students and the counsellor. I have gazed on the students' language-learning experiences in the past and how these were described and re-experienced in the reflection texts and in a shared memory session. I gazed on the face-to-face counselling sessions between learner and counsellor and the research interviews between learner and researcher. I have also "done" biography by producing the eight student stories in "Language Learning".

Finally, I want to turn my gaze on the "stories inside stories and stories between stories". The following three patterns in the kaleidoscope represent an early decision in terms of how to approach analysing the massive data. It was evident from a very early stage that the data contained a multitude of story-in-the-story elements.

One of the first occasions on which I was alerted to this potential analytical solution was when I was editing the videos of the first group session in order to show them to the students in the interviews. The episode on the video that alerted me to the intertextual and internarrative nature of the documents and data was what I later called the *Mistakes Episode* (see pattern six) in the first group session. Johanna's comment in the group discussion caught my attention as it was yet another telling of her powerful memory from school. Although it is just a short comment, it alerted me to

the possibility of analysing the episode in the light of what I had encountered before in her text. Another episode in the first group session, *A Non* (see patterns seven and eight), is an example not only of the internarrativeness but also of the potential in the recycling of videoed data and its force. It is a powerful situation in which the main teller of the tale, Ulla, is a very captivating performer and obviously very deeply involved in the telling. Her way of telling the story was remembered by many and the reaction was still strong when they watched it a month afterwards. This is the only time we meet her in this research because she only took part in the first group session.

For quite a long time I conceptualised the apparent internarrative connections in terms of intertextuality as a textlinguistic issue, but I had problems starting the writing of this last section. Un/fortunately, I had to take a break from writing in January 2006 when I broke my right arm on an icy street and was incapacitated for a fairly long time. In the meantime I went back to Carola Conle's writings. Her notion of 'resonance' (Conle, 1996, 2004, attributed to Frye by her) made me see the connections between the stories in the data in a new light. I realised that it was a deeper process that was going on. When looking at my data, as tends to happen in narrative inquiry I was reacting to the students' experiences with 'resonance', with a story of my own. Moreover, they were reacting to each other's experiences with resonance, with narratives of their own. Carola Conle (1996) describes resonance, which she claims is always available in storytelling, as follows: "Resonance is the process that carries the inquiry along, producing more and more stories, through metaphorical connections rather than strictly logical ones".

Stories in this data resonate and it is the resonance that moves them across the texts and the interpretation. Each point of entry into each resonating story presents what I have come to consider a researcher's epiphany (Denzin 1989), a moment of revelation in the research process; they could be described as turning points in my thinking that have come about through the writing. The episodes that have selected themselves into each pattern resonate with each other, and the three patterns, in turn, resonate together, as do all the stories in the kaleidoscope. They are my attempts at reconciliation, an attempt to become a teacher and a counsellor through the writing who will not haunt myself in the years to come (Casanave 2003). Metaphor plays a central role in resonance. Stories and episodes in them are connected through metaphor, not as a figure of speech, but as a process of understanding. Our own teachers live on as "memories in our heads", we as teachers might live on as yet other memories in our students' minds. As a teacher and a counsellor I feel it is important to work towards a memory that does not feed on tensions, shame or unresolved disputes (Conle 1996, 2000).

With these three patterns in particular it is impossible to say whose story I am telling apart from the researcher's story, which follows me every day and changes all the time. Again in these three patterns it is as evident, if not more so than in the previous ones, that the teacher's voice is always a blended voice with individual, cultural and historical echoes, including academic and theoretical echoes (Elbaz-Luwisch 2005). So is the student's voice. I have struggled in this section, as I did in the previous ones, in distinguishing between my own and others' voices, but still including the other research participants' discourse and thought. In each of these three patterns a reaction to one student's personal story or a glimpse of that story was my point of entry (see also pattern five). Taking over the participants' personal stories remains a hazard here as well. This is the reason why I have chosen to write about these story-in-the-story episodes by patterning the whole via its parts and through the researcher's dialogue with herself. Very clearly, these last three patterns reflect my conviction that the very process of research writing affects the writer deeply.

The fact that before embarking on telling these last three stories I had to take a break from writing meant that I was forced to find other ways of moving on. I first tried to do so by engaging in left-handed writing without capitals and punctuation, which soon tired my left arm and hand and seemed to produce pain in my ghost-writing right arm. I decided to move on by reading through my *Book of Stories* and research diary once more, and as writing was a burning issue for me I ended up taking mental and some scribbled notes on the entries and sections concerning writing. This exercise made me reflect upon the very form of presenting the data in this last section. For Coffey and Atkinson (1996), writing and representing are vital ways of thinking about one's data. As research writing had become a part of the quest for a pedagogically-motivated way of researching, it now also appeared more important in terms of "Language Learning", a language and a way of writing that is intertextual or internarrative above all. I had produced the student stories (see pattern five) and I was still worried about having over-voiced the tellers despite all my efforts to give an auto/biographical interpretation and representation.

Acts of writing stem from diverse, even conflicting motivations, and research writing that is carried out over a long period of time is bound to result in representations of the self that are probably interweavable but do reflect differing prominent modes of one's identity in interpreting the experience in the data (Casanave 2003). I have seen the researcher as a narrator all along. In these last stories I have, again, chosen to explicitly position myself differently at the beginning of each of them, first as a learner, then as a counsellor, and finally as a researcher. This reflects the power of resonance in carrying research along. Aneta Pavlenko (2003) has written about the divide that

separates “us” (academics, for me very prominently teachers, but also researchers) and “them” (foreign-language learners and users). She sees her own insider experience in being an immigrant, a language learner and a bilingual user of English as strengths in her work as a researcher, and points out how crossing the border back and forth makes it possible for her to see how interlocked our languages are with our multiple identities and desires. In pattern six I will describe a similar border-crossing that was made possible through resonance.

The choices I have made for these kaleidoscope patterns reflect my initial intuition, the point of entry into each story. They have remained strong intuitive experiential moorings throughout the process, although I have crossed the borders during each telling. This has led me to position the others differently, too. The students become fellow learners, ALMS counsellors, and co-researchers across but also within the stories. This may lead the readers to take different positions as well, although this is impossible to predict. Readers come to autobiographical texts from their own experiential contexts and with expectations influenced by different types of stories available to them, both research stories and personal stories, but others, too (Smith and Watson 2001).

Patterns six, seven and eight are examples of re-storying the same events in multiple ways in order to reflect the complexity of identity issues. I am attempting another depiction of the change needed in thinking about the teacher-learner relationship by combining the making explicit of self-reflexive positions and giving a voice to the complexity of auto/biographical work. This is, most of all, related to the complexity of both teacher identity and learner identity. The relationships between these in a learning encounter are multiple: both selves are, respectively, in relation to past or current, other selves; to significant others; to the cultural context; and to the audience, especially in a research setting (Mann 1994). With this solution I also hope to make the point that teacher-research is truly a process in which field work, data collection and writing cannot be separated. The whole research effort becomes a heuristic process characterised by the elements of intuition, tacit knowledge and introspection (Saarnivaara 2002).

In this section I also aim to shed more light on the ALMS course as a social situation, on how the individual experiences appeared in the light of the whole, and on how these experiences were carried to and from the group session. I am looking for yet another way of telling about (E)FL experiences and the episodic nature of a language course, and attempt a multi-voiced re-storying of the episodes and scenes from the group sessions. One way of showing and seeing a learning environment is to depict it as fragments, as proceeding in episodes, like patchwork (cf. Salo 1999).

The stories in patterns seven and eight in particular feature several student characters. As I have mentioned before a researcher should be looking at the kaleidoscopic effect of every new encounter, and I believe the counsellor has the same duty. In these stories my aim is to produce a kaleidoscopic effect of a group of learners on a language course. The focus is on how experiences differ, how telling someone about experiences differs, how one and the same situation is experienced in different ways by different students, and how different meanings are read into the same classroom and other learning encounters. Some scenes in the stories specifically aim at finding different ways of making meaning out of the same situation. My initial interests in this research have pushed me to direct my gaze towards experiences involving the teacher, autobiographical elements and emotions again and again, and have guided me in the emplotment of these stories.

In the end, the emphasis of each story changes constantly, which is unavoidable when inquiring into lived experience. Inevitably, the 'I' of the narrator changes even within one story from a learner/counsellor/researcher 'I' to a student, teacher, woman, mother 'I', to name a few. It may not be possible to make it clear to the reader which 'I' is dominant at different points in each story (Conle 2000, Connelly and Clandinin 1990). This difficulty has to do with the non-conclusive and fluid nature of the process of resonance. This is how Carola Conle puts it:

...during the experience of an experiential story that is part of the teller's inquiry, the listener unpredictably meets up with elements of his or her life, elements that are of particular interest or perhaps connected to some tension. If those interests are pursued narratively, the listener's own inquiry is stirred as he or she listens to stories of others. The process is very Deweyan (Dewey, 1938): it is open ended and ongoing; it is only partly available to consciousness and can never be entirely named (Conle 2004, 156).

Kaleidoscope pattern six: Teacher Memories³³

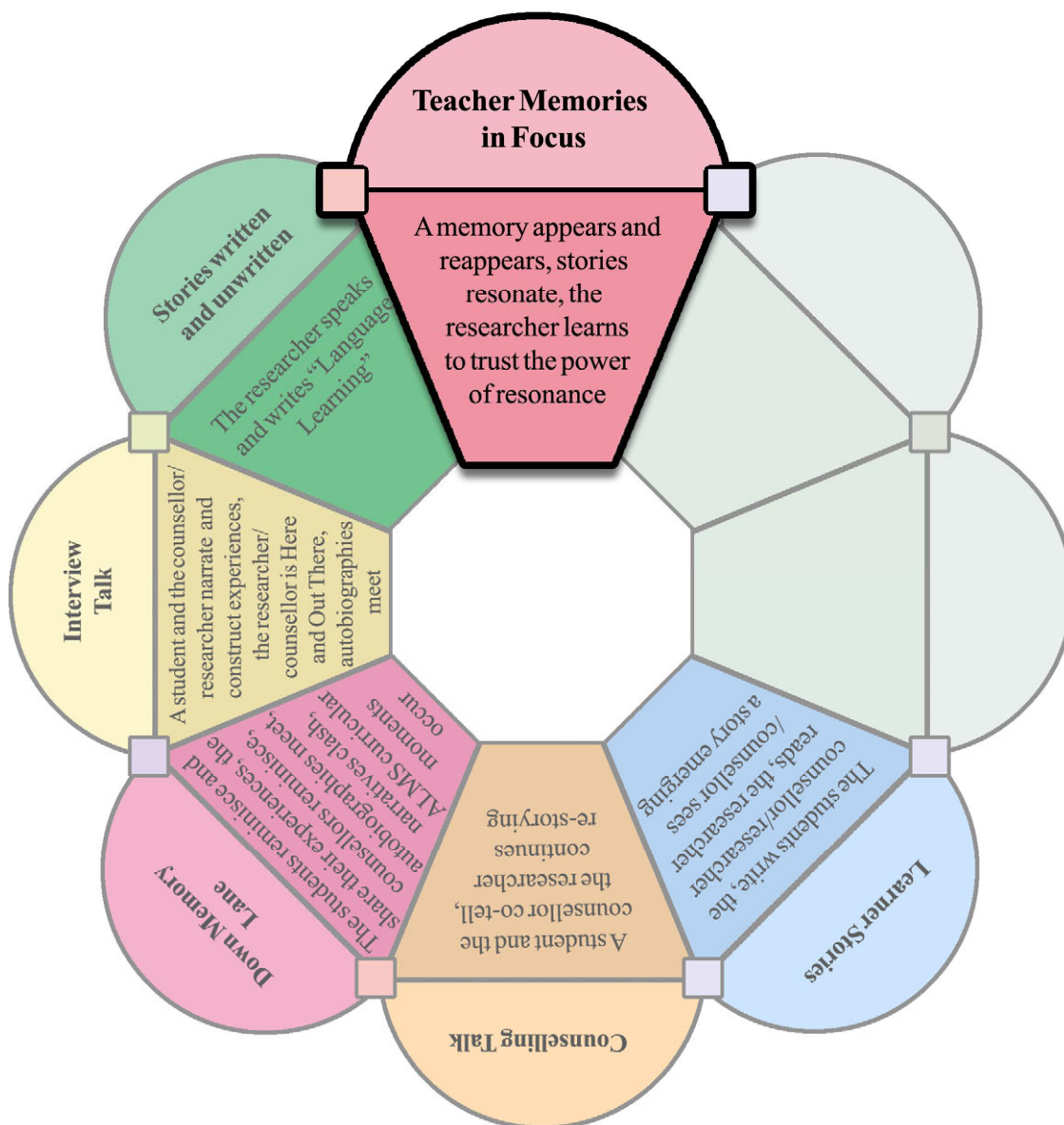


Figure 10: Kaleidoscope pattern six: Teacher Memories

³³ The Leena/Johanna story appeared in a slightly different form in *Narratives of EFL experience*, edited by Kalaja, Barcelos and Menezes (2008). The chapter, which arose from this thesis work, is called Turning the Kaleidoscope - EFL Research as Auto/biography

The story line goes as follows:

- 1) The researcher reads Johanna's pre-course questionnaire and stops short at one of her memories from school.
- 2) Later she reads Johanna's reflection text and meets another version of the memory.
- 3) In the group interview Johanna has tears in her eyes when she briefly mentions her experiences from school.
- 4) The researcher watches the video of the group sessions. Johanna only has a minor role to play in this episode, but she is the one with the most dramatic message.
- 5) In Johanna's research interview the researcher takes up the experience from school, new details come up and the relevance of past experience to later learning is discussed.
- 6) The researcher interviews the group counsellor and understands the connection between Johanna's memory and her own teacher vulnerability.
- 7) In a conference presentation, the researcher tells Johanna's story in order to highlight teacher memories and her auto/biographical approach to interpretation.

Presenting the chronological storyline first is a way of inserting my researcher-self into the story, but it is also meant to give the reader a sense of how the memory moved chronologically through the thesis inquiry. By using the historical present all the way through I am emphasising the fact that these events continue to preoccupy me, both as a researcher and as a counsellor (Ochs and Capp 1996).

Johanna's strong memory is interesting and fascinating in a number of ways. It resonates strongly with my own autobiography as a learner, which is how I situate and position myself at the beginning of this story. It is a story with qualities that put it at risk of becoming what Carola Conle (1999) calls 'a one-liner', or 'a hardened story', by which she means a story that can be readily made to suit the new purposes of a new teller. A researcher's telling voice can acquire the quality of an all-knowing narrator who uses a story for her own purposes by detaching it from its experiential moorings and from its true context. According to Conle, this can easily happen if the voice of the researcher is distant from the characters of the story.

Johanna's story should not become my instrument and I hope to show the contexts in which it re-emerged carefully. I also contextualise the story in order to avoid ordering (E)FL stereotypically. I hope to show in my emplotment how the memory moved in the data, what the contexts were in which it reappeared, and how, in fact, it changed in form at every telling, but kept its non-linguistic experiential qualities. In the following turnings of the kaleidoscope I not only chronicle events, as in the listing of the memory's movements mentioned above, I also narrate and in that way am both a narrator and a character in my story (Conle 1999). Thus I ensure that I am as much subject to

temporal and contextual changes in the story as my research participants. This will also help me to maintain a sense of agency for them in my story.

My way of interpreting the role of Johanna's memory in the whole thesis process has to do with Connelly and Clandinin's (1988) suggestion that our own learning experiences become metaphors for what we do with our students. Our own experiences shape our expectations about our students and colour our interpretations of their behaviour in learning encounters. Carola Conle (2006) has pointed out how negative experiences and wrongdoings or hurts in our lives as learners become special sensitivities with which we meet our students. She suggests that recognising these sensitivities helps us "meet the walking wounded" among our students. This is the kind of self-knowledge we need as teachers to be able to reflexively look at the choices and decisions we make in our lived curriculum.

I will now turn the kaleidoscope very slowly to bring each fragment into view one at a time.

The first fragment

The students are asked to answer six email questions before the course begins. Johanna sends me two sets of answers because for a while it seems that the first email has not arrived. Johanna writes about a significant learning experience in German, which has affected her as a learner of English as well:

Negative. The German teacher in upper-secondary school was a tyrant who made everyone cry in turn. I haven't opened German textbooks since then – and I won't open any! (first email, translated from Finnish)

In the second email she adds the following:

We started checking our homework together before going to class so that no wrong answers would come out. No more German, please! (second email, translated from Finnish)

Johanna's words in the first email resonate with an experience I had as a pupil and so my story is immediately evoked as a response to Johanna's. I remember having to stand between the rows of desks cross-examined for what seems like hours while the other pupils gaze at me. It is a maths

lesson, I am crying and I am only eleven or twelve. Carola Conle (1993, 2000) sees resonance as a major structuring principle in narrative research. The metaphorical understanding that she claims connects parts of stories works in my case: there is an adult in Johanna's story, as there is in mine, who uses his power to question up to the point of breaking the child's will and making her cry in shame. The resonance is the powerlessness and victimisation of the one being questioned. Conle suggests that these story-to-story connections work by linking clusters of images in one story to clusters of images in others. The connection is not constructed, but automatic in that a metaphor is not consciously created or asked for.

Johanna's memory is from school about ten years earlier. While obviously based on a very intensive experience, it has the qualities of becoming dismissed by many as another sob story. However, it is a story that echoes or reflects scenes in many of the stories about Finnish school and teachers recently analysed by Ulla-Maija Salo (2004, 2005). Feelings of inferiority, shame, of not having the knowledge or the skills are all part of the popular imagery of teaching and learning. Obviously, the plot in stories about school and teachers is often built around how stigmatising takes place, how a learner gets labelled as somebody who does not know, does not have the skills, does not qualify. The popular imagery of how teachers and teaching stigmatise is readily recycled, and thus is in danger of being hardened into generalised and even stereotypical narratives, which in turn may give rise to frozen stories that become prisons for those telling them. As a teacher I see a pressing need to take the story in my hands and study my professional identity from the perspective of reinventing and recreating. I do not wish to succumb to the stereotype of a tyrant teacher in a hardened story, in a cumulative cultural text (Weber and Mitchell 1999), but I also wish to leave my victim's cage now that I know the power of the story over me.

The second fragment

It is evident that in each telling of her personal experience Johanna is evoking new details of the lived experience. Ochs and Capp (1996) point out that every telling of a narrative provides not only the narrator but also the listener or reader with an opportunity for fragmented self-understanding. Each telling only evokes certain memories or concerns in both partners. We only apprehend our partial selves, and only fragments of experience are accessed on each occasion: it is never complete self-understanding on the part of the narrator or the listener/reader. Johanna is continually building novel understandings of what she is as a language learner as she tells and retells her story. Her presentations of the partial language-learner selves are integrated into a collective voice (*made*

everyone cry, we started checking) in the email tellings above. In this second fragment the pattern becomes even more extended: more language teachers enter the picture, but in the same role as the first, as tyrants. Johanna situates herself in this version of the story as a learner who did not work beyond the expected minimum:

*As a learner I was lazy I admit. I did my homework but nothing more. Its partly cause of the teachers. They were horrible in every languages. If someone didn't know the answer **they made her cry in front of everybody**. It really killed something inside most of us. That's also why I didn't want to learnt any language for a while* (Johanna's reflection text, written in English, my highlighting).

This telling of the experience in the reflection text is written for the first individual counselling session. The story here is, firstly, about what Johanna does and, secondly, about how she feels. Undoubtedly, the consequences of what she feels are more significant: she loses interest in foreign languages for a few years as a young adult. Jerome Bruner (1986) suggests that narrators construct a dual landscape, one of action and one of consciousness. In the former they focus on action and in the latter on beliefs and feelings. The landscape of consciousness categorises and rationalises the actions and beliefs for the reader: something died in Johanna's learner self and so she lost interest in learning.

The lasting non-changing emotional quality of Johanna's story is the experience of shame. Salo (2005) suggests that two themes in particular recur in the telling of negative school memories: 1) bad experiences and 2) monotony and routines. These are memories that need telling in that they characteristically revolve around unresolved events. Equally they are stories that need listening to. They gain novel meanings in the active listening, and in the sharing of the experience. The turn in the road might come for a troubled narrator who keeps reliving one and the same experience over and over again if he or she has somebody who will listen. As a counsellor at this point, I should be able to accept this listener responsibility, my part in the student's meaning-making process. I have argued for a dialogic relationship in counselling meetings, which means that a counsellor should relate to the Other in a true and open dialogue. Bakhtin (1981) wrote that words only take on a meaning when it is given by the listener. Thus the counsellor's role is crucial in the narrator's process towards coherence.

The third fragment

I now look at Johanna with tears in her eyes in the group session when she mentions having had “bad experiences” at school. For me, her reaction is an indication of how the autobiographical is stored in our memory as sensations, as bodily reactions (Jaatinen 2003). Johanna’s experience has guided her in making decisions about what to learn (*not German, ever*) and how to learn (*I hoped ALMS would be a different course*). As a counsellor I need to listen to and try to understand Johanna’s emplotment of her story: her active construction of the past in the light of the present: I need to listen for the narrator’s truth, the truth as it appears to Johanna.

The fourth fragment

Then I turn the kaleidoscope to show an episode in the first group session. I am following the researcher’s chronology here because, although this session obviously took place at the very beginning of the course, it only came into my hands when I was watching the video and editing it. The transcription of the extract is a pale image of the episode on the video. I added comments on gestures, tone of voice and facial expressions after watching the extract several times before sliding the fragment in my kaleidoscope.

The Mistakes Episode³⁴

The episode starts when the students are reporting back on their small group discussion on learning styles and experiences. Joan has been making the whole group laugh by demonstrating differences in intonation by acting out how British and Finnish lotto numbers are read out.

Ulla: *Actually I’m happy that I’m more relaxed than I used to be.*

Timo: *And if you are too worried about grammar you won’t open your mouth and talk.*

Joan: *That’s right that’s right, and again many students have this fear say at school I daren’t open my mouth because the minute I made a mistake the teacher was there (wagging her finger). How many of you have had that experience?* (most students put up their hands and laughter follows)

Johanna: *We were all crying at least once, it was terrible.* (shakes her head)

³⁴ Joan had difficulty relating to her character in the dialogues transcribed without punctuation. I rewrote these after she read the manuscript.

Joan: *And that's sad. And with some people okay they can see the point or they don't worry about it but with other people it affects them, sometimes for their lives that they don't dare open their mouth in a foreign language because they've had a bad experience. That's one of the things that many students say about this kind of course here, that they begin to get their confidence back because nobody's saying, "neh neh, you made a mistake go back and do it again" (wagging her finger, voice nagging). So as you say with this foreign language thing there's a time to be relaxed and there's a time to let your emotions speak also, and a time to get a message across. There's also a time that you need to be more focused on the niceties if you like. If you're writing your doctoral thesis or your gradu in English then it's just as well to be more analytical, but most of you are not doing it within this module so give yourself some fun.*

Mia: *We were talking a lot about being at school and studying English at school, that although our faces get older the little girl inside (laughs, gestures) there is remembering how it was to sit and wait your turn to read that one sentence and counting and thinking if that one sentence is too difficult.*

Joan: *And so by the time when you were so busy counting and worrying about your turn you totally lose whatever everybody else is saying.*

Mia: *You don't hear anything you just think it wasn't so important, only my turn.*

Joan: *Exactly. I remember doing that on my Finnish course when I first came.*

Timo: (jokingly) *Nightmares coming back.*

Joan: *Absolutely.*

Mia: *And I understand that you are all the time saying that you are not looking at our mistakes. It's very good to say it so maybe we ah... (hides her face in her hands when she can't find the word)*

Joan: *Believe it.*

Mia: *Yes, thank you.*

Joan: *Please believe it.*

Joan accepts Johanna's story here and legitimises her experience by weaving it into stories about student experiences from ALMS modules and of different but acceptable ways of approaching different learning tasks. Joan is the primary recipient of the story, and Johanna and the other students are gazing at her at this point. Later, some students will be reporting back and thus addressing the whole group. What Johanna and Joan are co-telling resonates with Mia so that she tells her own story. Interestingly enough, Salo's two types of negative school memories get intertwined here: Mia brings in the routines aspect. *Counting and worrying about one's turn to read*

out the one sentence in the text or gap exercise has been remembered by Mia and her group members, and Joan readily relates to it and replies with a story of her own.

The fifth fragment

The next time the memory appears is in Johanna's research interview.

Johanna: *She was an old-fashioned teacher who demanded that we learn certain rigmaroles by heart and then moved on to do some exercises. She didn't accept mistakes or incorrect answers in the exercises. It was not enough that we had done them, they had to be correct. And she didn't ask who would like to answer, who knew the answer but she made us speak in turns, row by row, in order, and then someone made a mistake and they were then cross-examined for as long as it took them to give the correct answer or until they burst into tears. And if someone tried to whisper the correct answer it meant that two people were in a nice mess. It was absolutely unreasonable and we had three years of German in upper-secondary school, and we were almost adults by that time. During the last year we started checking the homework before going to class so that everybody had an identical answer and made sure everything was correct, because many of us were quite good and had the correct answers so we made sure no one had any mistakes left in their homework.* (translated from Finnish).

It is noticeable in Johanna's account that she herself has not been individually targeted as yet in the various tellings of the story. In the interview she adds another scene in which she was the sole target of the teacher's rage:

Johanna: *I got ill in the third grade and missed most of the lessons. She got mad and shouted at me because she didn't know I had been ill. She thought I had skipped the lessons and I was really embarrassed, I just turned and walked away.*

Johanna later accepts the teacher's apology but still continues to remember:

Johanna: *I remember her forefinger, it was, oh no! It left us all such bad memories.*

In the interview I move back and forth between being a researcher and being a counsellor, especially when we discuss Johanna's programme in ALMS. As a researcher I am glad to recognise

an alternative story about language learning developing. As a counsellor I am happy to offer her support on her perceived problem in listening. She is, in fact, very actively working on her problem and has evidently stepped out of her frozen story.

The sixth fragment

The memory session with Joan helps me come to an interim conclusion about me as a researcher:

Leena: These memories are kind of strong. They have always bothered me, I've always sort of seen myself as a memory in somebody's head.

Joan: As a teacher you talk about now.

Leena: Yes, as a teacher, I talk about this as a teacher now, and somehow this line between myself as a teacher and myself as a learner is so blurred. And I think that you know all the things that happened to me all the things that happened to my friends, and then what I hear from my students and what I know happened, having been in the teachers' rooms, has made me very aware that I might well be a memory in somebody's head.

With the help of Johanna's memory I am in the process of doing what Norman Denzin (2005, 10) suggests narrative researchers should do:

In bringing the past into the autobiographical present, I insert myself into the past and create the conditions for rewriting and hence re-experiencing it.

In the same article Denzin uses the words 'the sting of memory', an expression that vividly describes my inquiry so far, and which I suspect many recollections of classrooms and language-learning and teaching encounters are all about: a memory stings and we need to do something about it. When I look back at the beginning of my research process I can see a researcher fighting back an unconscious eagerness to focus on victim stories. I now understand that the victim story needed to come out to make it possible for me to move on with the inquiry.

The seventh fragment

The circle closes when I talk about Johanna at a conference:

This time, the intertwining of emotions with the rational is my concern all the way through the research process, not stopping short at the data collection and the preliminary stages of the analysis and writing.

This is, however, not the end of the story. The educational auto/biographical story that I have told in this pattern, the Leena/Johanna story, has shaped and continues to change my thinking. It has already modified my actions as a counsellor. It is very significant for the telling here to remember that Johanna's autobiographical episodes are not talking in the data by themselves, they only talk if I ask them a question. This acknowledgement has a strong link to research ethics: I do not wish to send off frozen stories, narratives that have been detached from their experiential moorings. Johanna's story can only be read in connection with mine, as part of my emplotment of the story in which I am the narrator but also a character. From the research interview onwards the story became more and more prominently an auto/biographical story and the resonance of this can be seen in my words to Joan, the group counsellor: "a memory in somebody's head". I keep coming back to this story and others in the thesis, as a researcher, in conferences and book chapters, and in the thesis itself. There have already been other conferences and the Leena/Johanna story has been told, again, to highlight my auto/biographical approach to interpretation.

But I continue my talk. In what follows I am describing the writing process and its relation to the whole research process:

I have become even more aware of the interpersonal dynamics of an interview encounter, and naturally a counselling session. The talk shapes and defines the self and Other of both participants and can leave the researcher/counsellor, as well as the interviewees/learners feeling vulnerable. My focus consequently is also on the letting be, on what is best left untouched, the emotions and the unspeakable, on what is beyond words. And despite the difficulty or impossibility, on how to try and write about what I see in my kaleidoscope.

The circle that has once closed opens up again when I write this section. I am active in moving the eyepiece of the kaleidoscope and have added yet another story to the overall researcher story. The next resonating story demands to be told.

Kaleidoscope pattern seven: Emotions in Focus

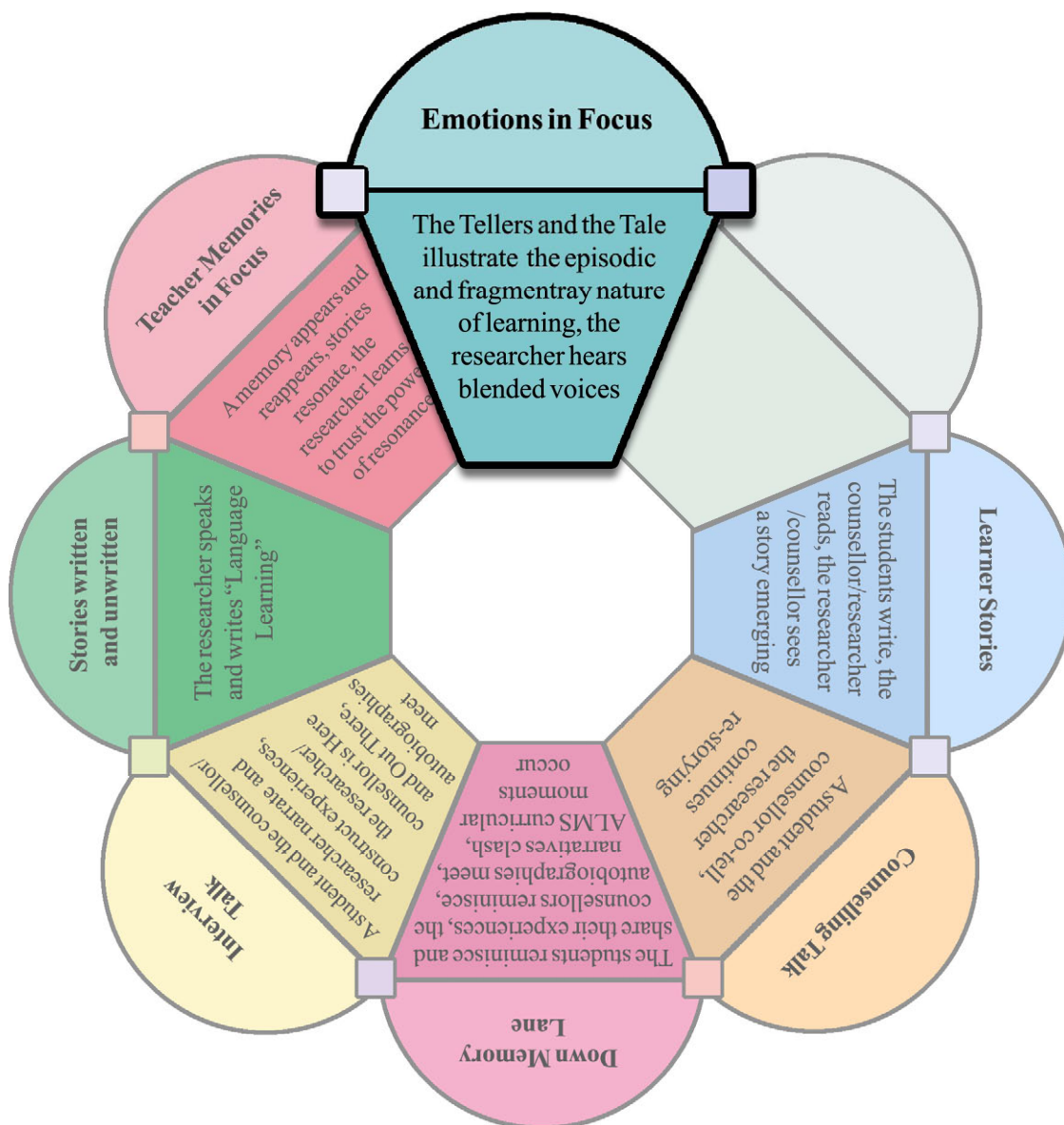


Figure 11: Kaleidoscope pattern seven: Emotions in Focus

The story line in this pattern is as follows:

- 1) The researcher watches the video of the first group session with editing and shortening in mind. She sees an intent face and hears a voice starting a story. The episode lives on in the researcher's mind.
- 2) The episode comes up in Päivi's interview.
- 3) The researcher shows the episode to Katja in the interview when learning strategies are discussed and Katja immediately remembers the episode.

- 4) The researcher has specifically asked Juuso (for the second time) to come to an interview because he features as one of the main characters in the stories told by Päivi and Katja.
- 5) The group counsellor tells a story about the text and how she came to use it.

Again, the storyline is meant to shed light on the chronology of the research process. The story I am about to tell is different from the previous one in that it starts with a description of the joy of learning. It resonates with my counsellor experiences and, initially, that is how I position myself. The picture, again, emerges in the kaleidoscope one fragment at a time.

The first fragment

I am watching the video of the first sessions a few weeks after the actual sessions. My aim is to shorten it to a more manageable length for the interviews. It is very clear that my interpretation of the data has started: I am in the process of making interpretative decisions in the sense that I am cutting out bits that are repetitive or less laden with meaning than some others. Mostly, they are bits that are also very difficult to transcribe because only Joan had a personal microphone and thus the students' voices were not always picked up by the big general microphones. Some bits include instances of general student talk or working quietly on a task. I am taking notes on what I want to cut.

I am now watching the beginning of a scene that captivates me. The students have worked in pairs on a communication task. They have each read a text and are now reporting back to the group on each other's texts as summarised to them by the readers. Ulla is telling the group what Johanna has told her about a text called *A Non*³⁵. As I watch I am there as a counsellor, listening with the students: it is a very strong vicarious experience through the watching. I experience it when I listen to Ulla's telling, when I see Joan smile, when the students on the video all turn their faces to the teller: the story on the video seems to tell about a good moment in the group, about an intense and significant moment.

³⁵ This is a short story by Gopal Baratham from his collection *A City of Forgetting*.

The A Non Episode

Ulla: *I heard a story about a man who was actually not seen through his life time...* (tells extensively, at much greater length than anybody else, her face is intent and she takes eye contact with the group while telling and keeps on and on).

Joan: (does not interrupt but comes in at a point where Ulla stops herself for a second) *Okay, you have a phenomenal memory you've got no notes here and you have all these details.*

Ulla: *He was an interesting man* (raises her voice) *he is seen now.* (laughter in the group)

Joan: *Would someone like to continue who listened to this story. Who else listened to it? Would you like to continue?*

Päivi: *Yes. I heard about these part-time jobs and then one night he died and this story is all that remains of him and nobody missed him when he died.*

Joan: *Yes. Did she miss anything out would you say?*

Ulla: (immediately wants to continue) *Then the landlady...* (laughter interrupts her, especially Johanna, the reader, is amused)

Johanna: *It really is an interesting story. There is sense in this story, really someone's whole life so you can remember it that way.*

Ulla: *And because you can put emotions in that story cause it's quite sad story and can be true as well so the landlady ...* (relates more details) *sometimes a dead person can smell quite good, like fresh bread.*

Joan: *What about you who read the story how did you feel about it?*

Juuso: *First I read it really fast through then I pointed out the key words that I used so I didn't tell the whole story.*

Joan: *And what about your feelings, did you get emotionally involved?*

Juuso: *Not really.* (burst of laughter from the group)

Joan: *Did you ...* [unclear]

Juuso: *I thought it just a story I didn't let myself get involved.*

Joan: *We are all thinking about strategies, of course, and one sure way of remembering is this emotional involvement. It does help you remember sometimes. Sometimes of course it has the opposite effect and clouds the message.*

Juuso: *But for me this was like a task.*

Ulla's part is easy enough to label a flow experience. She is enjoying herself and managing to keep the others interested. She is telling the story to the whole group, not only the counsellor. As I am

watching the video for the first time my counsellor-self very strongly dominates the other selves. Later, as a researcher, the episode makes me go back to the video many times. I am able to stop it, to go back and forth, to notice facial expressions, to listen to prosodic features in the talk, to look at minute details, and to compare the transcription with what I see. I am also struck by the story-in-the-story aspect now. Moreover, I look upon Ulla's performance as not only dealing with a task set in the classroom but also as yet another type of narrative among my data. I take this to be an example of what Cortazzi (1993) calls a performed narrative. For Cortazzi, this type of narrative is constructed when the entertaining aspect of [a teacher's] classroom discourse is woven into the other aspects of [her teaching discourse]. For me as a researcher this is self-presentation enacted in different media, not only in a text but also bodily charged on the video. Ulla's story of flow on the video is not in tension or contradiction with the textual rendering of the episode, but it is not quite the same either.

However, it was the visual narrative of the episode that caught my attention and had me notice its significance to the participants. I originally chose to video the sessions in order to enhance the participants' remembering of them in the interviews. I also saw the video as a way of authenticating the group experience for both myself and the interviewees. The visual narrative is like the written one in the sense that it stops time for the researcher and makes repeated readings possible. Interpretation as a multilayered and complex process is tangible in my narrative reading of the visual imagery on the video: editing it, transcribing bits of it, and inscribing these readings into a text all have their contexts, they have all taken place in the three-dimensional inquiry space. How much more do I read into the episode on the video than a counsellor ever does or has the time and opportunity for? How different is the story the researcher tells from the one a counsellor would? Is the classroom story already changing dramatically in my mind when I watch and re-watch the episode? In the interviews I try to invite and even ask for stories that might include this episode in order to find out about the meanings various participants read into it.

The second fragment

As I bring the second fragment into view in the kaleidoscope I am aware of reconstructing lived experience in my text to fit my chosen point of view, my research interests that concern the teacher's role, autobiographical elements and emotions. I am focusing on certain shades of meaning and leaving others be. 'Emotion', in particular, is my guideline. This might help my reconstructing at least some of the secrets behind the video story.

Päivi remembers this episode when she tells me how it felt to be in a group situation, which she always experiences as problematic and distressing. For her, the reporting stage of this particular text was a situation in which she forced herself to speak:

Leena: *Well what about this situation now when Joan asks if anybody wants to continue do you remember what you thought?*

Päivi: *This was also a situation when I thought I'd be caught if I didn't say anything (laughter) that someone will notice if I don't say anything.*

One secret comes out: the videoing was what prompted Päivi into taking part in the classroom interaction. But she also remembers this episode as a task involving pair work, which she did with Juuso:

Leena: *Do you remember this situation? Tell me how it went with Juuso.*

Päivi: *Well, I felt pleased at finding the point in my text and also managed to convey that to him in our discussion, and although I explained at length he still managed to pick out the main points from my telling and then presented them in a masculine way. But then when he told me about this text that obviously contained many more emotions and so on that he didn't tell me about, and I was kind of surprised when I listened to this [Ulla's telling], that was it the same story that I heard.*

Päivi's reaction to the cooperation and, in particular, to Juuso's interpretation of the text feels very significant to my reading of this episode. She says that she had strongly felt that she wanted to read the text herself:

Päivi: *I felt like reading the text myself. I felt I had been wronged in not being able to read the text myself to be able to see what was in it, and I only got a summary, that he did the task in his own way but I just felt that he didn't tell me what I would really have been interested in.*

The task had been to read, find the main points, memorise them and tell them to the partner, who would then report back to the group. The idea behind this task is to have students think about what a task is, to plan their work together, to carry it out and also to spend time on thinking about how they did it and what kinds of techniques or strategies they used. Students do this in pairs independently of the counsellor and the rest of the group. The texts are gone through in a discussion, relying first on what the listeners remember, and getting the whole story bit by bit from different listeners. A

discussion on the meta-task follows: observations are shared on how the students worked on the task. After this, the counsellor presents SILL³⁶ in her preferred way and links it to the communication task. These classroom activities are now under my research lens as experienced by the students.

The third fragment

In the interview Katja and I discuss learning strategies and how she enjoyed working on the communication task with Mia. Katja immediately remembers the text *A Non* and guesses that it is this particular episode that I am trying to find on the video when I say there is “one more interesting text and the discussion on it”. For Katja this was a situation to observe rather than to participate in because she had been working on a different text with her partner Mia. She recalls Ulla’s telling with a narrative of her own. She focuses on the how of Ulla’s telling and on Juuso’s matter-of-fact interpretation, which surprised her because Ulla’s telling had so obviously been based on an emotional reaction:

Katja: And her way of telling it was so, it came from somewhere deep down, she had dealt with it somehow fully, and the way she told it: everyone was listening with their hearts standing still, thinking oh help, how sad, it started right away in that way... whereas he (Juuso) hadn't put his emotions in it, he had just read it, I think

The fourth fragment

In the end I sit down with Juuso to talk about his experiences and memories, ALMS memories among others. This is what he says after having watched the episode in the research interview:

Juuso: It becomes clear from that [the video] how I had done the task, I just read it quickly and then thought what would be the main points and told them, but then watching this afterwards like this when I said there that I only took it as a task, so that describes well how you have learnt to study languages. So I don't have the background that I would look upon these situations thinking they might be fun, to think and analyse the situation. We have always been given a task and told to do it

³⁶ We use Rebecca Oxford’s 1990 Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL). The intention is not to give training in the use of specific strategies, or to suggest that there are right and wrong ones, but rather to raise awareness of their role in the learning process

(...) and telling the partner, how well you can present to the other what you have understood and if you present it so that the other one also understands what it was all about. And if you had wanted to you could have talked about the feelings but I left it I guess.

Does Juuso feel the need to defend himself? Am I presenting the episode as a situation in which he acted in a way that was not desirable? He continues to reflect on his approach and sees an explanation of why he acted as he did:

Juuso: I have done the tasks according to the instructions, that came to my mind now as I was watching this and maybe I'm a bit of a lawyer as well, so I'm a bit different. I have a different approach to texts in general, to analyse and draw conclusions, so that's different.

In fact, Ulla did not quite act according to the counsellor's instructions in telling the whole story herself. Juuso's approach was based on what the written instructions were on the overhead. But what about the text that made this happen? What kind of reading practices does one engage in when approaching a (fictional) text with a plot, setting, and characterisation?

The fifth fragment

Joan had just come across this text and she was using it for the first time in ALMS. She did, in fact, use it with a successive group. It did not provoke the same reactions, but was dismissed as a pessimistic story.

Leena: But this whole thing, obviously the story affected, probably not everybody, not everybody read or listened to it, but it affected many of the people strongly and it brought about this thing about emotions. I mean, we don't always get to talk about emotions although in a way they are part of the strategy thing so this worked. Do you remember how you felt about this about the whole little episode? How well do you remember it?

Joan: Well, I remember it quite well because I was worried about using the story. It was a story that had affected me a lot obviously. Well, I thought that it was incredibly well written and I thought it would serve this thing about emotions which we don't always bring out and then, well I didn't quite know how to handle this (laughs, Leena laughs), but do you think it mattered really?

Leena: No no no.

Joan: *Because that in itself brought out matters, the girl now living in Canada also said that she didn't, she only brought out the main points, so different views of what the task is all about. I felt that it succeeded in that sense, but then the group succeeded.*

In this discussion with Joan, it becomes clear that she, too, has many voices that ask to be claimed. She starts with a counsellor voice, or at least it is a counsellor voice blended with her voice as the director and reader and actor in plays who is bringing a story to the classroom from a different landscape, the world of drama and acting. The worrying is probably her counsellor voice. This is related to the idea of different intellectual landscapes (Clandinin and Connelly 1996) in which teachers always function. Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) suggests that teachers' true voices are, in fact, only heard in the classroom setting where their primary concern is for their students. She goes as far as claiming that teachers speaking out of the classroom are no longer able to tell true stories of their classroom experience. In the research process experience changes and the story changes. According to this view, these fragments are obviously reconstructions of reconstructions only.

As a counsellor now I am listening carefully and with empathy to what Joan is saying. I hear a blended voice and a voice that is hesitant. It is interesting that Joan used this particular text by Gopal Baratham because, although it is a story from a collection of short stories, it shares features with a biography, a history observed by another, seen from the outside. Its language evokes emotions, it captivates, but it can be read in many ways, depending on the reader's purpose. Joan chose the text, not because she knew about my research interest but because she herself wanted to touch upon emotions in learning. In the end, my researcher *I* does not have the full story either. What I have is this new story told through the research lens.

Kaleidoscope pattern eight: Autonomy and Auto/biography in Focus

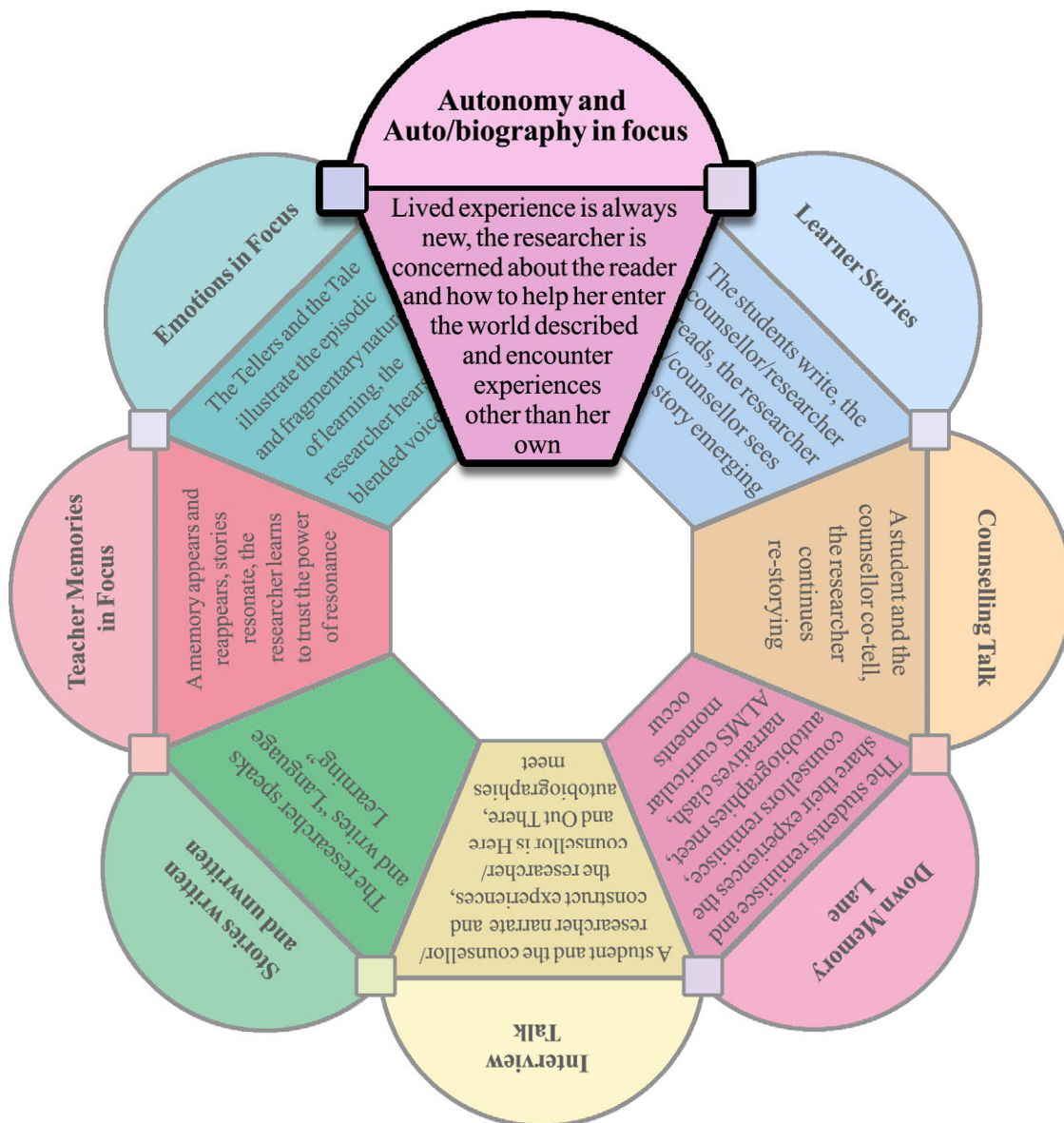


Figure 12: Kaleidoscope pattern eight: Autonomy and Auto/biography in Focus

The story line is as follows:

- 1) The researcher reads Päivi's precourse questionnaire where she says "I do not fit in your profiles".
- 2) In the group interview routines are talked about, shyness is mentioned by Aino and Mia, Päivi chooses not to participate.
- 3) In Päivi's interview, she says she does not want to give of herself and describes an audio-visual course as her ideal language course.

- 4) The researcher considers the group counsellor's hesitation about bringing in the personal in the counselling sessions.

My initial position is the researcher's: I am alerted to Päivi's expectation of there being certain "profiles" the interviewees are expected to fit. I am also more and more concerned about the reader. Marjatta Saarnivaara (2005) describes research that basically aims at understanding the nature and meaning of experience as a heuristic process that has the elements of tacit knowledge, intuition and introspection. In this kind of process everything one encounters becomes data and the dialogue with the data becomes a rhythmic movement together with the phenomenon. When this kind internal quest is reported on the writer faces the dilemma of how to help the reader enter the world described, and to meet experiences other than her own. Does this restless writing genre that I have adopted help the reader? Does this section shed light on different sides of experience from those that come out in the rest of the stories in the kaleidoscope? My aim is to focus on the pattern forming and to have a dialogue with the data in a rhythm that is, again, slightly different from the dialogue in the previous sections.

The first fragment

It is early days in the research process. I read through the pre-course email questionnaires from the course participants. Päivi, a more mature student in the Faculty of Maths and Sciences, writes: "I might be willing [to participate in the research interview] but I do not think that I fit in your profiles because I am not a typical university student on the basis of my age to start with". I read Päivi's comment in the light of what have been described as accompanying notes attached to autobiographical texts (Vilkko 1997). My justification is the fact that the pre-course questionnaires also probe into lived experience and ask students to write about their educational lives so far. Päivi sends her questionnaire and "sees it off" (Vilkko: "saatella") with the words above. This immediately strikes me as a way of reaching towards the reader past and beyond what she has written about herself. In the midst of selecting students for the interviews I find myself asking: "Do I have a profile?"

The second fragment

In the group interview, which has turned into a memory session in my researcher mind, we speak about school and language classes (see also pattern three in which I present this session as a dramatic dialogue between the participants). Critical voices are raised about experiences in the 1980s and 1990s. The focus moves quickly to routines, which I realize does not surprise me, and story meets story again:

Aino: Taking turns in reading and answering, that was horrible.

Leena: You were good but you still felt it was awful.

Aino: Yes, I was quite shy at that time and maybe it wasn't so bad if we had to read sentences because I was quite good at pronunciation but if we checked exercises or translation sentences or something like that, oh boy was that awful! You had to try and count which sentence would be your lot and rack your brains is this correct now and the teacher all of sudden started from people sitting near to me (voice shivers but laughingly), or even from me so I felt help I have no time to prepare myself for this great trial.

Mia: According to one and the same pattern, go through the text in the unit, read in turns, look through the vocabulary list, do some exercises, and of course checking the homework,. Language classes have always gone according to that same pattern.

Aino: It also happened in a university language course where the group was big I'm sorry to say. You again had to see which bit was going to come to you and if you weren't certain you had to ask the person sitting next to you what she thought because you just couldn't give a wrong answer. You got stressed out about it. One teacher used just this method and said what about you the girl next to the pillar, what do you think and I thought oh no, the pillar, me, what's the answer? (laughter) I didn't learn to speak although I did learn other things but it's always the same problem that you should use the language

Katja: Nothing ever happened that made you think oh we're doing something different today. On the other hand it was guaranteed that if you had done your homework in a certain way then you were fine in the lesson. But what bothers me is the fact that you didn't learn to speak when you were counting the lines beforehand and knew that you'd get this practised it once or twice in your head, so that didn't develop your oral skills, and in particular not the thinking that you would have to form a sentence yourself.

When I am telling the story of the group session to myself (Vilkko 1997) I use the words ‘routine tragedy’ (Kosonen 1998 and Laine 2000 use ‘arkitraaginen’ in Finnish). The more I proceed with my writing, the more I begin to feel the tension caused by hearing others use, but more importantly, using these two terms myself, ‘profiles’ and ‘routines. Although my intention is to approach learning and teaching encounters with a view of knowledge as contextual, I fear the potential implications of my use of language. Am I generalising and writing another frozen story of (E)FL ? And yet, I do acknowledge that a personal contextualised narrative is not fully and only personal, but also touches upon and draws on more general conditions, and is even shaped by them. Is this coming through in the way I write?

The third fragment

In the interview, Päivi describes a language course that she took as an adult and really liked. Her description of it shakes me and stops me and gives me food for thought, because this time no vicarious experience seems to be possible for me. It is also a story that is contradictory to the one told by the other students in the previous fragment. Päivi’s reflections on what she experienced as an ideal language course appear in the following without Leena’s questions, comments and prompts. The interview extract that this edited story comes from appears in pattern four in full.

Päivi: We studied audio-visually and we had a native speaker as a teacher, and we had a language studio at our disposal, which was all such luxury compared to school days. And it was really efficient compared to school because we students had good tools and I enjoyed it really a lot. Luckily we didn’t have conversations or group work. Half of the time we spent in the studio and worked on our own and the other half was in class, and the teacher asked questions and we took turns in answering them. But it was geared towards grammar so we didn’t have to think of something to say we just had to come up with the right answer. I think it worked much better and I was really motivated to learn because I hadn’t had the opportunity for so many years. We had the opportunity to practise our language skills, pronunciation, in a safe environment where we knew how it went and didn’t have to think of and make up something to say ourselves. W should I say now? It was clear because it was all in the sentence. The thing was to say it so that it was grammatically correct and to know how to pronounce it, that is much safer. No I absolutely don’t want to give of myself but I want to work with the subject matter.

The impossibility of fully entering the experience of another person is here as clearly as with any other experience I have been writing about. I admit to myself that Päivi's last remark is particularly disconcerting to me: what else is my research all about and what else is the writing and sharing of reflection texts all about but demanding students to "give of themselves"? And what about ALMS group situations and sharing stories with other students? How do I convey this tension in what I write? Is this the way of making stories interact and allowing a new story to emerge that is better informed of otherness? How do we make sure we have room for people to have all their parts? How do I make sure I have room in my counselling and, in particular, in the group sessions for the silence in some of my students?

Juha Varto's (2005) idea of a beginningless beginning is a good guideline here. Each classroom and counselling-session moment is characterised by unpredictability: lived experience is new in the sense that unforeseeable constellations are always in the making. Thus a teacher and a counsellor must have a strong belief in these individual moments, and try to support the belief in the student in her own experience as a source of meaning. The experiencing *I* is what matters, and what links the old and the new experiences.

The fourth fragment

We are always faced with the unclusiveness of narrative inquiry and the lack of final answers to problems encountered in teaching and counselling, with new dilemmas, dangers and limitations facing us having "entered the door". Joan comments on the danger in using reflection texts in a routine way:

Joan: And I don't actually want to go too far, I'm not altogether comfortable with almost requiring students to give of their own personal thing. Fine if they want to but I react against the requirement. I don't think it's our business really to insist.

In writing this story I realise that it is autonomy and auto/biography that I have been looking into all through the process. I have been trying to make space for the personal, chaotic, silent, resisting and different in a setting that expects students to take over responsibility for their learning and terms this 'learner autonomy'. I have been trying to reconcile the emerging experience of autonomy as positive chaos with what could easily become a kind of manuscript if communicated as a master story of ALMS counselling to new counsellors or to the students. I am crossing a border here and I

should make sure I do not introduce new routines, force something on either the students or the counsellors. This confirms what I wrote before, quoting Carola Conle (1999): “Not that each and every one of us must, or would want to, enter by this door [interconnectedness between inquirer and her personal context]”. It is as if this last fragment in pattern eight was forcing its way into the centre of the kaleidoscope: it is becoming a fragment of the story in the middle. It is, however, evident to me that the new story should not be written using the researcher’s superior voice to conclude and control whatever the characters have said so far.

On the narratives in the kaleidoscope

What have appeared in the kaleidoscope are fragments, episodes, stories and patterns of my double narrative process: one process includes the narratives generated by everybody taking part in the research, and the other is the voice of the researcher, myself as the narrator of those narratives (Kyratzis and Green 1997). The kaleidoscope of ALMS stories represents an attempt to do narrative research by drawing attention to ways in which stories arise in interaction and are often jointly produced by several people (Cortazzi 1993). It is an attempt to show how a peer culture, an ALMS culture, is created by a counsellor, a group of students and a counsellor-researcher as they construct oral and written narratives within and across events in group sessions and counselling (Kyratzis and Green 1997). My research is a site in which different narratives come together: everyday narratives of the group sessions and counselling; elicited narratives of the written reflection texts; and interview narratives that share features of both.

The re-storying of the following narratives feels the most meaningful in the sense that the construction process appeared to be a valuable way of integrating life and language learning:

Students’ autobiographical narratives: ALMS reflection texts were researcher-elicited narratives and documents that were also part of the students’ course work in English, that is, a task they were expected to do for their first counselling session. Their place and value in the research fluctuated in the researcher’s mind for various reasons: as a document they were mixed up with the Finnish pre-course questions; they were not brought into the counselling dialogue with all students; but then again, their potentially suspect and contradictory role as a “gift” to the counsellor and/or teacher-researcher made them a story of their own in a different sense from what was initially intended. I have interpreted these written narratives as offers to “shake hands”. They are not to be controlled,

but should be met and read with experiential and imaginative counsellor eyes. There is a potential for co-telling because of resonance.

Interview narratives: the narrative biographical interviews with the students, both their individual interviews and the group one, and with the counsellor grew in importance during the research. They provide an outstanding example of the way narratives are co-constructed and how they can reveal experiences, but also how they are a tool that helps construct and constitute these experiences. The interview talk and telling show how these narratives are mutually shaped and reflect the course of the developing interview discourse (Cortazzi 2001). They also touch upon the narrative aspects of counselling talk in ALMS.

Classroom episodes: these show in the kaleidoscope in various shakings. They are part of the group counsellor's autobiography meeting that of the students'; they link me and her as counsellor-colleagues; they show how Helsinki University students come together from their various faculty cultures to jointly construct meanings in the English classroom; and they echo the master narrative of Finnish foreign-language teaching. My aim in the episodes was to describe sequences of classroom actions and discourse that caught my attention on the video (or in the transcription) because of the social, emotional, cognitive, or even moral effect they had on the participants, and me personally and professionally.

Researcher narrative: this crucial story has emerged in the emplotment through the stories in various kaleidoscope patterns. I hope I have shown how the turning of the kaleidoscope was done and how the various reading, analysing and interpreting procedures took shape in writing and finally merged in the overall researcher narrative. It is through this narrative and in symbiosis with it that the rest of the narratives are shown, and in which the strong internarrativeness and intercontextuality are to be seen. This is the narrative that opens windows on all of the above, and also on the overall ALMS narrative and the master narrative of Finnish foreign-language teaching as seen through one teacher/counsellor's eyes. As such, it is an effort to do research into ways of being a teacher (cf. two doctoral dissertations, Jaatinen 2003 and Conle 1993).

All of these should be seen as jointly constructed and dialogical. Through the work I have come to focus on narrative as human interaction in relationships (Riessman and Quienney 2005). Obviously, there is no single story that could be claimed to encompass the individual experiences of the participants. The ones told here should be viewed against the background of my brief intellectual autobiography in part A of the thesis, as should be the ones that remain untold. The choices that I made as to which stories to tell have to do, first of all, with my need to understand the teacher's role in my students' narratives. Still, I might have chosen different stories from somebody else looking

at this data with the same motivation. The teacher memories have a particular place in the story for me: they are now an important part of a kaleidoscopic view of (E)FL.

My other purpose in choosing was to show the internarrativeness of my stories: by showing how they come in various patterns of my kaleidoscope. I hope I have managed to shed light on different sides or even layers of meaning-making, on how an experience evolves and becomes a new experience through the experiencing *I*. My third motive was to capture some instances of autobiographical elements and emotions at work in language learning. They are an element in all language-learning encounters no matter how fervently we would like to deny that. We use them, and we often hide them, but still act on them no matter what we say or write. It is, however, very difficult if not impossible to interpret them. Constructing a meaningful account of an emotional experience (see pattern six in particular for an attempt to do this) is challenging, but can also be empowering.

The ALMS kaleidoscope is also part of the broad way of using emplotment in linking narrative fragments and episodes. My way of telling the ALMS story in these kaleidoscope patterns has also been a creative process in which the text and the very process of writing are intertwined. The writing process ties this personal experiential narrative to a certain context or contexts, people, times and places. As Marjatta Saarnivaara (2002) claims, autobiographical episodes do not speak by themselves; they only speak if they are questioned by the researcher. The choices as to which episodes or stories the researcher listens to are firmly linked to research ethics: I am responsible for not launching stories that have been taken away from their experiential context. These particular stories can and should only be told in connection with my story and with an emphasis on the metaphoric resonance arising from them.

I hope I have managed to do what I was aiming at: to bring teacher stories and learner stories within one and the same turning of the kaleidoscope. I was not looking for logical cause-and-effect relationships, but was listening to the resonance and experiencing the power of stories in that way. This research kaleidoscope is also a way of presenting the learning, teaching/counselling and research as it appears to me in practice: an activity that is inherently episodic and fragmentary, not linear and logical, forever changing and forming new constellations when the setting changes, for example when new actors enter the picture, when approaches to learning and teaching change, or when narratives clash.

The resulting complexity and variability of the research text has to do with the effects of the telling on the story itself. Carola Conle (1999) suggests that the very telling makes up, at least in part, the teller's own perceptions about the events. Moreover, what she calls "now-perspectives" change with each telling because new information and circumstances influence the teller. Thus the told event is only "reality" from the current now-perspective. In part C I will use yet another now-perspective and telling, bringing in additional thoughts and horizons: my hand keeps turning the kaleidoscope.

PART C

WRITING INSIDE THE KALEIDOSCOPE:

Kaleidoscope pattern nine

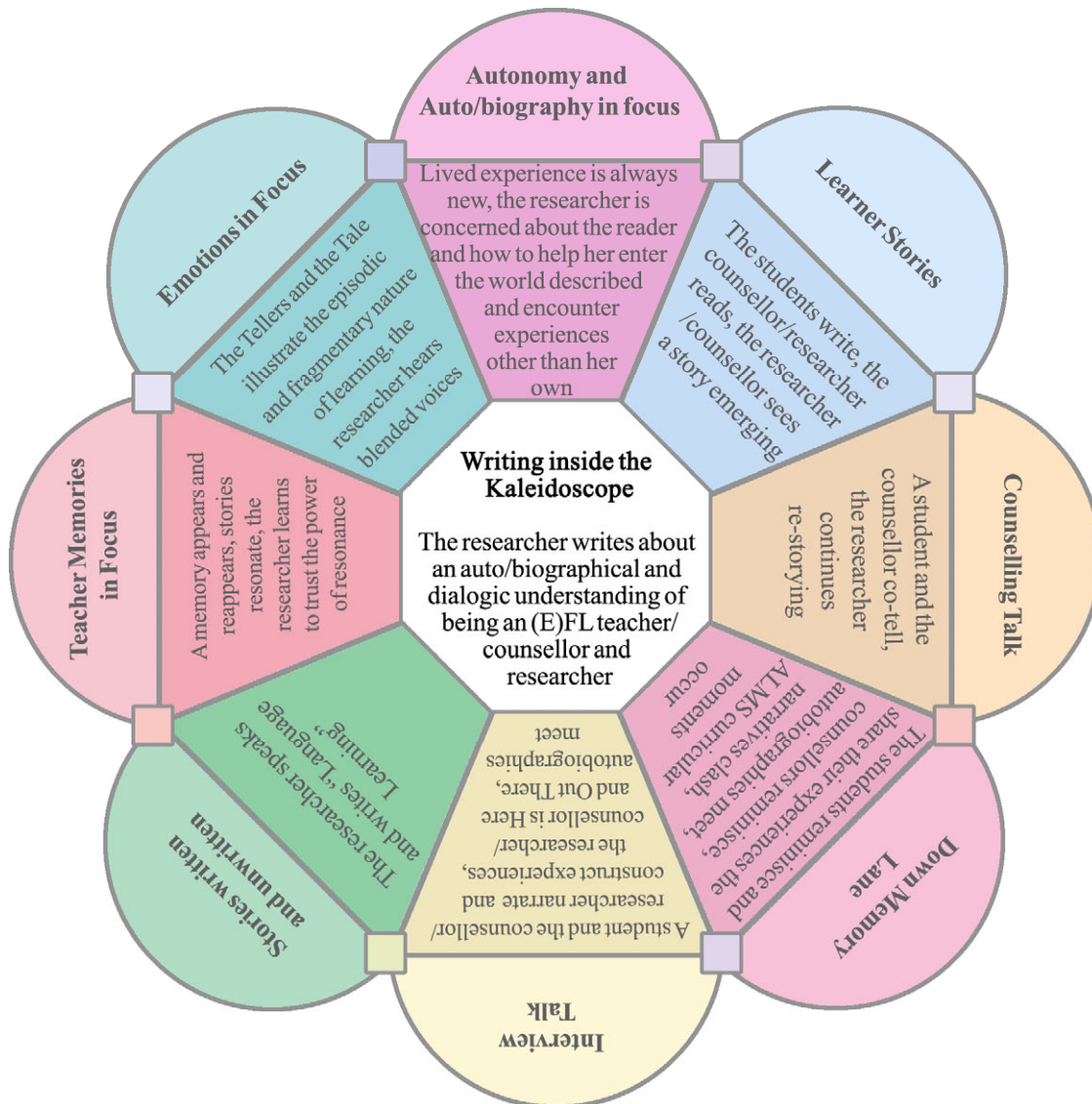


Figure 13: Kaleidoscope pattern nine: Writing inside the kaleidoscope

A writing story of (E)FL research as auto/biography

... but writing is not only a task done to finish off research.

(Saarnivaara 2004)

Marjatta Saarnivaara (2004) suggests that one should be motivated to write because one wishes to find out something one did not know before starting to write. She does not look upon writing simply as an activity at the end of the research process, a task done when one knows exactly what to say. For me, this became tangibly clear in the process: I realised I was doing something that was teaching me, something that was profoundly changing my thinking. Writing was a creative process. First and foremost, it deepened my understanding of what research methodology and choosing a method for research means. When I was trying to understand the various experiences narratively, I was thinking about them in terms of the complex three-dimensional inquiry space. This meant keeping in mind aspects of temporality (past, present, future), personal and social interaction, and the significance of place.

I have described and documented how my methodological and theoretical thinking developed in parts A and B of this thesis. This research started as a way of finding out what kind of experiences and memories were part of our ALMS learners' history and how these coloured their current experience of learning in ALMS. In the course of the writing I gradually became aware of how significant my internal quest was to the kinds of meanings I gave to those experiences and memories. Moreover, the way my own experiences and contexts were driving the research, both the process and the outcomes, became more evident when reflexivity in the research became a central factor.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) have emphasised how the shifting ground of inquiry phenomena in a narrative researcher's work makes it necessary to name them at many points during the process. They consider the complexity of the three-dimensional inquiry space as the basis of the shifting. This is what happened in my research as well. The phenomena shifted along the temporal dimension and, very importantly, the personal-social dimension. When my researcher position moved, the focus of the inquiry shifted: teacher knowledge and teacher identity came to the fore. Clandinin and Connelly's description of how one narrative inquirer tried to "shrink into corners of

elevators” when her colleagues asked her what her study was about rings true to me. This is not a question one can answer with finality at the beginning.

The foci in my work turned out to be the following:

1. describing ALMS encounters and specifying their narrative aspects;
2. reconceptualising learner and teacher autonomy in ALMS and in (E)FL;
3. developing (E)FL methodologically through a teacher-researcher’s identity work;
4. research writing as a dialogical narrative process and the thesis as an experiential narrative.

Writing became my way of constructing, gradually, what I now see as an auto/biographical dialogical understanding of being an (E)FL teacher. ‘Dialogue’ refers to both research reading and writing here. I have taken my reading of the autobiographical texts to be dialogical, an interactive process between me and the texts, but I have also taken an ethical approach that makes an empathetic reading possible. Moreover, I have come to understand autobiographical writing, both my own and the students’, as an exercise that is dialogical with life events, and multi-voiced. Writing, or story-telling, is the glue holding the foci together in this experiential story of a teacher-researcher.

My aim in this last textual self-study by an (E)FL teacher/counsellor is to describe how “writing inside the kaleidoscope” (Israel, 1990) happened. I will attempt to explain how writing affected me and how the changing research, teaching and learning context affected my writing. I am attempting yet another story, what could be called a writing story (cf. Richardson 1994, 2000) of the research re-storied in the kaleidoscope. I will also continue the theoretical and methodological reflections. Moreover, part C represents an attempt to bridge some of the gaps in the kaleidoscope stories and experiences. I am not, however, aiming at a conclusive interpretation of the individual or the collective stories. Like the stories in parts A and B, it begins with the notion that Molly Andrews (2004) brings up: when one is writing about the lives of others, ultimately the most that one can do is to strive for an interpretation that matches the complexity of the experience as told by the person concerned. I feel this is equally true of one’s own (research) experience.

A little story about consent and confidentiality: ethical concerns

This research was participatory in nature, carried out with, not on, learners and a counsellor. The aim was to empower, respect, and give voice to both as knowledgeable and active participants. This has not been easy or straightforward, however. A good intention is not enough to guarantee that a voice is given, not to speak of taken, in research. Moreover, auto/biography as the interpretative frame already admits to the impossibility of an innocent story-teller who fades away and leaves the stage to her participants.

Bochner and Ellis (2003, 155-156) suggest the following ethical assumptions for autoethnography, narrative ethnography, co-constructed narratives, personal narratives, research memoirs, and interactive interviews:

1. The researcher is seen as part of the research data.
2. A research text is always composed by a particular somebody somewhere.
3. Research involves the emotionality and subjectivity of both researchers and participants.
4. The research relationship between researchers and participants should be democratic; at the very least; researchers should acknowledge their obligations to the people they study and write about.
5. What researchers write, create, and/or perform should be written, created and/or performed for participants as much as about them; researchers and participants should be accountable to each other; researchers' voices should not dominate the voices of the participants.
6. Research should focus on what could be, not just about what has been.
7. Researchers should conceive of their readers and/or audiences as co-participants, rather than spectators, and should think with them not just about them.

All of these assumptions have guided me. Jo Reger (2001, 9) writes: "I was too visible, an ethically challenged contaminant that had no right to be in this space". The fear of this kind of researcher's taint was probably one of the reasons why I chose to collect my data in an ALMS module run by another counsellor, not my own course. Obviously, as an ethical solution it was justifiable because teachers are always the ones who have the power and the students' reaction was that it was better this way. Riikka, a student who did not want to be interviewed, laughingly mentioned how she was used to "always being videoed" because her secondary-school teacher had been doing her doctoral thesis work in Riikka's group. Had I been her counsellor she might have felt that she did not have the option not to be interviewed. Then again, I did not end up writing a third-person account of the

counsellor and her group. My researcher “*T*” appears in a leading role in this research text. The aim has been to appear as a character in the story, but not the all-knowing narrator, in order to preserve the agency of all participants alike (Conle 1999). I hope that my signature is not too vivid, and that I leave space for participant signatures (Clandinin and Connelly 2000), too.

When trying to tackle the question of where a researcher’s emotions about ethical conflicts belong in scholarly writing, Riessman (2005) was driven to storytelling. She calls in her narrative for ethics-in-context rather than abstract ethical principles. She sees a need to confront ethical issues in research relationships, and to seek solutions in a dialogic manner. We also need to call ourselves into question in our written representations by bringing into the spotlight the emotionally-charged relationships from the field. Storytelling has helped me to interrogate my emotions at various points in the research process. I have tried to include, not delete, these emotions in the stories told.

My starting point was a conviction that theory informs method; hence method is not separate from how we conceptualise the phenomenon, how we know and how we work with the knowledge. The whole process of telling a narrative history of experience is extremely complex. So far I have presented writing as a way of finding out, of learning, of knowing, of discovery and analysis, and of telling. It is also a process fraught with ethical dilemmas, however. All the way through the thesis process I have been concerned about consent, about confidentiality, anonymity, representation and participation. At the beginning the students and the counsellor gave their consent to the full use of the videos, and of the written and audioed documents. Yet, as narrative inquiry is contingent and unfolding, my text has been in progress all the time. The eight stories written in “Language Learning” have been read and approved of by the students. Joan has read through the thesis and given the green light to the text. However, I have given presentations and have written other texts arising from the thesis that were yet other interpretations in which I put bits of data from the thesis into a different context. This has always meant creating other, new experiential narratives. Consent is therefore an ongoing and open-ended process.

Lived experience is evoked in stories, in the telling and in the listening. My research hinges on listening to the stories, on seeing the participants as knowledgeable and active, not as mute objects. My listening and restorying is also a matter of confidentiality, however. Carola Conle’s insightful writings have guided me in dealing with ethical questions. She has repeatedly (1993, 1999, 2000, 2006) written about the contextual nature of stories and the importance of preserving their “experiential moorings” when restorying. I have taken her warnings about sending off “one-liners”

or “hardened stories” seriously, and have tried to make sure that the context is always given or created for each one.

I have taken the telling and the narratives to be dialogical in that the stories are shaped in the co-telling. My interpretation is based on a dialogic reading of the data, and should be seen as a suggestion that will leave room for the reader’s meaning-making. The reader has the possibility to test the verisimilitude and credibility of my interpretation through vicarious experience: could I have been part of this, could this have happened in my classroom/counselling session? My narrative is intended to help the reader to enter the world I am describing, and to meet an experience other than her own. Thus I hope that the meaning-making process will continue with the readers of the thesis, because the “results” of a narrative inquiry are for the readers themselves to find in the text: in the chapters, stories, episodes and fragments of the thesis.

Research writing as a relationship

My quest in this thesis has been to find a pedagogically-motivated way of researching learning and teaching interaction and, in particular, counselling, in an autonomous- language-learning environment. I have tried to develop appropriate and accurate methods that would make room for lived experience, meaning-making and narrating, because in my view these all characterise learning encounters between learners and counsellors. Lived experience as a source of meaning, telling and co-telling become especially significant when we try to listen to the diverse personal and academic voices of the past as expressed in autobiographical narratives. I have aspired to develop ways of researching learner-counsellor dialogues, and autobiographical narratives within the dialogues that show respect to the participants, that are relevant, reflective and also self-reflexive. Reflexivity, or more accurately, the process of becoming reflexive, has guided my research effort, which has turned out to be a rather complex quest.

In the middle part of my work I turned my gaze on various constellations of lived experience in my research kaleidoscope. I wanted to make sure that my data was multifarious: I collected material on various occasions and in different settings during the one course, videoing group and individual counselling sessions, carrying out biographic narrative interviews, inviting students to write open-ended, personally-inspired reflection texts on their learning histories, and asking permission to read and keep student logs and diaries. I have come to understand research as auto/biography in the sense that as a researcher I have used my own life and (E)FL experiences to understand and

interpret those of the research participants. It has also meant having my own actions, experiences and even my autobiography as research objects. Research writing in this sense needs to be reconsidered in order to give room for the researcher's, the participants' and the reader's meaning making: in other words, writing itself becomes inquiry into (E)FL. It was necessary to look for a genre of research writing that would be as close as possible to classroom and counselling interaction, and which would incorporate the autobiographical and experiential narratives of the participants.

In this last part of the thesis I am taking the morpheme 'graphe' of the term 'autobiography' as my starting point: I am mainly looking at the last element but I will inevitably claim the unity and integrity of the three (Greek *autos* meaning "self", *bios* "life", and *graphe* "writing")³⁷. The experiential is meant to be present all the time: in fact, it gives reason for the mode of writing that I have chosen, what I look upon as a more evocative way of writing the thesis. To me, narrative has its beginnings not in the text, but in interaction, in communication between people. For a teacher/counsellor the textual aspect is of great importance, though. Students write various texts on the course; the ones of most significance for this research were the autobiographical reflection texts. How the counsellor reads these texts, how she reads and analyses the writing, the process and the product, are both of significance.

I wanted to capture and raise questions about lived experience and its significance for how educational encounters are remembered and verbalised. I have not aimed at explaining what experience fundamentally is. Moreover, I have been aware of the limitations of language in trying to capture experience, but I have tried, as a teacher or a counsellor does when reaching out to students in various educational encounters, struggling to find ways, using English and/or Finnish, and always shaping the experience via the language used.

I have been writing in a doubly foreign language: in English and in "Language Learning". The latter has been simultaneously the more familiar and the less known to me. In part A I described this language in the following way: "an English that would give a tangible feel of (E)FL experiences, in part even bodily experiences but always experiences wrought with emotions and autobiographical elements". I have learnt "Language Learning" in various language classrooms in Finland and a few

³⁷ In the three parts of the thesis I have respectively dealt with issues arising from these three elements: in part A my concern was with the *self* and how the *self* was getting into grips with the research; in part B I was occupied with *life*, or *lives*, the lived experience, life as lived in language-learning encounters; in part C, as noted above, I describe the *writing* as glue holding together these elements and many others.

abroad, in Britain and Germany, over a long period of time, 40 years altogether. I have also learnt it outside classrooms, at different points in time, at different durations, in different environments. I have learnt as a pupil, a student, a teacher, a counsellor and a teacher-researcher. I have learnt it while learning English and also other foreign languages. I have learnt it because of and despite of certain factors, including teachers, co-learners, materials, methods, routines, motivational factors, emotions, personal problems, my personality, strategies and learning styles, an endless number of factors that have coloured my learning process. I take all that learning to have a bearing on how this thesis has been written.

My thesis proposal was worded so that the focus was on neither the role of writing nor the language to be used. In particular, the proposal did not foresee the thesis process as a struggle to bring together English and Finnish, which I now consider part of my learning more “Language Learning”. It did not envisage an effort to find ways of using and describing the use of the two languages as carriers of stories, stories that turned out to be somewhat different, not truly identical. Catherine Kohler-Riessman (2002) writes that a narrative researcher is forever translating; as an interpreter of the lives of others we translate. But I have also been engaged in self-translation at numerous junctures and border-crossings during my research process when I have moved from reading to writing, from listening to writing, and back again. The language of my data and documents has been blended and when writing this text a blend, “Language Learning”, has been my goal. Translation has thus come to mean not only translating bits of data and text from Finnish into English but also the process of translating the experiences talked about both in Finnish and in English into yet another experiential language in the thesis.

The fact that telling stories happened in two languages in ALMS became extremely significant for the research. This is not the way we work on a “normal” course because the official language of the programme is English. We have wanted to help and encourage students to talk and write about their learning in English, and in the counselling we use English for sharing stories. Consequently, Finnish has not normally been the main language of reminiscing, although I have moved between the two languages in my own counselling with students on the remedial ALMS course in particular. On this course, however, many stories were told to me in Finnish and these have been re-storied in the thesis in English. Reiss and Vermeer (1986) emphasise the fact that a translator always has an intention and a purpose, which are built into the translation process. My intention has been to translate in a way that leaves the text slightly unpolished, so as to resemble classroom and/or real-life language learning/using. Translating is not an innocent process and it is influenced not only by

the actual texts (writings, images or sound) but also by the context of interpretation, and the intended audience and its expectations (Oittinen 2006).

As part of the translation process, trying to give voice to personal expressions led me to look for new, more suggestive and evocative ways of writing. When I was reading through, listening to and watching episodes from the data I started noticing images and expressions that were metaphoric. I encountered, for example, the following expressions in Finnish: 'käy kimppuun kuin yleinen syyttäjä' (attacks one like a public prosecutor), 'riveittäin tentattiin' (grilled row by row), 'oltiin liemessä' (we were in a pickle), 'aina saman kaavan mukaan' (always according to one and the same pattern). These metaphoric or otherwise unusually strong expressions in Finnish affected me deeply when I was either looking for ways of translating them into English or just struggling to embed them into my writing as experiences. They were a driving force when I started understanding the links between bits of analysis through resonance. Even before I read Carola Conle I had already experienced resonance as internal echoes when collecting the data and starting to read the stories. Resonance was happening when the stories in the data met mine and each other, when one story made me make metaphorical links with another (Conle 1993, 268). It was sometimes very difficult to decide how to tell the story in English, and in the telling to connect form and meaning in a way that would enable further resonance.

The situatedness of knowledge has become very clear to me in the process of writing: it became tangible when I wrote separate pieces, seminar papers, articles and book chapters arising from the thesis process. My interpretative process has been influenced by the different contexts of writing, and my position shifted and kept shifting as I looked at my data at various stages. Catherine Kohler Riessman (2002) points out the importance of paying attention to positioning in personal narrative. She particularly calls for researchers to return to texts they have analysed in the past. This is what I did when I started to write my intellectual autobiography for the thesis, and as part of that went back to look at Mike's story in particular in the light of my theoretical perspective and autobiographical insights³⁸ as they were at that point in the research and writing. Kohler Riessman claims, and it is my conviction as well, that writing can reveal how the positioning of the researcher influences what she "sees" or "hears" in the data.

³⁸ See Appendix 2 for my theoretical and autobiographical perspectives in the licentiate thesis..

When I encountered Liz Stanley's work and understood the implications of auto/biography (the interrelatedness of autobiographical narrative and telling somebody else's story) for a teacher-researcher's work, I also realised that I had not paid enough attention in the licentiate to the moment of telling, or to the influence of present concerns and future aspirations on interpreting a personal narrative. The slash in the term marks a fluid boundary in many ways: self and other, fact and fiction, past and present, reality and representation, can all be approached as intermixed rather than separate. These issues were emerging and taking shape in the content and form of my research and writing. Consequently, I felt that my autobiography and its workings were not accounted for in my analysis of Mike in my licentiate work. I also noticed that I had not accounted for the emotions generated in the research interviews. I had not seen Mike's personal narrative as an (E)FL learner from the point of view of the performative features of autobiographical narratives (Kohler Riessman 2002) either. The strategic choices that Mike made as a narrator in terms of positioning himself in the story as an agent and as an object might have been interesting avenues to explore.

Kohler Riessmann's (2002) exhortation to engage in reinterpretation made me go back to Mike's story a second time during this thesis process. Looking at my reading of the interview text yet again helped me see that I had been struck by the fact that Mike's story in ALMS became a story without a happy end. It also made it clear to me, however, that I never acknowledged the strength of my reaction in my licentiate. Professionally, I was only slowly realising the full importance of the atopos, the dialogue and discourse of counselling. The friction and its roots in the quality of the dialogue and the significance of a longer and deeper perspective on both the learner's and the counsellor's history to the quality of the discourse became my main results and conclusions. The complexity of the atopos still escaped me; one missing feature was the narrator's intention and the context and audience relationships of personal narratives. In Mike's case I was his audience but so were the other students in the group interview, which I transcribed and from which I used extracts in my analysis of Mike. I did not touch upon the other students' reactions or responses to his stories.

Obviously, my writing process and my interpretations of Johanna, Päivi, Aino, Anne, Katja, Juuso, Maria and Mia and the group counsellor as part of that writing have shifted my position even more: I have come to give more new meanings to Mike's story, in particular his story in ALMS. One area that I did not look into thoroughly was the research relationship: how Mike saw me and how I saw myself. Moreover, the counter-narrative to autonomy that Mike was probably telling almost escaped me. Kohler Riessmann (2002) notes that autobiographical imperatives draw us to certain

interpretations and not to others. I am now convinced that there are be still other perspectives that could illuminate this issue rather differently.

For me, it is important now to acknowledge the historical situatedness of my interpretation and to draw attention to how the way I look upon learner autonomy and learner identity and counsellor/teacher autonomy and identity has changed to include autobiographical elements, and their role in how we tell our story as learners and counsellors. Here I see the same process as in teaching situations: we are only understanding with our partial selves, we are only understanding tentatively. It is always a limited understanding that we have of phenomena: we need others to complement our fragmentary understanding.

I have told many stories in the previous two sections of my thesis. Some of them probably seem repetitive, some disconnected from the rest. For me, having put these stories next to each other, however, has meant finding explanations for my actions as a teacher, as a counsellor, and as a researcher. Storytelling has proven to be a reconstructive process: it has helped me to put the teacher and student perspectives in the same picture, and to see how I move from one to the other, and to still different positions. Through storytelling I have been able to have my actions, my biography and experiences as research objects alongside the course, its participants and their actions, biographies and experiences. It has helped me to get a glimpse of how students and another counsellor make sense of learning and teaching situations. The explanations that I have found are what Polkinghorne (1988, 21) has called narrative explanations:

In the narrative schema for organising information, an event is understood to have been explained when its role and significance in relation to a human project is identified. This manner of explanation is different from that favoured by logico-mathematical reasoning, where explanation is understood to occur when an event can be identified as an instance of an established law or pattern of relationship among categories. (...) But explanation by means of narrative is contextually related.

One more issue that the very writing has helped me partially to clarify is the emotionally-charged quality of learning and teaching encounters, and how to deal with this in research. As a counsellor I hope to reach out for, to react to the resonating feeling in my students' autobiographical telling. In this text I can only aim at *describing* learning encounters in which emotions have caused participants to react and act in various ways.

Senni Timonen (2004, 403) writes:

Could research on emotions have as its result the mere articulation of feeling? A text that in one way or another touches upon and whispers about the research object itself?

Like Timonen, I wanted to take up emotions and their experiential, bodily, affective and reflective layers in teaching/counselling and learning encounters in (E)FL. Like Timonen, I have been deeply aware of the difficulty of distinguishing between them and at the same time, describing their organic unity. Experience has been the process through and in which emotions have taken shape, where I, too, have located them. It has been my intention not to objectify experience and the emotions of others. By aiming at *describing* rather than *explaining* the autobiographical and situated experiences of the research participants, I hope I have tapped into the role of emotions in language learning. I have not tried to describe the richness of emotions in all their variations, nor have I aimed at an exhaustive description and explanation of causalities. Like Timonen in her thesis on folklore, I have written about positive and negative feelings, the extremes of emotion mainly, the very intuitive basic feelings that the stories about learning and teaching seem to express. I have come to see research writing as a feeling process, as an experiential and experimental activity, and as a method for (E)FL.

David Morris (2002) borrows the concept of ‘thinking with stories’ from Arthur W. Frank. In a modest way I feel I have been thinking ‘with’ stories, not exclusively ‘about’ stories. For Morris, thought not only involves reasoning, it also represents a crucial collaboration with feeling. The linking, rather than the separation of reason and emotion that was my concern at the beginning has led me to approach narrative as something that obligates me as a listener and a reader. I have not taken narrative as an object for complex analytical interpretation with a view to fully knowing its meaning, or to reducing it to a generalisation. Instead, I have “allowed narrative to work on me” (Morris 2002, 196).

My worry at the outset of the research was how to capture and later represent different perspectives on the same educational encounter. I came up with my version of doing bricolage (see Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, Roth and McRobbie 1999), my kaleidoscope of ALMS stories. It was in this kaleidoscope that I represented a learning environment through my readings of various oral and written texts from the interviews, the videoed counselling sessions and group meetings, the student work, writings by theorists and practitioners in education and (E)FL, and my own professional

discourse. Thus I aimed to produce a research text in which there was no single conclusive master narrative. My own researcher story is meant to be read as a possible representation of the whole, and I hope to leave the readers the opportunity to create their own reading and representation of the experiences. Roth and McRobbie state that a text like this will require a different way of reading, an engaged reading: readers are invited to submerge themselves in the multiple experiences through the kaleidoscopic bricolage of texts, texts that parallel, complement, intersect and disrupt each other; texts that, I hope, do not marginalise or delete feelings, emotions and narrative ways of knowing.

Kenneth Gergen (2007) suggests that writing is fundamentally an action within a relationship, and only gains meaning and significance within relationships. He continues to argue that we need to be concerned about how we choose to write because our manner of writing invites certain forms of relationship while at the same time discouraging or even suppressing others. He refers, in particular, to scholarly writing and its existing traditions. He is intrigued by the communal dimension of discourse and the need to increasingly appreciate how ways of writing establish a particular relationship between writers and readers.

As far as my research writing is concerned, Gergen's argument has a lot to offer. Writing as an impersonal form of address with a single expert in the know addressing an anonymous readership is not what I would choose to use in communication with my students as a teacher. This carries over to my writing as a researcher. Educational writing in general should, in my view, help to create vicarious experiences by also capturing some of the emotional and experiential aspects of what the writer is describing. First-person narratives may have the power to, as Gergen puts it, "diminish the boundary between author and reader". They invite the reader to "think with the writer". In the context of learner autonomy, it is important not to position oneself as a superior. I feel that this is less likely to happen when the very writing aims at speaking from experience. This kind of writing invites participation from learners who have a long history of educational encounters behind them as well. Language learners' everyday knowledge of language is then included in the multitude of forms of knowledge, all of which have significance in (E)FL.

Gergen suggests that Bakhtin's idea of speaking as a form of ventriloquation could be interpreted to mean that the words we use are born within a relationship; they are not mine, not yours but ours. This is very much what happens in a language counselling situation: what we speak as counsellor and learner is born in the atopos, the between that echoes the voices of former teachers, both the

learner's and the counsellor's. It echoes the voices of former learners and co-learners. The very counselling relationship gives birth to these words. When researching that relationship and writing about it one needs to open up the atopol further to include the readers, a new mode of relationship.

ALMS writing as a relationship

My aim in this section is to explore student writing in ALMS which is the parallel relational writing in the programme. Some of the problems that I encountered in my research writing and some of the solutions I came up with are relevant considerations for our students' writing, too.

In ALMS we have aspired to empower our students by giving them a solid basis in learning-to-learn: there has been a firm emphasis on developing their strategic skills in learning languages. Many ALMS students still come with the baggage of form-focussed language classrooms (Huttunen 1996). Some come with hurts and wounds from previous learning situations. Many come with very good skills in grammar and vocabulary, solid language knowledge. Some have a good command of the language and also good confidence as language users, but others have problems with launching into using the language orally or in writing. The teacher expectations vary and counsellors thus face complex needs and demands.

We have always covered the two kinds of knowledge in language acquisition that according to Claire Kramsch are requested of us as language teachers by second language acquisition theory: *knowing that* (facts about language) and *knowing how to* (language performance) (Kramsch 2005). From the beginning we emphasised learning-to-learn, which we saw as empowering the students, in our determination to foster their meta-cognitive skills. We defined learning-to-learn fairly widely: it implied understanding the complex and multilayered nature of language learning. To begin with it implied choosing appropriate learning approaches, planning a language learning programme and carrying it out, and evaluating skills and levels. However, in the course of our research efforts and our writing projects, and through this inquiry in particular, the need to have knowledge about and appreciate the integral nature of educational and life experience, and to consider the role of affect and emotions, has become more and more significant. This means that we now, as part of the counselling, put a lot of effort into the students' *remembering how* and *imagining what if*, i.e., we focus much more on empowerment through encouraging autobiographical reflexivity.

In my inquiry I have come to read new meaning into the teaching and learning of the four skills of reading, writing, discussion and listening for both counsellors and learners. I feel that I have developed a better awareness of how deeply dialogic language learning is, and how each skill is in dialogue with the other skills and the users. It is this linking and interaction, a braidedness of the skills, that I would like to promote in teaching writing skills in ALMS. Although this section focuses on students' writing and as such should be seen as a parallel story to the one I have just told about research writing, I do not see student writing as separate from the other skills. I will argue, in fact, that writing and reading feed speaking and listening, and the atopus of counselling is, and should be, filled with voices from all of these.

There is a clear need for us to teach practical writing skills required for CVs and letters, job applications, emails and other product-oriented forms, as there is to teach academic writing for various disciplines and departments. Apart from these, but also in connection with the latter as regards qualitative research, I suggest we give equal weight to more personal approaches to writing. (E)FL offers an excellent opportunity for developing evocative writing as described by Laurel Richardson (1994 and 2000). Her idea of CAP (creative analytic practices), for example, offers language learners a rich field for trying out their skills in writing. English for Specific Purposes teaching, which is a central and valuable field in our university language centres, has at times been approached in a very technical way. There is a danger of excluding students whose approach to learning might benefit more from personalised encounters with the language. It would be good to think that English will continue to be a foreign language that is not only "the language of professional ambition and achievement" (Kaplan 1994) but that opens up unpredictable associational worlds.

When writing a text or a story is seen as a creative process the focus may move to writing as such, and to the interwoven nature of the process and the product. Unlike the writing that our learners have practised and mastered at school, the whole becomes more important than the details, the message becomes more central than the individual mistakes. Writing stops being a "gift" for the teacher and becomes telling, retelling, reconstructing and giving a form to lived experience. It brings the writer into contact with her autobiography and promotes the use of the foreign language as a way of communicating. In ALMS we have offered Creative Writing Groups and Writing for Learning Groups, and recently what we have called Autobiographical Writing Groups. As personal stories are not and can never be wholly personal, these kinds of writing processes and products always share something and tap into the intersubjective aspects of experience. Sharing the stories in

a writing group may facilitate reflection on the learning process. Furthermore, questions concerning the foreign language itself are brought into the discussion, not as mistakes or flaws but often as “this is how I could best express it but I feel there could be another way”: the limitations of expressing and describing experience are a fruitful way of encouraging and pointing out the similarity of the process when we use our mother tongue.

ALMS course documents are multi-meaning texts, both for the students asked to produce them and for the counsellors reading them. Learning diaries, for example, have many meanings and readings in that they can be looked upon as reporting texts, as evaluations of learning, as inter-texts, as personal life stories, and/or as emotional ventilations. Among these documents, however, what we have called reflection texts are probably the ones that carry the most meanings and possibly have the most confusing elements in them. Inspired by Alice Kaplan’s *French Lessons: A Memoir* whilst working on my licentiate, I was looking for a way of encouraging reminiscing, and reflecting on the significance of past language-learning experiences for what students were going through in ALMS. We ended up asking our students to write free-form texts on their histories, their present skills and wishes for the near future, the ALMS course that they were just beginning. In effect, these are versions of ‘Language Memoirs’, students’ first-person narratives on their histories as language learners.

When we introduced the reflection texts into the programme I had not read Alice Kaplan’s seminal essay ‘On language memoir’, in which she, in fact, coined the term for this genre. My motivation was - in the spirit of action research - to improve the ALMS programme by feeding in a new practice that I had come to see would potentially improve the quality of the students’ learning. I had read Aneta Pavlenko’s 2001 article ‘Language learning memoirs as a gendered genre’, though. In 2002, when I finished my licentiate and as an enactment following my reading of Kaplan’s book and Pavlenko’s article, we introduced the reflection texts to the programme. Since then, research into the genre, which is now also referred to as ‘translingual memoir’ (Besemeres 2006, Pavlenko 2006), has proliferated. Because my interest in this genre has been predominantly through counsellor eyes, I have become more and more fascinated not only by the writing of the texts, but also by the reader responses, my own and other counsellors’ dialogic reading, listening and responding to them. These have all been issues and interests in this research.

In my teacher-researcher’s mind and daily work autobiographical narratives are not primarily data, but function more importantly as a learning tool, a part of the interaction between learners and

counsellors: learners write and tell, counsellors read and co-tell. In my view, the core of both teaching and researching teaching should be in promoting an autobiographical reflexive approach to (E)FL encounters (Jaatinen 2003), and I am convinced that the writing of ‘language memoirs’ in the form of ALMS reflection texts helps the students to reflect upon their past language-learning experiences and emotions. Through this reflection they become aware of their narrative language-learner identities, which are multiple and complex, fragmented and episodic. As in the turning of the kaleidoscope, novel constellations of experience arise whenever new teachers, co-learners and classrooms are encountered, but there are always shadows of and inscriptions by past events in every new beginning, say, of a language course. As Claire Kramsch (2005) notes, language memoirs bring into focus the role of private memory and imagination in (E)FL learning: remembering *how* (past experiences and emotions) and imagining *what if* (future scenarios for action), which could be seen as focal elements of a reflexive approach to learning.

What is particularly interesting for ALMS is that the ‘language memoir’ genre as practised by Eva Hoffman in *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* and Alice Kaplan in *French Lessons: A Memoir*³⁹ means narrating in English something concerning experiences that they have had as people who have studied and to a certain extent lived in more than one language. Their unique learning background enriches and diversifies their experience and makes it possible for them to express insights into language learning in a way that is not possible for a monolingual person. Whereas these writers write their stories from the perspective of someone now fully in command of the language, our students with their varying but on the whole relatively high level of English definitely share some of that experience of remembering when they were not as competent users of English as today. Obviously, our students are still learning and are not using the foreign language to the same extent as Hoffman and Kaplan, but they are doing very much the same thing: trying to give coherence to what were fragmented events (Kramsch 2005). Unlike Hoffman and Kaplan, they are not accomplished writers, they are not ex-patriots or exiles, or immigrants, they are not forced to learn English and to disuse their own language. Still, they are writing about experiences that have come about because they are not monolinguals, having all learnt English and Swedish, but many also French, German, Russian, Spanish, and/or Italian and it is this experience that makes it possible for them to say something more than would have been possible for a monolingual person.

³⁹ These two are referred to in most research on translingual writing, but there are many others such as Julia Alvarez, Elias Canetti, Kyoko Mori and Vladimir Nabokov, to mention a few.

Moreover, these texts are not only tellings of anecdotal instances from individual students' learning histories: they are always inter-textual and socially bound to numerous learning encounters between learners, peers and teachers of various languages. As such, they are valuable data for a researcher, and may shed light on the (E)FL experiences of such European children who started studying English at a very early age. Our students have studied their other domestic language (Swedish for most of them) and one or more other foreign languages from a young age as well, usually from their early teens. They thus have long and multilayered language-learning histories, which are full of intense and sometimes emotionally-wrought events and encounters. Finnish university students' learner identities have been influenced by the competitive role of English in Finland: mastering English is a must, and *not* mastering English may single them out as inadequate failures. Their experience of learning Swedish, which many consider a questionable and undesired duty rather than an opportunity, adds to the Finnish paradox of what Claire Kramsch (2005) calls "the multilingual experience".

Our students have experienced and readily write about intense classroom episodes and/or real-life learning situations, which have often been explained away without touching upon the emotional side of the experiences. I believe that through inviting them to write autobiographical texts we enable them to enact the multilingual experience on the symbolic level, which according to Kramsch antedates the communicative and intercultural experiences focussed on in (E)FL. What is equally important, however, is that in entering the reader role and accepting the necessity of an autobiographical reading of these first-person texts counsellors in ALMS can take the dialogue further and together create new beginnings for learning more. Stories are of necessity told to someone: whether they are oral or written they are always addressing someone. The addressees may be real or imagined, and they may even be imagined versions of the narrator. These are the reasons why I approach the writing of autobiographical narratives as an inter-subjective process. This kind of exchange aims at producing a shared understanding of the meaning of an educational encounter (Smith and Watson 2001). According to this view it is justified to invite students to reminisce, as well as to ask for permission to read the students' texts.

When students come to ALMS they bring with them a collection of memories and experiences from different foreign-language classrooms. These memories are related to their teachers, the methods and techniques used, their successes and failures in tests, and other stories. They do not necessarily mention writing experiences as such in their reflection texts. As counsellors and researchers, however, we need to concern ourselves with these experiences and their relevance to what and how

the students write. Many of our students carry their writing baggage with them: school memories of writing in foreign- language classes could be described as a “gift” for the teacher, (Saarnivaara et al., 2004), rather than as a source of pleasure or self-expression. Their memories show that writing at school was an impersonal activity that was rarely used for understanding one’s feelings, thoughts, or experiences. The discursive practices of school are with us when we write: we do not want be excluded, we do not wish to produce texts that are not considered worthy.

Consequently, both as a counsellor and as a researcher I read the reflection texts with this ambivalence in mind: the writing is intended for the language counsellor, but it is also a way of giving meaning to the educational and life history of the writer. As stated earlier, to me as a counsellor, narrative has its beginnings not in the text, but in interaction, in the communication between people, in this case learners and counsellors. However, for both the learner and the counsellor the textual aspect is of great importance, too. How the counsellor reads the texts, and how she reacts to both the process and the product are of significance. In the end, what probably matters the most is “hearing” what the student has to say.

Finding a voice

My teacher’s name is Miss Brownell. I don’t like the cut of her jib. (...) She is too sarkastik and she likes to make you rediklus. Then she laughs at you in a disagreeable, snorting way. But I forgave her for slapping me and I took a boquet to her to school next day to make up. She received it very coldly and let it fade on her desk. In a story she would have wepped my neck. I don’t know whether it is any use forgiving people or not. Yes, it is, it makes you feel more comfortable yourself.

L. M. Montgomery, *Emily of New Moon*

Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2006, 29) writes: “Teacher knowledge is deeply personal, so research which studies teaching from a narrative perspective has no choice but to go in close”. This has been a difficult but empowering venture. In this part of the thesis, I have made the effort and will try to further document the role of writing as inquiry into this process. In this section I will describe how writing helped me to develop my voice as a teacher-researcher by going close. The two qualities of the writing process that I have come to consider important are the ones that Elbaz-Luwisch also paid attention to: firstly, writing is intrinsically a feeling process and secondly, it is a narrative autobiographical process in which the writer is in dialogue with herself. It was through writing that

I became aware of the possibilities of reflexive self-study as a starting point towards a narratively contextualised teacher-self: autobiographical writing and autobiographical reading helped me to find answers to many interpretative questions.

The issue of teacher identity is one focus that has grown out of the narrative process. When I started my work I wanted to bring the seemingly separate teacher and learner stories under the same research lens. Identity was not a research focus at the outset. The more I was writing about the learning encounters in ALMS, the clearer it became, however, that a lot of the work was about a teacher's narrative identity.

A decisive meaning-making instance for me was, when through autobiographical reading and the very writing, both in the research diary and within the first attempts at thesis writing, I became aware of how strong the vicarious experiences were when I encountered the representations of teachers in the texts and the stories of others, in the jokes told, and in the memories shared. My understanding of the relationship between these texts and my own meaning-making process was broadening, and I started to reflect on the role of these textual doubles in my reading, creating meaning and making choices and decisions. I found an intriguing parallel in Kali Israel's writings on the multiple relationships between lives, images and stories. Kali Israel (1990) writes⁴⁰:

... there are numbers of overtly factual works in which a character is said to be teacher [Victorian woman] X, or overtly fictional works in which a character is said to be based on her figure. The phenomenon of a teacher's [Victorian woman's] existence in the texts of others and the possibilities made and destroyed for the self by these textual doubles; the phenomenon of teachers [women] reading themselves into texts and looking to texts for models of persons which they might be, actively seeking and choosing among stories and characters.

I recognised the same phenomenon of teachers' existence as figures in the texts of others and how it often happened that I the read myself into these texts. Sandra Weber and Claudia Mitchell (1995) suggest that our teacher identities stem from both individual and collective life history in that our stories are not only our personal accounts, but are simultaneously cultural, institutional and historical. They use the term 'cumulative cultural text' to describe the multitude of images of teachers that occur and recur in films, books, television, children's play, and in people's memories,

⁴⁰ I have replaced all her uses of 'Victorian woman/women' in the text with the word 'teacher/s'.

writing and drawing. Their study is a reading of the textual representations or images that form the collective biography of teachers. Like Weber and Mitchell, I have been interested in how images of teachers in students' texts and in research literature, and to a lesser extent in fiction, have coloured my teacher voice and infiltrated my identity.

Eila Estola (2003) discusses teacher identity as other-oriented. She suggests that, although the overwhelming majority of teachers are women, women's practices, experiences, ways of thinking and, what is of special interest here, their relational way of constructing their teacher identities, have been considered deficient or ignored. She proposes that teachers construct their identities based on the cultural narratives about teachers that are available to them. According to her broad theoretical framework, that of the narrative-biographical approach, the first stage in the development of our teacher identities takes place before our formal education. Formal education and teacher education are only the second, albeit significant stage in this development. In her research into the relational moral as expressed in Finnish teachers'⁴¹ stories she found out that various categories of voices were discernible in their construction of identity. Apart from the multitude of voices from teacher education and other formal education, the multi-voiced discourse of educational policy, administration and the media was also discernible. It is very significant that teachers construct their identities in the midst of many contradictory and differing voices.

I have repeatedly used the term 'voice' in this work. I might not have used it consistently but I have tried to keep in mind the fact that voice, a concept drawn from Bakhtin's currently popular work, is not simply an expression of individual subjectivity: it is a complex issue. Expressing our own ideas and claiming a voice is not a straightforward, easy matter (Elbaz-Luwisch 2002, Lensmire and Satanovsky 1998). Especially in connection with teachers' professional growth and developing a voice through writing, Lensmire and Satanovsky's idea of voice as "a project involving appropriation, social struggle and becoming" (Lenamire and Satanovsky 1998, 284) is inspiring. The notions of 'project' and 'appropriation' accurately describe the nature of my research writing as autobiographical writing: it is ongoing and complex, and it echoes the influence of others in my language and writing.

Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2002 and 2005) argues that Bakhtin's understanding of voice in general, and his distinction between authoritative and internally persuasive discourses in particular, offer a

⁴¹ Eila Estola makes no difference between secondary-school, primary-school and kindergarten teachers in her study.

way of making sense of both particular teaching stories and the work of teaching on the whole. By authoritative discourses Bakhtin (1981) referred to the language of society and its institutions, among them the language of disciplines and of academic writing (Elbaz-Luwisch 2005). Internally persuasive discourse, then, is language used by individuals or small groups lacking in authority, but it has significance for an individual's thinking when the person engages in a process of "distinguishing between one's own and another's discourse, between one's own and another's thought" (Bakhtin 1981, 342). Autobiographical writing is something that can help us to formulate our own internally persuasive discourses (Bakhtin 1981, Elbaz-Luwisch 2005).

Freema Elbaz-Luwisch (2002) personally experienced how writing a research article was a process of interacting discourses: she tried to appropriate for herself the language of Bakhtin, which she found internally persuasive but had to struggle to make her own. She describes this as a process of self-study that has theoretical voices in it, sometimes muted, sometimes integrated into the text, sometimes left behind in the participants' words. My research began as a struggle to speak outside of the authoritative discourse, but using its very words, which were the ones readily available at the time. When engaging in autobiographical writing I have also struggled to appropriate many theoretical voices, that of Bakhtin among others⁴², and I have come to consider writing as a way of appropriation and becoming, as a process of claiming and developing a voice. Research writing which is not linear, but fragmentary, cross-disciplinary and intertextual, has had an influence on how I am now presenting the idea of teacher identity. Writing has both disintegrated and integrated various fragmentary elements in my past teacher self, and in my many ways of being a teacher, a learner, and a researcher.

⁴² Elbaz-Luwisch (2005, 14) writes about these voices of theory and how they echo in the stories teachers tell about their work: "... a theorist might wince to hear what use is made of his or her ideas."

My story to live by

Learners, teachers and researchers are storytellers in their own and others' stories.

Connelly and Clandinin (1990)

A biography is considered complete if it merely accounts for six or seven selves, whereas a person may well have as many as a thousand.

Virginia Woolf, *Orlando*

In their efforts to understand teacher knowledge, Connelly and Clandinin (1999) have developed concepts that reflect their epistemological interest in the personal and practical nature of education. They (1988, 25) give the following definition of their term 'personal practical knowledge':

Personal practical knowledge is in the teacher's past experience, in the teacher's present mind and body, and in the future plans and actions. Personal practical knowledge is found in the teacher's practice. It is, for any teacher, a particular way of reconstructing the past and the intentions of the future to deal with the exigencies of a present situation.

The storied quality of teacher knowledge became increasingly clear to them. When they realised that it was both formed and expressed in teachers' personal and social contexts, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) developed another narrative educational concept, 'professional knowledge landscape', which seeks to capture and describe the complexity of the context in which teacher knowledge is formed and expressed. The metaphor of landscape allows for space, place and time. It allows for different people and events and a multitude of relationships. Thus, it acts as both an intellectual and a moral landscape. For me ALMS is a very central location, but there are many other features and characters in my professional landscape that I have tried to give glimpses of in the thesis.

Clandinin and Connelly (1996) further recognised 'secret', 'sacred' and 'cover' stories that make up the landscape. When teachers move back and forth between their out-of-classroom and in-classroom places on the landscape, they live and tell different stories. Sacred stories represent the theory-driven view advocated by practitioners, policy makers and theoreticians, and they are

encountered in the out-of-classroom places. When teachers move to the in-classroom place they are free to live stories of practice and to speak in the freedom of their classrooms, giving expression to the lived story. Cover stories are told in order to fit oneself into the acceptable range of the current story of a school, they are, again, out-of-classroom stories. The language Clandinin and Connelly used to describe the landscape has understandably resonated with teachers.

They developed a further term, 'stories to live by', to make the narrative link between knowledge, identity and context. They suggest that teachers' working lives are shaped by stories, and that these 'stories to live by' comprise their teacher identity. "Who am I in my story of teaching? Who am I in my students' stories? Who am I in the administration stories? Who am I in my colleagues' stories?" These are identity questions that we as teachers try to answer, and they are also extremely important questions to which we as teachers need to pay attention. Only by attending to our own stories can we attend to our students' stories.

My thesis work could be considered an inquiry into my teacher identity, my story to live by. In trying to understand the multifaceted teacher knowledge and multiple narrative identity of a language teacher I have drawn on the Bakhtinian idea (see also Elbaz-Luwisch 2005) of multivoicedness or polyphony. This helps in tying together the strands of the tangled web of a storied identity and it helps in explaining the composing and changing of stories to live by. It also helps in avoiding the conclusion that there are different kinds of voices that can always be distinguished. It is rather the case that teachers engage in many complex conversations, and that 'voice' does not mean giving expression to something given that points to some essence inside us (Lensmire and Satanovsky 1998). Bakhtin's dialogue as an umbrella term also places meaning, identity and story in the atops, in between, in the encounters between people. Thus it is possible to see teacher identity as something changing, discontinued, vulnerable and complex, discordant and in all this, deeply human. It could be researched by giving meanings to various encounters between teachers and students, teachers and colleagues, teachers and administrators and, in school settings, between teachers and parents. The tangible everyday feeling of speaking with many different voices as a teacher has come to mean teacher identity as a multivoiced, dialogic narrative (Elbaz-Luwisch 2005).

Voicing subjective experiences and sensations requires a language, it requires a community, and while recognising the inadequacy of language in describing experience, I see in narrative the possibility and potential of understanding and providing an opportunity for others, the listener or

reader, to vicariously experience what the other has experienced. Varpu Löyttyniemi (2004, 36) writes about narrative medicine what I could have written about a narrative approach to teaching and counselling:

...narrative makes it possible to understand the patient [student], which is not the same as knowing fully but more positioning oneself in the dialogic space opened up by narrative, applying the doctor's[teacher/counsellor's] own experience and storytelling ability, imagining what the patient [student] has experienced and co-telling further.

I have taken teaching/counselling and research on them to be similar in nature, and have considered the narrative aspects in them by remembering that I have been part of the story myself. In my work as a counsellor the co-telling happens when we negotiate the student's programme arising from her history, and when we touch upon various memories and experiences that might resonate with my educational history as a learner, teacher or counsellor, or my personal history. Time never stands still in teaching/counselling: there is a flow that continues; there is always another meeting, a developing relationship between teacher and learner (cf. Löyttyniemi 2004). What has been slightly different between counselling and research encounters is the fact that in the research process and research writing I have been, as if, stopping time and describing what I see. This is also what makes my role as the teller more intensively focussed on the telling, the emplotment, identity as constructed through language, identity as narrative.

I fully agree with Löyttyniemi (2004) in thinking that interviews and research encounters are more likely to be situations in which discordances and poetic imagination have space, whereas in teaching/counselling or a doctor's work there is more of a pull towards unity and looking for a clear plan, a more unified teacher/doctor identity. She writes how comforting and encouraging it was for her to find the narrative alternative for conceptualising identity issues. Identity as something stable and uncontroversial was not appealing to me either. Engaging in storytelling and, in particular, paying attention to my personal story opened up a new approach to identity: to be able to view my teacher identity as fundamentally fraught with controversies and still not flawed as such, was a relief. Löyttyniemi defines identity as a picture of the hero in the story that grows out of the emplotment. This picture consists of traits and characteristics that are recognisable to the teller/writer and to others to the extent that she wants to present them. This is what I hope has grown out of the emplotment of my thesis story: my teacher/counsellor/researcher identity as I picture it now, or have the ability and understanding for at the moment.

Autobiographical telling always happens in relation to public identities and social categories, which is also why the textual others that I mentioned at the beginning of this section matter. Carola Conle (1996, 1999, 2000) has shown convincingly how a process of resonance can happen when stories are shared: a teller's story triggers memories of similar happenings in listeners or readers. Resonance thus makes it possible to participate in another's experience through sharing the emotion created, for example, or the problem or its solution. Acknowledging and accepting otherness is also an essential feature of dialogic teaching. What has become clear in the process of writing is the past self or selves as the Other: a teacher's and a learner's identity is built in relation to other participants in learning encounters, and also in relation to our past teacher or learner selves. Otherness is a doubly important feature in the relationship between learner and teacher.

The idea of narrative identity and its development through interaction is crucial, and is linked to the concept of auto/biography that I have used as an interpretative tool. To me, the binary opposition of biography and autobiography is not justified. As Liz Stanley (1992) puts it, they are inseparable dimensions of the same experience for me. An autobiography (the story of one's life as seen by the person in question) and a biography (a story as told or written by someone else) are thus only angles that meet in the researcher's reading. Research in (E)FL is auto/biography in the sense that the researcher is always using her own (educational) life to understand and interpret the (educational) lives of the research participants. The link between auto/biography and narrative rests on an understanding of a teacher-researcher's autobiography as interwoven with her construction and telling of the students' biographies, and of her teller identity as it keeps changing in the process.

The teacher-researcher's auto/biographical *I* is the producer of knowledge in this thesis, knowledge that is open to change, produced in a contextualised sense-making process. It is narrative that links the elements in the chain of events and provides a way of picturing the voices and voicing processes of a teacher's identity formation. Auto/biography thus becomes a practice and a method of narrative inquiry in that it helps bring about a textual recognition of how acts of understanding take place. Liz Stanley (2008) writes: "Auto/biography, is thus a technical and theoretical term which recognises that the supposed binaries of self and other, fact and fiction, past and present, reality and representation, autobiography and biography are mutually traversed in stories, narratives and other accounts".

As for the plot in the thesis story, it is evidently not the only possible one, and I did, in fact, consider alternative plot lines at some points. I am aware of the strong emphasis on the

development and deepening of the hero's thinking, if not a transformation, that is restoried in the overall narrative. I am not unaware of the naiveté of this solution for many readers. This, however, is the kind of sense-making that characterises learning encounters that are perceived as meaningful by many learners. The driving force in my case was not so much a significant other, such as a teacher, but my self-reflexive approach in trying to make sense of the experiences and memories told by the learners and a counsellor, and restorying the meanings given from the data or field-texts. The field texts, however, are populated by many significant others, very often teachers.

As a practising teacher/counsellor I needed this opportunity to stop and think. We need to learn to tell our stories as teachers, and thus to find a voice. Voice very significantly carries and conveys the idea of agency on the part of the teacher doing research, writing, and teaching. In trying to find a way of voicing what one knows as a teacher it is essential to recognise that it is a unique voice that is speaking. The story that is created cannot be duplicated by any other voice. This voice does not need to be hidden: it deserves a place, it is a valid story among others. It is an authentic research voice in the field of (E)FL.

“Looking for ourselves in others’ stories”

Writing and representing have been vital to me as a way of thinking about my data, as Coffey and Atkinson (1996) claim. It is very clear that thinking about the very form of representing the data, including my own teacher story, forced me to think about the different meanings, understandings, voices and experiences that were present more deeply. And writing, as Coffey and Atkinson also suggest, is helping me to make my point in this last part of thesis, too. I would like to take up an aspect of telling our story as teachers that I only encountered fairly late in my research process. It is the issue of counter-narratives or counter-stories.

The concept of ‘master narratives’ was a part of my analysis and interpretation from the very beginning but admittedly, the idea of working in the margins did not develop enough to include the concept of counter-narrative. The dominant cultural narratives about and by language teachers and students of languages were my real starting point. Yet, when I started my work I did not conceptualise the quest as one of primarily finding meaning outside the emplotments of the master narratives. Nevertheless, it became clear to me in the course of my work that finding my voice also meant writing and telling a counter-narrative. Mark Freeman (2002, 202) defines counter-narratives in the following way: “... culturally-rooted aspects of one’s history that have not yet become part of

one's story". According to this view, a counter-narrative has been experienced and now articulated individually, but it very clearly belongs to a specific community with only a few specific scripts (Andrews 2002). Thus, counter-stories only exist in relation to master narratives. They are not necessarily dichotomous entities, however, but they are always in tension with master narratives, "neither fully oppositional nor untouched" (Tore et al. 2001, quoted by Andrews).

The idea of a counter-narrative, especially when defined as potentially fragmented and incoherent, and in particular as a matter of perspective, also helps me in reading the stories within my researcher narrative: some of the stories told by my research participants conflict with my own perspective. As Molly Andrews (2003) puts it, our stories are not and can never be wholly personal. Within us, whether we are teachers or learners, we have a reservoir of untold stories that are both personal and social (Freeman 2002). We have within us the possibilities for making sense of our lives, learning and teaching using these stories. Counter-narratives, then, are stories we tell that either explicitly or implicitly challenge the master-narratives.

This relates to how I have come to understand the relationship between learner and teacher autonomy. Flávia Vieira (2007) makes the strong claim that in the autonomy field, teachers have historically not taken a central role in research and pedagogical development. She links this deplorable state of affairs to the well-known divorce between schools and universities in the production of educational knowledge. In presenting her ideas of the relevance of professional teacher autonomy, which she sees as an integral and crucial element of developing learner autonomy, she uses the metaphor of 'writing with a broken pencil'. This metaphor helps to convey the central aspects of the notion of teacher autonomy: tolerance of uncertainty, a willingness to venture into the unknown and, especially, the ability to understand and deal with the complexity of pedagogical practice in schools.

According to Vieira, the lack of attention to issues of teacher autonomy could have something to do with overlooking the ideological underpinnings and implications of the very notion of autonomy. If educational knowledge is constructed without the direct participation of teachers, it leaves the teachers with only a technician role, applying externally produced knowledge. Vieira emphasises the fact that teacher development is self-directed, inquiry-oriented, experience-based, collective and locally relevant. It is for teachers to produce local, self-generated knowledge and to struggle for autonomy as a collective interest. She suggests that struggling is to be expected, and that

complexity, perplexity, uncertainty, problems and dilemmas are integral to pedagogical reasoning and action, something to be expected and willingly dealt with.

When I position myself in the learner-autonomy field, I see a relation to Freeman's idea of a counter-narrative. Indeed, I feel that Vieira has been telling a counter-narrative for a number of years. There is no reason why we as teachers should only keep looking for ourselves in others' stories, particularly in researchers' stories (cf. Ricoeur 1992), and not to tell our own. Significantly, positioning in narrative research also means looking at how characters are reported in the events described, and how tellers position themselves in relation to their audiences and to their own past (and future) selves. I have attempted to do this in this last part of the thesis: I am re-positioning myself again by evaluating my interpretative process. It appears to me now that my thesis is not only an inquiry into the personal practical knowledge of a language teacher: it is more that I see myself as a producer of theoretical knowledge as well. Nevertheless, it is the personal practical knowledge that forms the melting pot, or to go back to my research metaphor, it is what helps me form a kaleidoscopic picture of the whole, both theory and practice. This quest has been about ways of knowing about languages and knowing a foreign language as a teacher and as a learner. It has also been an experiment in what writing in a foreign language can teach. In many ways, the research-writing process resembles ALMS students' work: there is support and counselling available, but learning to write and doing it constitute an autobiographical experiential process.

I am impressed by Flávia Vieira's approach to developing a pedagogy for autonomy for a number of reasons. First of all, she is very serious about the teacher's voice in both teaching and research. Secondly, she raises the point about striving for learner autonomy despite its problematic nature, despite the complexity and perplexity that is to be expected. Thirdly, she advocates true collaboration between teachers, learners and researchers through shared projects of action research in which there is no self-evident leading role for the (outside) researcher. Fourthly, she argues for a contextualised understanding of a pedagogy for autonomy. Fifthly, she puts a lot of emphasis on the collective effort in creating and developing such a pedagogy. This last point is of relevance even to a work like mine, which has been a deeply personal quest. It has, however, been a very relational effort, an effort to position myself in relation to many other actors on the stage.

Katariina Hakala's (2007) ethnographic thesis *The position of knowing better and the space for knowing otherwise. Pedagogical mode of address in teaching (and in research)* is an intriguing text that proceeds from a description of jointly produced data (researcher, teachers and pupils) and the

joint generation of questions and themes to the researcher's evolving methodological and analytical choices and focuses in the research text. Hakala is an educational researcher, not a teacher, and her interesting point is that Finnish research on teaching is mostly done by teachers or researchers with teacher training and/or links to the teaching profession. I do not think that this is the case so far in (E)FL research or in learner autonomy. Hakala's research emphasises the difference between teacher-researchers' and her own researcher's position. She sees her own position as defined by her non-teacherhood: her gaze is directed at being a teacher and at a teacher's position in a socially and culturally determined position. She looks upon teachers' ways of addressing pupils from the position of an Other, an analytically questioning researcher. In her work she found that teachers' ways of seeing and speaking about teaching as something done via and through one's personality brought tension to the communication between her and the teachers' whose work she was observing, and the feeling of speaking different languages (Hakala 2007). Even if the cultural cumulative text did assign us the role of *knowing better*, which Hakala saw in her research, I would hope that we could strive for *knowing otherwise*, both as teachers and as researchers.

Another counter-narrative in learner/teacher autonomy is told by Naoko Aoki (2008). In trying to answer the question of why there is so little autonomy in our language classrooms she suggests that this might be a question for teacher educators to think through bearing in mind the complexity of teacher development as a phenomenon. In particular, Aoki argues for research that would deal with issues of transforming teacher identity. As I mentioned earlier, in the narrative approach to teacher knowledge and identity that Clandinin and Connelly have promoted, teachers' storied lives are taken as a starting point in research and practice. Secret stories are the ones teachers live in the safety of their classrooms, as opposed to cover stories that are told outside the classroom when competence needs to be proven and uncertainty and vulnerability to be hidden. Sacred stories, then, are the ones that guide us, the ones based on theories. Aoki (2008) claims that when learner autonomy grew from a marginal or a fringe group interest into an established practice, it became a plot in sacred and cover stories.

Like Aoki, I am interested in the potential of practitioners, in other words teachers to take control and to help theorists to improve their work by telling stories. When I have been writing about issues of identity, and even transformation, in this thesis, I have been telling my story to live by (Clandinin and Connelly 1999). I have also been trying to reveal how my sacred story as a teacher and counsellor, and also as a teacher-researcher, reflects my understanding of autonomy (Aoki 2008). I could not agree more with Aoki when she suggests that a paradigm shift is needed in research

approaches to better benefit from teacher stories as improvers of theories of learner/teacher autonomy. A paradigm shift is needed because we are dealing with research that is different. Stories are not objective, they cannot be neutral because narrative relies upon an initial agreement of what is ordinary and tells about a deviation (Bruner 2008). Stories are context-bound and local, told here and now, as Aoki notes. They are unique, and not generalisable. They are complex and contradictory even, they change and they are alive all the time. They have no definite endings.

Aoki firmly states that we need to accept every teacher's interpretation of learner autonomy as such. The field needs to acknowledge this fluid multiple reality of teachers and researchers. In this research and in my daily work as a counsellor I have been concerned about the contextual and individual nature of both learner and teacher control. In the Jimenéz Raya et al. 2007 report on learner autonomy the definition given for teacher autonomy is exactly the same as for learner autonomy:

The competence to develop as a self-determined, socially responsible and critically aware participant in (and beyond) educational environment, within a vision of education as interpersonal empowerment and social transformation.

For the moment I could accept the above as a definition of autonomy and a goal for the research and teaching done in educational environments such as (E)FL. However, a precise definition of learner autonomy is, on the whole, problematic (Aoki 2008). She writes: "Teachers will not tell their secret stories if they sense they will be judged against predetermined norms". If secret stories are the ones that need safe places in which to be told, it might well be that the sacred story of learner and teacher autonomy has been too elusive for many teachers. It might help if learner/teacher autonomy were looked upon as yet another binary with the slash marking fluidity, comparable to auto/biography. For me, learner/teacher autonomy is a "technical and theoretical binary that is traversed in stories" (Stanley 2008). As I have shown, it has travelled across and within many stories in this thesis.

Matti Hyvärinen (2004) talks about editing experience as an integral part of narrating and story-telling: editing means that the teller has learnt from living and is giving meaning, orienting towards the future in telling the story. I do not think of narrative as something that exists, that is ready to be found. However, I do think that stories can and do become models for our activities. I also think that our teacher identities can be found through a narrative understanding through which we can become tellers, and even heroes in if not authors of our lives (Ricouer 1991).

A short *currere* in ALMS

Riitta Jaatinen (2001) suggests that teaching a foreign language is a process that can be planned experientially using the participants' autobiographical knowledge as a foundation. Such an experiential process also involves a dialogic element that represents the conceptions and comprehended meanings of the teacher and the learners, their negotiated solutions and decisions, and practices based on this. This describes well what ideally happens in an ALMS face-to-face counselling session: counselling is *currere*, curriculum work; planning learning, teaching and counselling in a way that discloses experience and deepens our understanding of the running (Pinar and Grumet 1976, Jaatinen 2001). It also describes the learner-learner encounters in the programme, I would hope. The curriculum is thus never finished, but must be seen as a constantly negotiable and changing system, different for different participants. The planning of learning takes as its starting point the student's and the counsellor's "biographic situation" (Pinar and Grumet 1976, 51). Autobiography meets autobiography in the counselling meeting. The counsellor's task is to "hear" what the student has to say about her past learning, her present situation, and her plans and wishes arising from her reflections on these. Self-reflexivity is needed because counselling discourse is never innocent, but builds on layers of personal and educational history and experiences.

Each student and counsellor reads unique meanings into the ALMS counselling and the course as a whole. Life and educational experience come together and affect each other; their temporal aspects and social-personal dimensions, and the effects of place and context meet within the three-dimensional inquiry space built into the counselling system. I feel that the support systems in ALMS (the group awareness sessions, the individual counselling, the skills-support groups) have been constructed for this purpose, for curriculum development: in counselling, ideally the aims and meanings of learning and teaching/counselling are constantly questioned, renegotiated and created. This means that as counsellors we are always engaged in new counselling conversations, and new meanings will arise. Unexpected and unforeseeable autobiographical meetings may take place, and horizons of experience that are not imaginable may open up. These are instances of *imagining what if* that cannot be planned. What I have written in this thesis is thus not the final word on *currere* in ALMS.

Through *currere* I come to pedagogy and thus to the very basis of my work. Like Flávia Vieira (1997) I believe that any educational setting, be it a classroom or a self-access centre, presupposes a pedagogical rationale about the conditions that enhance autonomy. Like her, I look upon pedagogy

as a co-constructed phenomenon in that it is very important to define the quality of the parallel roles of teachers and learners using the same criteria, if not claiming that the roles of teachers and learners are equal. In my version of pedagogy for autonomy, inquiry is at the heart of the empowerment of teachers and learners: here I have come to mean inquiry in the sense of auto/biography as a social and educational practice and a method of inquiry. Auto/biography as a holistic rather than a primarily linguistic approach is easily embedded in the type of work that seeks more interdisciplinary approaches in (E)FL, focuses on what happens in other fields beyond language (Vieira 2002), and takes (E)FL questions as more pedagogical and educational than linguistic (Kohonen et al. 2001). I have also searched in education in trying to answer some of the questions arising in this study. Moreover, I have drawn on applied linguistics, women's studies, autoethnography, sociology, social psychology and cultural studies for inspiration and ideas. The conceptual framework around learner/ teacher autonomy comes from various fields of study.

Autonomy combined with auto/biography, which is at the heart of how I have seen the teachers' role in autonomy, is an educational goal, a possibility, a goal in our *currere*, and as such valid and valuable. Flávia Vieira (2002) writes:

... maybe pedagogy for autonomy is not so much about language learning as it is about learning a language, which seems to be a quite different matter. I would say that language is the substance, learning is the soul. And the soul is much more ineffable, and therefore more difficult to capture.

Whose story is it anyway?⁴³

I would like to close the circle, again, with two student voices from the ALMS programme, Tero's and Markku's⁴⁴. I see many new curricular stories evolving in their texts. This is how they write in "Language Learning":

Tero

English was my first foreign language so I started to study it in the third year of comprehensive school. I am going to tell a little about my English studying and learning in high school and after that. Studying English at high school differs totally from the ALMS-studies in English. At high school there was a curriculum that was tightly bound from above and it was followed. I think that a big part of studying languages at least in our high school was grinding away, learning by heart and exams.

At high school we usually proceed according to our course book. We often listened to the text that we had as homework (translation and understanding) and handled and underlined some issues and expressions related to the text. A lot of time was also spent on learning grammar. We also had listening comprehensions and reading comprehensions quite often. At the lessons we also had some discussions in pairs or in a little bigger groups. After that the teacher usually asked a few students something related to that discussion. Every English course included also essay writing where the use of dictionary was not allowed.

I didn't succeed well in listening comprehensions and reading comprehensions. They were total horror for me, especially those multiplechoice exercises. I often got poor scores from them. In my opinion one of the biggest reasons for the poor performances was that for example in listening comprehensions I was all too nervous and that spoiled my chances. I had difficulties to follow if the speaker talked fast. These several failures affected naturally my motivation and interest towards the study of English. I succeeded much better in so-called "course exams". I think that learning new

⁴³ This is the title of a chapter I wrote together with Felicity Kjisik for a book with the provisional title *Learner Autonomy in Foreign Language Education: Culture, Identity and Pedagogy* while I was finalising the manuscript for this thesis. The data we used were reflection texts collected during a different term in ALMS.

⁴⁴ These students were not in the group I was involved with but in other ALMS groups in autumn 2004. The texts are unedited student English

words for one lesson or exam is not very usefull, because if you don't use those words after that you easily forget a big part of them.

I didn't like studying English at high school. One of the biggest reasons for that was my English teacher who taught me the first two years of high school. She didn't understand why I often failed in these listening comprehensions and reading comprehensions. After the discussions we had at the lessons I felt that she always asked me something and that irritated me. I also had a couple of private conversations with her because of my failures but I didn't get enough support from her. Bad picture from her was left for me. Luckily on the third year of high school I had another teacher in English and she understood me much better. She was also able to encourage me.

As a person I am quite shy and introvert character. So for example speking in a little bigger group with unfamiliar persons often demands a lot to dare to express my own views and opininions not just because of foreign language. Then I am often too passive. I think in smaller groups I learn better than in large groups. I have been also in embarrassing situations when some foreigner has asked me something.

There was a big threshold for me to go to the obligatory oral English and also to the Swedish course at University. I have delayed attending to the course. So they have remained at the latter part of my studies. Before I went to the basic ALMS-course in English in last spring term I had spoken English very little after High School. My level in speaking skills was low. The books in my main subject [...] are mainly in English and because I have learnt terminology I am able to read [...] books, without big difficulties. The books in [...] include lots of matematic formulas that also help me a lot.

I think that basic ALMS-course was a good experience. I like the idea of this kind of language course where you can decide yourself what do you do and how much time do you spend on each activity. You make curriculum of your own and proceed according to that. You also get individual feedback on what you have done unlike at high school.

I and one other student have also had an own conversation group since last January. Actually at first there were three other students in our group but since March there has been only Tuija and I. We have continued the activity of our group also for the whole spring and summer. Our goal is to go on discussions also for the whole autumn term. We usually meet in self-access rooms. The main

goal of this group is to improve our speaking skills so that we are able to discuss topics and several other subjects. At the same time we extend our vocabulary. During this over eight months I have been able to improve my speaking skills a lot. I think that this kind of language learning has worked very well.

I can exploit these conversations of our group in real⁴⁵ ALMS-course. In addition that our own group will go on its action I have also registered to the conversation group. So my goal is still to improve my speaking skills in English and to be able to discuss about different subjects. I just wonder how do I dare to express my ideas and opinions in the group which consists for example of ten people. I hope that subjects are such that I have something to say about them and the atmosphere in the group is good and encouraging.

Markku

My language learning history

I began my English studies when I was nine years old. Within Finnish elementary school system one has to study at least two foreign languages. The first foreign language - which one starts on third grade - is called the A-language and is studied seven years. The B-language is started on seventh grade. Usually Finns study English as their A-language and Swedish as B-language. That's what I did too.

After elementary school I went to senior high and continued studying English as my A-language. Put altogether this means that I have done ten years of English studies within my basic education.

I have had three different English teachers. I think that they all had pretty much the same teaching method. We learned by using language in given situations: What would you say if you were that person? What is that person telling you?

Learning grammar was also a big thing and filling a tag with proper word wasn't enough - one also had to give reasons for the chosen form. Even though I've been very interested in theoretic

⁴⁵ Tero was on a faculty ALMS course at this point but had already done a remedial English course as an ALMS module the previous term. He had also studied English in between the two courses with students he met on his first ALMS course.

philosophy, which is very much about reasoning, this never really was my style of doing language studies. I had no problems with learning grammar rules if I concentrated on it, but I always got good results using intuition. In Finnish there's a certain word, kielikorva (language + ear), which basically means that someone knows language by intuition, has naturally a good sense of language. Even though grammar gives instructions for forming proper English sentences one has to admit that there are dozens and hundreds of dozens of exceptions and phrases that cannot be derived from any rule. Same goes with many expressions in Swedish; there are no rules, one has to know - or get the right intuition.

Sitting in a classroom can be boring but the classroom isn't all that there is. One must at least add classmates, teacher and equipments like textbooks to the whole. I have always been lucky with classmates: we've been studying English under decent competition. This expression of course includes the grades but also great sense of humour during English lectures: stretching the limits of language by testing expressions. What would the teacher say? Is this or that proper English?

I guess language skills could be separated into two different subcategory: active and passive - or: productive and non-productive. Reading academic articles has very much been the latter. One is alone with the article, reading and figuring out what the writer has had in mind.

One of my significant learning experiences

My latest significant learning experience in English has been "reading without voice". I don't know if this is a known concept but I would say that this has been a great metacognitive thing to me. Consider there is a phrase A and two persons read it. One reads it and hears (or tries to hear) how the read words would sound if they were spoken. The other just reads the text without trying to imagine that. Now which one is the faster way to read? In my case it's the latter. It's the same way of reading that I do when I read texts in Finnish. Put on other words: you don't have to read a text word by word in order to get a grip of it -just look at it.

My main goal in learning English

My main goal in learning English is to make it a life long process. I see English as lingua franca - Latin - of our time. The path is the goal in this case by which I mean that I should restart a process of everyday learning in English. This doesn't mean that I should read more texts in English or

watch more BBC. I should do these things that I do normally but do them consciously, use some metacognitions. Why does one use this expression here? What alternatives are there? How could I remember them easier? Is A synonymous with B or is there some difference? etc.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

Accompanying letter (translated from Finnish)

Helsinki 5 October 2004

Dear ALMS student,

Welcome to the course! We will start on Friday 15 October at 9.00 and continue on 22 October at 9.00 again. You will meet your own ALMS counsellor Joan N. in these group meetings. Later you will meet other ALMS teachers as well. This autumn I am working as a researcher in the ALMS programme. My doctoral thesis, on which I am currently working, focuses on counselling in ALMS in the light of students' learning histories. My research is one project among various surveys and projects aimed at developing the modules. Your reply to this questionnaire and your participation in the course are extremely important to us. Because of my research we will video both the two group meetings and the individual counselling meetings you have during your course. I will use these videos for research purposes only.

Please reply to the questions below before the course starts and send your answers to me via email. By replying you secure and accept a place on the course. If I have not heard from you by 13 October I will take this to mean that you do not want a place in this particular group and I will contact students on the waiting list.

You do not need to repeat the questions, just number your answers. You can also send me a handwritten reply. Feel free to ask for more information! Thank you in advance for your valuable input in our development of ALMS counselling and teaching. I hope the course will be a positive learning experience for you.

Regards,
Leena Karlsson
Lecturer in English
University of Helsinki Language Centre
leena.karlsson@helsinki.fi
Telephone 09-19123700

Pre-course questionnaire (translated from Finnish)

Please answer the following questions in Finnish, Swedish or English depending on which language feels the most natural to you for telling me about your own learning. Tell me about your thoughts, expectations and experiences. Everything you tell me is strictly confidential.

Background information:

Your faculty and main subject:

Starting year:

Previous English studies (school, university, abroad, what type of studies and for how long):

Questions:

1. There is a description of the ALMS course on page 43 in the Language Centre study guide. We mention planning your studies, setting goals, reflecting on your own learning, and self-evaluation as aspects of the course. What kind of experiences do you have of planning, setting goals and self-evaluation in connection with studying foreign languages? What does reflecting on your own learning imply to you?
2. The course description also mentions a personal study plan. Have you made a personal study plan for any of the subjects you study? What kind of expectations do you have of your ALMS study plan? How do you see the counsellor's role with regards to the plan?
3. Your course includes two 15-minute individual counselling meetings. What are your expectations of them? What do you expect of/from the counsellor? What do you think she expects of/from you?
4. Tell me about a foreign-language-learning experience (English or some other language, positive or negative) that has affected you deeply.
5. What factors affect foreign-language learning most?
6. Are you interested in reflecting on your experiences and English learning and studying with me later in the term? Suggest possible days and times, please. If you agree to participate in this part of my research you may record five hours of work in your ALMS Log (1 credit = 40 hours of language work).

Thank you very much for your response!

Appendix 2

A few stories from my licentiate thesis

I have included the parts of my licentiate thesis (“*Sitting beside herself and in conversation with herself*”. *Learner – counsellor dialogues on self-evaluation*) that I feel are relevant in terms of understanding my frequent references to it. These are:

- 1) the summary, to give an overview of the thesis
- 2) Mike’s story, or his linguistic biography, as I presented it in Chapter five of the thesis. I revisited this text (and also the transcripts of the individual and group research interviews and the recordings made of them) at a couple of points during the research process. I use Mike’s story in this thesis to highlight my epistemological development
- 3) the two concluding sections, which build a bridge to my doctoral thesis.

1. Summary

The starting point for this action-research oriented study was the need to understand and critically interpret different theoretical constructions about learner autonomy, learner beliefs and self-evaluation. Moreover, there was a need to construct knowledge about the reality of a certain learning culture, the ALMS (autonomous learning module) programme at Helsinki University Language Centre. The aim was to improve the programme by feeding in the deepening theoretical and practical understanding of the teacher-researcher into the practices of the team-based English course.

Socio-cultural approaches to second-language-acquisition research provided the framework for the analysis and interpretation of the extensive data collected during three action-research cycles. In particular, a dialogic interpretation of the research process, the language-learning environment, process and interaction, including students’ self-evaluation, was developed. A multi-method approach was used in the analysis of the thematic interviews, the discourse of the counselling sessions, the questionnaires, and counsellor e-mails. A cyclic dialogic and discursive reading technique was developed for highlighting the topics and themes related to the research issues, self-evaluation and learner beliefs, and the interindividual aspects of the interaction between learners

and counsellors. Learner biographies of three ALMS learners were produced as part of and on the basis of the analysis to give a voice to the students participating in the programme.

The importance of language learners' histories for their construction of self-evaluation, which is a new learning responsibility for most students, seemed to evolve. Counselling and counselling discourse as negotiation and dialogue about an individual learner's process are emphasised. Different approaches to reflection and self-evaluation in terms of verbal and written discourse should be respected by counsellors to avoid unnecessary friction building up in the counselling situations. This means that self-evaluation is to be seen not as pre-formed and pre-defined replies and comments, but as jointly constructed understanding. In particular, learners' multi-layered everyday knowledge of language should be seen as an important element in developing a working knowledge for self-evaluation. The use of authentic questions in counselling is argued for. Self-evaluation as a cyclic process in which new information is fed into the learner's learning programme seems to offer a way of helping him or her see its relevance. The role of certain learning documents, such as the log, is to be seen as parts of a whole, not as separate entities standing alone. The practical implications for the programme are related to developing further the reflective approach to learning-to-learn adopted in the programme.

2. Mike⁴⁶

Background as a language learner

Mike was a student of theology, in his fifth year of studies. He had studied English for ten years at school, and spent a year in Florida as an exchange student. At the university, he was exempted from the reading-comprehension test and the listening part of his oral-skills test, but failed his oral interview. In the pre-course questionnaire he wrote that he could manage in everyday situations with his English. In the research interview he mentioned that his reading was fluent as he had to read a lot of subject-specific texts in his faculty, and that he in fact found it "quite easy". In contrast, he found writing very difficult indeed, and this is an area that he focused on in ALMS:

⁴⁶ I have deleted some numbering and changed the layout slightly to better match the way I have used different fonts in the current thesis to differentiate between my voice and the participants'. I have not used abbreviations the same way as in the licentiate itself.

And when both speakers of English and teachers of English have corrected my (written) language, unfortunate mistakes have always been found that make it very difficult to understand the language. And then another thing: I am a bad writer in Finnish, too. I speak a lot and with ease so that it's easy to express myself orally. But when I have to put something on paper, things get complicated.

Mike felt that he had learnt his English mostly as a spoken language in sunny Florida in the United States, and repeatedly stated how his relaxed way of learning had proved to be problematic when it came to mastering the grammar in more formal situations, in particular when writing:

It makes things difficult when you've got a bad basis in grammar.

As he perceived a clear need in this area, Mike had also included improving his grammar in his ALMS contract.

Obviously, the time in Florida was an influential period for Mike in terms of his self-image in English. He recalled coming back to school for another two years after his exchange year. He felt that his spoken skills were much better than those of the rest of the students, and in particular, he had increased his vocabulary considerably:

I became a language celebrity. I was my language teacher's language problem after coming back! Fortunately, the teacher was very understanding and left me alone...didn't require nonsense like some teachers do [from exchange students]...they require pupils to use the words in the book word lists although the [exchange] student might know six other ways of expressing the same idea.

His language history from school is typical of a Finnish university student, but additional and interesting chapters were added during his studies in the Faculty of Theology. He had studied Swedish at school but was never good at it, nor had he had the motivation to learn the language. At university he had embarked upon studies of what he called "paper languages", Latin, Greek and Hebrew, languages required by his faculty. He had done his Latin very quickly, but with both Greek and Hebrew he aimed higher: he intended to learn them well enough to be able to translate texts.

He had had no previous experience in self-evaluation in foreign-language learning:

This is very difficult as we're used to an East German school system! That's the Finnish comprehensive school in plain Finnish. When evaluation is something somebody else does (to you).

Mike referred to the regimentary nature of the Finnish school system repeatedly in the course of the research process, in terms not only of the teaching of foreign languages, but also of the whole educational atmosphere of the comprehensive school in particular.

In the research interview Mike commented on the pre-course questionnaire, in which he had said that the evaluations given about him had been “accurate in their own way with a lot of things missing”:

They don't measure in any situation the kinds of skills in a language that you might think you need in normal life ... in these language tests they look for correctness, not that you would have been understood. Which are two totally different things.

Mike thus seems to share the one belief about language and foreign-language evaluation in formal contexts that came up repeatedly in the pre-course questionnaires: real language skills are different from the ones that the Finnish school system requires and measures in its tests. He is very critical of the language testing in which correctness is the criterion for evaluation. The multilayered nature of everyday knowledge of language and language learning, however, shows in other comments of his in which he expresses ideas about using and learning good English, i.e., correct English, as a positive goal. The metaphors he used are interesting: they are similar to the “violent” ones reported by Dufva et al. (1996) and have an element of using force in order to learn:

*... certain incorrect structures based on Finnish and it's quite difficult to **weed them out**.*

Native-speaker competence and aiming at error-free English seem to be Mike's (controversial) goals in learning the English language. He also joined a conversation group in ALMS to brush up his spoken skills, and hoped to be able to converse with a native speaker of English who would correct his mistakes.

Self-concept and learner beliefs

When asked what kind of a language learner he was, Mike said that he was not a good language learner. He was very clear about the reason as well:

My way of working with language is a kind of learning by heart as long as there are no opportunities to use it. So I read and try to learn lists of words by heart and I try to force them into my memory and then recall them in working situations, so it's a bit problematic in that sense.

Again, his feelings about the problematic nature of formal language-learning situations are repeated here. His feelings were much more positive about informal situations, and he saw that he had progressed in situations in which he had been able to learn English by using it in different real-life situations:

When we (Mike and his wife) watch American TV series, read books in English or have to speak with people, I'm the one doing better – without exception. This is where the difference comes: it's all about me having used the language and her having learnt it from books.

He envied his wife for being able to make associations and seeing logical links when learning a language. He thought that his own way of learning was very demanding as he had to learn 'every sign separately', as he said. Somehow, there seemed to be a dichotomy in Mike's way of conceptualising language and language learning: he talked about formal language learning as learning structures and signs and grammar, whereas his idea of learning outside school was connected to experiences and personally meaningful episodes.

His way of thinking about learning is further clarified in the context of the following analysis that he gave about himself:

I have never been in a learning situation in my life. That is, I keep teaching and learning situations totally apart. And in my case, learning has nothing to do with the teaching situation; unfortunately, as it would make things a lot easier. I do all the work after having gotten the information; I go back to it and I start memorizing it. Developing a whole out of it and creating a framework.

Dufva et al. (1996) classified the “mini-theories” held by their subjects about learning foreign languages into the following four:

- 1) Learning means being taught
- 2) Learning by doing
- 3) Learning is observing
- 4) Learning is absorbing.

They note that the same interviewee could mention more than one belief or mini-theory and these could even be contradictory. Mike could be said to have taken elements from the first two when talking about his formal learning situations, and to have stuck to the idea of absorption when referring to his informal learning experiences. A strong negative and labour-intensive element seems to characterise the first.

Mike repeated another belief about the mastery of a foreign language by saying that he knew English well enough to think in English:

When I speak English, I think in English. I have come to know it so well that I don't translate from Finnish any more but I do it directly in English.

This is something he called “being inside the language”, and he felt that as time goes by one tends to forget how to do the trick - although he then remarked that, in his case after years of not living in an English-speaking country:

... it always happens when I speak (English), so far at least. It's like a switch in my head that turns to the bilingual position.

When taking this further in the group discussion, I asked him how he knew that he was thinking in English, and he said:

It's just an automatic reaction to think in English and notice that the others are speaking Finnish around you and I think in English to the extent that I translate what people say into English for myself.

This is one of the beliefs mentioned by Dufva et al. (1996). In their data, learners were divided into two groups: the first group felt the relationship between thinking and language to be a visual one, and the second group reported on thinking verbally. This was also the group that included people who saw that continued exposure to a foreign language made it possible to gradually start thinking in that language. Mike brought up this belief repeatedly in the course of the research, and obviously felt that his Florida experience made this possible for him. This is also connected with the unforced and natural way of learning which was totally unlike his learning when in a formal situation.

When he was specifically asked about learning and how he perceived it, he said that learning was about applying things in the particular context in which they appeared. He also made a distinction between learning practical things and theoretical things. About foreign-language learning he said that it was no different from learning in general, although there were some special features, such as

... things related to remembering by heart and knowing words and so on. And then practising and becoming experienced, which is interesting in the sense that I don't think this can happen without using the language. So it's a bit like this "learning-by-doing".

He further elaborated on this idea when he talked about his different knowledge of English and Hebrew:

Yes, it's a very different [knowledge] and depending on how it has been practised and depending on the use that it's been put to.

He felt that autonomy suited him very well as it meant doing things on his own. His idea of learning by doing had not been realised in autonomous learning in the best possible way, though, as autonomy

... suits everything else except actually learning to use the language.

This was despite the fact that he had had opportunities for this in ALMS as well. Mike is here equating autonomy with self-study, but he gave other types of definition for it as well. In the research interview he also defined autonomy as learner responsibility over the learning programme and all actions taken.

Learning and evaluating in ALMS

As mentioned above, Mike felt that autonomy was about student responsibility. He said that taking responsibility over one's own work was central in autonomy. He continued by saying,

If you need help or advice, so there's a list of people who I think can help me if I definitely need and want it. And then there are certain meetings where problems can be solved, with others, too.

The one problem that he had with ALMS was self-evaluation. This came up in all the contacts with the counsellors and also in the research interview and group discussion, and in all his documents. The aim in the first two learner-awareness sessions of the ALMS programme is to concentrate on both the what (attainable language abilities) and the how (the learning process and how to monitor that, ways of working, resources and how to use them) in language learning. One of the central aims is to discuss the learning process in its entirety, with evaluation as a process of feeding information back into the learning programme. As the expectation on the students' part may be to learn more English, the outcome of the learner-awareness session could be meagre if the aim is not successfully communicated to them. There is nothing about the activity in Mike's log for the two days, and he left the evaluation blank; he noted down "none" under the language focus. He did not think that self-evaluation had been discussed in the sessions and his experience of what happened could be described as mostly recalling and remembering the 'old':

At least I don't remember that I learnt anything at all... If you think that learning is somehow about something new.

When I pressed him with a question about what might have been the point of these sessions, he said:

I don't have any idea of what might have been the objective!

One explanation for Mike's experience of the first session could be that the whole session is meant to be the beginning of reflection on the learning process. It is also about learning to learn, and about experiencing different aspects of one's learning history, and possibly getting new insights into how one could develop as a learner. It is also very much about sharing this experience with others: it is meant to be a situation in which prompts for developing an interdependent approach to learning are

given. This obviously did not get through to Mike, or alternatively, he rejected the idea of reflection and sharing as integral elements in language learning.

Mike's comment on how "school is just school" is relevant here. For him, it was a teaching situation which left him with very little to work on afterwards, which he was used to doing: this could be seen as a result of his idea of learning and teaching being totally separate activities. There was no new language to be memorised. One could also take Mike's approach to learning from the point of view of a certain unwillingness to develop and conduct a dialogue with the teacher and peers, and maybe most importantly, with the subject matter.

He did remember that a lot of practical information was given to the students in the first sessions of the course. He then ventured to say

I don't know if this belongs here but when we speak about self-evaluation, I don't remember that we spoke about this [self-evaluation] very much at all...that this is what it's all about: when you go through the course, you should evaluate all the time.

For him, then, the point of the first sessions was to get the practical information and to get back the feel of using English. The log was discussed as a practical means of support for learning in the second planning session, and that is something he did recall. However, he felt that filling in the log had been and still was very problematic in November when we talked about his log work. He felt that self-evaluation and the log had been not discussed in the first counselling session, and he was also sceptical about his own approach there:

It didn't come in the first counseling, or then it was one of these "let's go and have a hamburger" types of situation for me.

He remembered that evaluation was dealt with in the second group session, in which students are given the opportunity to attempt log writing. This is also the session in which the contracts are written.

my case It [ideas for self-evaluation] came in the second session, the brief one when papers were handed out, so write on these pieces of paper what you will do [probably referred to the contract] ...which came three weeks too late in.

Mike's story is somehow a story without a happy end! It becomes clearer and clearer in the course of the research interview, and then later in his documents and group discussion, that the justification for, and in particular the tools of, self-evaluation were never at his disposal.

Mike and a cry for help

From the very beginning Mike kept saying that self-evaluation was a problem. In his first individual counselling he said,

[Evaluation is] very difficult, always been, well, maybe a better way to say it (?) I haven't done it ever so it's always been done by somebody else so... and that makes it very hard to evaluate the thing what I have learnt and what I have done.

Unfortunately, the counsellor here does not realise the depth of his problem. The counsellor⁴⁷ took it from a motivational point of view and tried to point out the usefulness of self-evaluation in other areas, but this was not what Mike wanted. He was motivated but he lacked both the conceptual and concrete tools.

C1: *Can you see that it might be useful? To be able to do it yourself?*

Mike: *Of course, if I just get it done. That's one of my biggest problems getting done the way it really is the reality...my learning things and...*

C1: *Yeah, but again it might help if you also think that you can do it for other things as well, so it's not only with English that you can use this system, you know...*

Mike: *Well, maybe if I learn to do it here I can use it somewhere else.*

In fact, they had already discussed the log and Mike had commented on how problematic he found it.

C1: *So, what have you put in your log about your reading of this novel?*

Mike: *I don't know. Oh, this thing about the log system, it's kinda weird. I mean, I can take the part of something and now I'm concentrating on this and, how would I say this, I'm trying to concentrate on the whole thing, you know reading the whole book what I've learnt of it and so on and not just little parts maybe fifteen minutes I just can't just a few things and I just can't see how that could be done and ...*

C1: *Yeah, yeah. But are you keeping a note of the time spent on reading it?*

⁴⁷ Mike had two counsellors, Counsellor one (C1) in the first group session and his first face-to-face counselling, and Counsellor two (C2) in the second group session and the second and third face-to-face counsellings. This is how we organised counselling in 1999.

Mike: *About, yes.*

C1: *And, are you thinking after you put it down after every time; do you think about it at all?*

Mike: *Not really, I'll do it anyway, so I read English books anyway, so...*

C1: *Sure, sure, sure. But if we're looking at it from this autonomous route point of view and using it specifically to focus on the language. For two minutes after you've put the book down unless you've fallen asleep already. Hah! Just think, what was difficult in what I've just been reading? Did I understand everything? How did it forward my language? And just jot that... those thoughts down on a piece of paper so then it's easy when you come to evaluate the whole thing. So then by the time you get to the end of the novel you see OK, this has taken me so and so and so many hours and this day was easy and this day was difficult and this time I had to read the section twice because et cetera. And now I feel that my English is better because! Do you understand?*

Mike: *Yeah, I understand what you mean. The problem is that this book is basically very easy to read. I understand basically all the words and it's only been maybe five words I haven't understood at this point and I've read almost eight times the basics. So that makes it hard to evaluate the book because the language itself is very easy, incredible. Maybe I should have taken a more difficult book, taken a Shakespeare or something...*

C1: *Well, maybe that would be going from one extreme to the other! But of course, you can, even if it's that easy you can still use the book to further your language because you said your writing you could then write something about it, is that what you plan to do?*

Mike: *Of course maybe some summary or some vocabularies or something, I don't know but*

C1: *... the five words. Or maybe even go a little bit more deeply in so that you are writing about your emotions or that you're analysing the characters. Do you understand why I'm saying this? You push the language. More than what's on the surface.*

Mike: *Yeah, it's a good idea.*

It is very evident that the counsellor is trying not to take the decision away from Mike. She is suggesting but she is not setting work. This is where the first sign of Mike's membership in the counsellor as a teacher is to be seen. Riley (1999) talks about membership as those discursive practices that are involved in the social construction of identity: here Mike is clearly membership in C1, not as a counsellor, but as a teacher whom he expects to tell him what to do. The counsellor, however, is staying in her role. She tries to offer tools for coping with the LOG and suggests how Mike could make a language-learning task out of the reading process. C1 is also taking Mike back to his needs and goals which they have been discussing in the form of the contract: improving his writing was one of Mike's main goals. Mike seems to be accepting this

although he is not taking it any further by saying what exactly he thinks is “a good idea”. On the whole, the atmosphere in this counselling session was very relaxed. Both counsellor and student said how nervous they were because of the video-recording, but showed very few signs of this. Some sort of rapport was built between them, and the openness of the plans and the programme still seemed like a promise.

In Mike’s second counselling session with C2 late one evening in November, they again talked about the tools when they once more discussed Mike’s reading of the novel that he wanted to include in his programme.

Mike: ... a problem evaluating myself as a whole...to find a way to see what’s happening... am I doing any progress or not? That’s my question all the time. Am I really learning anything. I don’t know...really don’t. I don’t know how I could see my progress in English...

C2: Okay, I have a feel...you know... I am prejudiced here but I have a feeling that when you were reading *Rainbow Six* if you’d been all the time doing different things every hour, doing some little different task with the book, you know, underlining something in the book one hour, the next hour picking up the key words, the third hour picking up slang phrases or something like this, then you’d feel much more concrete progress.

Mike: ...yeah, probably...I started a bit early... I saw I have like an empty calendar I have really much time to do this. I know I’m going to do this course... I know these goals with the course... I heard...

C2: ... if you think like of the conversation skills group you can go there, pop yourself in a chair and talk a little bit and then go away or you can go there and have in mind that tonight I am going to try to help my partner more. That would be your goal...or another evening you’ll... concentrate on the words you can use...you know, if you’re going to have these specific goals, I think you can then...

Mike: ... Yeah, I think that would have helped me in the beginning, you know, knowing this when I first started this course.

Somehow as he went through the enormous task of reading a novel of 900 pages, Mike became stuck with the idea of wanting to use that reading towards his credits. The voice to be heard in his comment above is that of previous ALMS students who had told him about the principles and organisation of the course (“I know these goals with the course...”). The students were, of course, referring to the organization. Students are encouraged to integrate authentic reading into their language programme, but the goals are set by the individual students as happened in Mike’s case as

well. The goals Mike wrote in his contract were to improve his grammar, writing and conversational skills. It seems that these goals became buried in the process. He referred to whatever advice he got from the counsellors as having “come too late” because he had started reading the book before actually starting the course. He also insisted that he did not get enough information “in the beginning”, which he felt would have made things different.

A week later, Mike had his research interview with me. When asked about the role of evaluation in learning, he came up with a very thorough analysis:

... when evaluation always has something that somebody else does and now the whole course is characterised by a different way of thinking...that one can evaluate oneself and that has turned out to be very difficult...what evaluation actually is... I started thinking about it after my last counselling about what the point is in it...so maybe it is... I would start with interaction. So that there is a discussion about what has been learnt...maybe the counsellor will help find the points to be evaluated by asking directing questions... will help notice what one has learnt... or not learnt...what has gone unnoticed...I have this (idea of) interaction...doing it alone feels very difficult, at least for me.

Mike’s description is not unlike the ALMS approach to evaluation and self-evaluation, and his tentative proposal on the counsellor’s role (“will help find the points”, will help notice”) closely matches what the counsellors at a later stage in this research described as their role in self-evaluation!

The question that Mike had in the first and the second counsellings (“Am I really learning anything?”) had not vanished by the time he met with C2 for his final counselling meeting. Again, it was late in the evening, and both Mike and C2 were obviously tired. Problems with parts of the programme were mentioned in Mike’s second utterance. Fortunately, they talked about Mike’s support groups first, and the positive outcomes of the two groups (academic writing and conversation) became clear. Being in these partly teacher-led or teacher-initiated groups had been beneficial. Mike had produced work, and also mentioned learning something:

... learnt from others’ mistakes...not to make them myself...

He had already said in the research interview (half-way through the course) that he at least hoped there had been an improvement in his skills. He had been working on his written skills intensively and hoped that,

I would have gotten some models and developed especially with my writing.

When C2 asked him what the best experience in ALMS had been for him, he said without hesitation that it was the freedom. The question on the negative side of the experience brought the discussion back to self-evaluation: Mike mentioned the lack of tools for evaluation as a problem. He also felt that he did not have any point of comparison, as evaluation of himself was missing at the beginning. *My problem with the whole evaluation process was that I really didn't know where I am at the beginning. I don't have any kind of evaluation at the beginning which said "you know this, you don't know this, this is your weak point, you can manage with this one". And it made it kind of unclear to...*

The counsellor's question about who should have evaluated Mike in the beginning set Mike to reflect on his idea of what might have helped him to get an idea of his level.

C2: Do you think that our side of evaluation of you should be better in the beginning or are you referring to some sort of internal evaluation?

Mike: I think it's a combination of those two. Some kind of an exam which says...which considers the written English maybe, conversational skills, what else grammar skills. Maybe reading skills. Then come back with a teacher and see okay, what did you not understand in this and what it shows.

C2 tried offering testing on a computer as a way of doing the first part of what Mike had just described.

C2: What if it was possible to test this on the computer, except of course speaking perhaps, but to test most of these things on the computer and see what level you were yourself. What would you say to that?

Mike: I've tried to do that the times I've been there [refers to either the computer group or when working with the computer in self-access or possibly at home]. But yet I don't know whether it does tell me anything.

After the course Mike was critical of the role of the counsellors in evaluating the learners. He felt that the responsibility should be more on the counsellor to give accurate evaluations of the learner's skills. He again used his reading as an example of how things did not quite work for him.

I think that the counsellor should try and assess the learner in the midst of the discussion all the time and very accurately... as accurately as possible so that h/she could direct (the learner) to do things that are demanding enough because I had a very easy time with the book... I hadn't realised what an easy time I would have... But maybe if the counsellor would have intervened at an earlier stage and said, hey, do you think this book is demanding enough. We discussed this a little bit but it should have come earlier... 900 pages earlier. This is where I see the responsibility...but it would have to start from the very first meeting when the plan is made very carefully, try to (...) evaluate the learner because the counsellor cannot work if s/he does not know the one being counselled.

This is an interestingly controversial opinion that Mike kept presenting. He was very critical of the evaluation practices at school, as has been mentioned earlier. Here is what he said in the group discussion,

I have always criticised this East German mentality in the comprehensive school and high school where one-sided assessments are given on how well one has learnt by heart idioms and phrases and tens of pages of exceptions to grammar rules presented by the teacher...which are all an important part of the language but which never show the real use of language. How well you understand jokes on American TV series as they don't appear in the translation. Or if you can express yourself, buy a hamburger if you want one.

He is referring to the real language skills, mentioned by other students as well, that are not evaluated at school. He felt that these were the skills he had himself. But he continued thinking about self-evaluation, and he then concluded that, in ALMS, the self-evaluation

... has no basis at the level when the programme starts, that you don't know what the point of departure is for evaluation so the accuracy is very difficult even impossible to assess... does it at any point hit the mark?

The dialogue about self-evaluation with the counsellors and also the researcher-teacher never quite got to the point where a common construction of self-evaluation in ALMS came about. The following describes an attempt in the group interview,

Mike: *I can manage when I need normal everyday language, when I have to go and buy food in a store or complain to a doctor that I've got flu.*

I: *Well, isn't that a fairly accurate evaluation in a way?*

Mike: *Yes, I guess. But it's not based on facts in any way but it's based on some sort of feeling and it's based on, in a way, well experience of course, if that can be classified as an accurate fact or accurate evaluation criterion.*

By facts, Mike is obviously referring to an external judgement: something objective and measurable in a test situation. Fully understanding his preoccupation with this element, which for him seemed to be vital in evaluation, would have helped the counsellors to focus more on the somewhat different approach to self-evaluation in ALMS. As reflection and self-evaluation seem to have their roots in the multi-layered and context-sensitive area of beliefs, it could have helped both Mike and the counsellors if the latter had taken a more focused approach to explaining the ALMS side of seeing evaluation as not a certain predefined action, but as a process in which a lot of leeway is built into the actual forms that it can take. Mike somehow did seem to think that the teachers were expecting something very clearly predefined that he was incapable of doing.

Another way of looking at Mike's counselling sessions with C2 in particular would be to try and see them through the rules for dialogic teaching. The sessions could be said to be lacking in the areas of reciprocity and reflexivity. The justification of actions was incomplete on both sides. There was too little reflective action on the beliefs involved on Mike's side, and the counsellor's support for him in doing this did not quite succeed.

3. Discussion: counsellors-in-making

In Gremmo's 1994 version of counsellor functions, counsellors might choose to provide conceptual information, methodological information, or psychological support to the learner according to the demands of the counselling situation, i.e., learner needs. Traditional teacher training has provided us counsellors with the knowledge and skills to convey both the conceptual and methodological information to a certain degree. The discourse used to present the information to the learner might require more effort and reflection. Moreover, helping learners become aware of their active role in

the counselling may be an area in which counsellors need to do critical reflection. Yet another area of development seems to be in helping learners to recognize and reflect on their beliefs and their meta-cognitive notions about the novel areas of their learner role. The focus of this work has been on learners' self-evaluation, and it has become clear in the course of it that beliefs about norms and rules in evaluation, as they come out in the discourse between learners and counsellors, may cause friction in counselling situations.

The research cycles, especially the ones involving the individual learners, clearly indicated that the ALMS learner support has to be even more focused on as a complex whole by the counsellors so that they can make connections between the different elements in each student's ALMS experience. Counselling should be even more seamlessly integrated with the rest of the learner support. The reflective approach to learner awareness that has been adopted in ALMS must extend over the learner- awareness sessions, the individual counselling sessions, and the guidance offered to students in the support groups.

Moreover, as regards self-evaluation in particular, the learner support offered has to have its basis in the learner histories of our students. We have to be more aware of how these histories are reflected in our learners' beliefs. We have to keep in mind, as well, the fact that schools will be going through a paradigm shift in the next few years as authentic assessment practices, including self-evaluation and assessment, will be adopted by more of them than is the case today. Nevertheless, we will have to be careful not to take it for granted that our learners are already fully developed as evaluators of their own work. The context-sensitive nature of learning, reflection on learning and self-evaluation has to be kept in mind.

Self-evaluation may need to be defined differently in different contexts. For the purpose of this research and the ALMS programme, I would like to propose the following definition:

Self-evaluation is dialogue, it is multi-dimensional and can involve various forms of documentation: it can be an entry in the LOG; it can be critical reflection carried out in the counselling session; it can be receiving feedback on one's written or oral performance from a peer and using that feedback to improve performance. Self-evaluation is dialogue with oneself, with the counsellor or teacher, with a fellow learner; it can be dialogue with a learning outcome or somebody else's learning outcome. It is always context-bound and takes into account the goal set at the beginning or the goal reformulated on the basis of reflection.

According to Holec (1996), in self-directed learning situations, all decisions concerning the learning programme are the responsibility and right of the learner. These include the definition of objectives, the selection of resources, methods and techniques, and evaluation and management. The teacher is involved in the preparation of the decisions, however. This preparation, then, is part of the learner-counsellor dialogue that begins in the group awareness session and continues in the individual counselling sessions. The reciprocal nature of the process of evaluation should be respected all the way through.

The stories re-storied in this work could certainly be interpreted so that a new friction can at times build up between learners and counsellors. It is a fine-tuned professional competence that a counsellor needs in deciding on the amount and specificity of control and support in each learner's case. It is not only the duty of self-evaluation, but also the counselling situation itself that may be novel to the learners, and their expectations and the reality might not meet.

It should be borne in mind in any analysis of a counselling situation between a learner and an ALMS counsellor that it is a question of a fifteen-minute-session where, ideally, the learner should be reflecting on work done and analysing the quality of that work in line with the goals set at the beginning of the programme. He/she should be making a successful stepping-back move from the actual learning activities to talking about those activities, to looking at them from the outside; she should now be "sitting beside herself". Moreover, the learners should be able to communicate information about the success of those learning activities and, very importantly, about the reflection, to the counsellor. This is not an easy task for those who might be in a language-counselling situation for the first time in their lives. Additionally, part of the reflection should be evaluating their language and learning accurately and honestly. As their role in the testing game at school has been totally different, it might cause them to go back to being censored instead of making the effort to self-evaluate. Membershiping the counsellor as a teacher doing the testing might be what the learner tries to do.

What about the demands of the situation on the counsellor? Bearing in mind that counselling is not teaching, he/she should be prepared to give various types of information to the learners; to support and help; to prompt for information on learning activities, and also on the process of "going meta"; to actively and constructively listen to the learners and to be able to interpret the meta-cognitive knowledge provided by them, which does not necessarily show in their outward behaviour at all. A

fairly demanding task for any language teacher, even a counsellor aware of the changing role he/she has adopted. And there is always the easy way out: putting on one's old censor clothes and "doing the testing", if not in the form of giving a multiple-choice test on, say, grammar, then in the form of assessing the self-evaluation itself: grading the log entries.

At the end of the cycle the counsellors should not only be looking for evidence of growth and development in terms of autonomous-learning and self-evaluation skills as predefined by them as teachers. Nor should the action researcher do this. Instead, we should all look at the jointly constructed understanding of self-evaluation that is to be seen and heard in the voices of both learners and counsellors. One thing that should thus be more focussed on by us as counsellors is the role we (meaning then the ALMS counsellors and the faculty teachers) have had in the learners' constructions of self-evaluation. We should accept the variability and the instability of these constructions, which partly depend on the nature of the negotiation process between the parties involved.

In particular, we should be able to look at the everyday knowledge our learners bring to the counselling as something that is multi-layered in the way described earlier, and changing from situation to situation. As suggested earlier in this section, one way of getting to know the learners is to find ways of having learner biographies available in a form that the learner approves of, as this provides a tool for hearing all the voices behind the learner's approach to learning, and to evaluating that learning. This was done very extensively with the cases at hand, and is not possible with all students. Nevertheless, fragments of their histories could be made audible to both the learners themselves and to us counsellors within the learner-support system if we concentrated more actively on this knowledge in the context of learner awareness. In particular, the dialogue between learners and counsellors in the individual counselling sessions could be used here.

The knowledge that teachers use in traditional set-ups about what language is, how it is used, and how criteria of evaluation are derived from statements of objectives, needs to be shared more effectively with the learners (Holec 1996). We need to help our learners acquire a working knowledge of these issues to make it possible for them to self-evaluate. Holec talks about a deconditioning process that is needed for learners to start questioning their beliefs and representations.

The one belief that he mentions illustrates how these beliefs exist in our learning world in both camps: learners traditionally see themselves as consumers of programmes rather than producers. The other side of this coin, of course, is that teachers see themselves as the very producers and authors of the programmes. This could be taken back to the first cycle of the study at hand: in the case of testing, the students very often have been passive consumers of evaluation and our demand for them to become active producers of evaluations might be a harder process for some of them than we think. A deconditioning process is needed in which the teachers should start radically questioning their beliefs and representations, too. The expert role has to be defined anew. The help and support they need has to come from colleagues: counsellors and teachers on the road towards teacher autonomy and a better understanding of their supporting role in the dialogue need to work collaboratively.

In ALMS, we need to work together in order to make it more visible to the learners that a good language learner is potentially a reflective language learner; a learner who, through reflection and self-evaluation, wants to understand his/her own activities and perspectives. Communicating this to the learners could be done by presenting self-evaluation as a cyclic activity (needs, objectives, methods, techniques, progress, evaluation, needs, objectives....); as a process where the outcomes of evaluation feed adjustments into the programme. Potentially, there is a new type of friction brooding in the counselling situations, as its demands are novel, especially to the students. The areas in which communicative non-success concerning the subject of self-evaluation might arise can be summarized as follows:

I Learner histories or biographies

These include beliefs and voices, i.e., the way learners see language and learning a language, and how they interpret their learning experiences;

II Counselling dialogue

The learner's role in dialogue and its discourse demands play a role. How membership is dealt with is important. Moreover, the process of going meta deserves attention.

It seems that the friction arises in the between if learners' and counsellors' agendas clash. In this work, the counsellors have been looked at as partners in the counselling discourse and the implications of their actions have been seen in the light of how they interpret and prompt the learners, not in their own right. Thus, the counsellor histories have not been looked at, neither have

their beliefs been investigated in detail. This certainly would have brought more insight into the analysis and might be an area where further research is needed.

Where do learners and counsellors meet, then? They could meet in accepting each other, in becoming aware of each other's agendas. They could meet in a dialogue that is opened up by the counsellor, who in Aoki's (1999, p. 151) words, "tries to make his/her reduced power visible". The authority of the teacher is a cultural given in the beginning of a teaching period. According to Huttunen (1995), the aim for the teacher should be to fade away from the authority position during the teaching. One way of looking at the interaction between counsellor and learner would be to see it as a dialogue in which the role of the counsellor is not that of a questioner knowing the right answer, but as a participant in the dialogue openly looking for a joint answer. This would mean that the counsellor script would consist of authentic questions, and no predefined answers would be expected.

The idea of negotiation and dialogue opens up a new possibility of talking about control and support in learning/teaching situations, and certainly in counselling situations. I would like, again, to refer to the five rules for dialogic teaching formulated by Huttunen (1995 and 1999), that he sees as prerequisites for a common meaning to be constructed. These rules could be seen to underlie any set of learner/teacher/counsellor roles and functions. The acceptance of and adherence to these rules might lessen the friction in counselling, which could come about in the less ideal interplay situations. In many ways, they bring a whole new approach to looking at any encounter in the learning world. Dialogues are for constructing common meanings, for openly and patiently involving oneself in the situation.

As counsellors we are faced with the challenge of helping and supporting our learners in reaching their goals. We have to facilitate their progress and learning process, and their evaluation of these, and help them to keep in mind the institutional constraints involved. We should give the learners' voices a chance of coming through, and we should respect their everyday language knowledge, which is an important part of their developing expert knowledge as language learners. Otherwise, the dialogue becomes a monologue and the common meaning is not constructed.

It seems from my data that the road to success goes via the realisation and acceptance of counselling and self-evaluation as a dialogic "game". If a learner and/or a counsellor fails to accept the fact that there is a "between" which gives self-evaluation a form and a content, then they both

remain dependent on the outward forms and manifestations of learning, autonomy and self-evaluation. These might, in the learner's case be, say, numbers and grades as in testing ("facts" as Mike called them), and in the counsellor's case the amount of reporting and log entries. It is the reciprocal and mutual shaping of the interaction that is the most important thing. This process is about the whole person, so it is not an easy option – the unexpected can often happen. In Bakhtin's words: "The word is half someone's else's".

Conclusion

Riley (1997) talks about counsellors as the Hermes of Greek mythology: as messengers of the gods but also as cheats and thieves. The underlying idea here is that the role of the counsellor is highly ambiguous. Riley continues to say that the role of language is also ambiguous: the effects of the messages we send as counsellors are not always those intended by us. This could be a good starting point for reflection for ALMS counsellors when we look at the programme and try to decide where we should head next. The reflective approach we have adopted is inherently one that requires us to keep probing into what we are doing. When looking back at the interventions introduced into the programme since its beginning in 1995, we can see that they have come about as team efforts, no matter where the initial impetus came from. This is also how we should continue.

Nevertheless, there might also be some justification for each counsellor to put more effort into each counselling situation with each learner in order to understand the process the particular learner is going through and how that learner is interpreting our messages. The one idea that is being discussed in the team is that each student could have just one counsellor instead of two, which would make it easier for the counsellor to learn to know the learner better.

The next intervention is still to be reflected upon by the team. To me, it seems that self-evaluation as it is conceptualised by learners and counsellors in counselling, and in particular the discourse used, is an area in which the counsellors should keep probing into ways of making sure the agendas do not stay separate, and of ensuring that predetermined behaviour should not be expected from the students. The contribution of the counsellors' histories and beliefs to the outcome of counselling has not been studied here and this is certainly a limitation of this work. Another area in need of further research is the log in the service of self-evaluation, and in particular, the process of writing either a log or a learning diary.

During this research effort I produced 426 pages of (handwritten) research diary. This diary functioned as a way of helping my understanding of the theory and the practice of my action research into ALMS, and also of ALMS as a course of study: it was a way of reflecting both on action and in action (McNiff et al.1996). The process invoked in me a need to look more carefully into the role of writing in foreign-language learning. During the two years of action research I have become involved in a new support group that we have called “Writing for Learning”. The two groups I have had so far have given me further ideas about looking into the process of writing in the service of learning more English, and also in the service of learning more about learning itself. The problems that the students in my research had with their logs have fuelled my thinking, and it has become obvious that the research done for this study has left many questions open in this area. The writing-for-learning process has not been studied in this work, but would certainly have contributed to the knowledge of why the self-evaluation was felt to be effective and rewarding, or not, by the learners and counsellors.

Having worked as a tutor for English, I know that the implications of my research could be considerable for this type of language-learning support as well. For a dialogue to come about, a tutor has to work hard as the circumstances are such that learners might only come once or twice. It seems to me, though, that finding out about the learner’s history and getting a glimpse into his/her beliefs about language and language learning will help the tutor’s work and make the brief encounter more beneficial for the student. Moreover, I am convinced that any learning-teaching encounter in foreign languages will benefit from a more dialogic stance, and in particular, a more thorough and deep-going discussion about learner histories. How to counsel in and about the new areas of learning, such as deciding on the needs, planning a programme, implementing and monitoring it, and evaluation, needs careful reflection from the counsellor. What may be even more important, a teacher faced with, say, the demands of the European Language Portfolio will have to reconsider his/her approach to how to introduce and support the practical application of authentic assessment in classrooms. My work on the ALMS self-evaluation experiences might be useful for this preparation work.

Although my interest in this research has been in hearing as many voices as possible behind the participants’ experiences, the limitations of the study should be seen as my responsibility. The inclusive way of researching (McNiff 1996) that has been attempted here should mean that everyone concerned is included. Moreover, an action researcher should make sure that everyone is treated with justice. I truly hope that I have shown enough concern and insight, and managed to re-

story the autumn 1999 experience by the ALMS community, including both learners and counsellors/teachers, not forgetting myself, in a way that is acceptable to everyone included. I hope that all of these voices come through.