

Teaching English through Storytelling to Young Learners

Ukrainian and Norwegian Experiences

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Master's thesis

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Abstract

The aim of this study has been to investigate how and to what extent storytelling is being used as a didactic tool in teaching English to young learners in Ukraine and Norway. It explores Ukrainian and Norwegian teachers' attitudes towards storytelling, focusing on the differences and similarities in their use of this technique.

The method used in the study is a qualitative approach with semi-structured interviews. The informant sample comprises six teachers of English: three from Ukraine and three from Norway. The objective of these interviews was to acquire insight into how the teachers implement storytelling in the programme for young learners at the pre-reading stage, what materials they use and the challenges they experience while developing and delivering storytelling lessons.

The findings from the study indicate that, for the teachers interviewed, both Ukrainian and Norwegian, storytelling has a place their English teaching, but it is not a very structured part of their lessons and is only picked up occasionally. This seems to a large extent to be rooted in the fact that storytelling is not highlighted in the current national curricula and textbooks for the primary school in either country, which also explains the lack of ready-made materials for storytelling to young learners in the pre-reading period. On the occasions when storytelling is used, it appears often to be by means of constructed short stories, made up by the teachers themselves in accordance with their current teaching needs, that is to raise students' motivation, to introduce new vocabulary or to reinforce acquired vocabulary. It appears that, due to the limited time allocated to teaching English in the primary school, teachers find it difficult to conduct storytelling lessons entirely in English and they have to resort to help from the first language to make the input more comprehensible.

The teachers reported that they find storytelling an efficient classroom activity, but a rather time-consuming one. The teachers interviewed suggested that time restrictions in their own everyday life may be reinforcing their tendency to rely heavily on the contents of course books, and may indirectly make it less relevant to include storytelling in the lessons.

Generally, the teachers' attitudes to storytelling in both countries indicate that they see it as an efficient didactic tool, provided that it is conducted in mixed language, i.e.

telling the story partly in English and partly in the L1. At the same time, teachers find it difficult to use storytelling frequently in the classroom because of the limited range of available storytelling material adapted for the young learners.

Based on these findings, I conclude that it may be possible to help establish the storytelling technique more firmly in the teaching process by developing a set of specially designed, structured teaching materials for Ukrainian young learners in the pre-reading period. Moreover, it appears worth consideration to blend English with the native language at the early stages of the storytelling programme, and then gradually reduce the amount of the native language used.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background and related studies

In a number of countries where this was previously not the case, foreign language competence, and particularly a good command of English, has now become essential for good job prospects and an improved standard of living. One country where this has become particularly clear, is Ukraine. At the same time educational specialists are increasingly suggesting that it is best to start teaching children a foreign language between the ages of 3 and 5, that is as early as in pre-school (Barkasi 1998; Filatov 1998; Cameron 2001; Cherniakova 2002; Ellis and Brewster 2002; Harmer 2007; Ksenofontova 2008; Larson-Hall 2008; Curtain and Dahlberg 2009; Gunjko 2010; Munoz 2010). As an English teacher Ukrainian schools both in the public and the private sector, I have seen how the school system has changed in response to these perceptions and signals. In the public sector, children start English in school at about the same time as in most European countries, but in the private sector a considerable shift of priorities has taken place. Because parents want to give their children the best possible start, they want them to be taught English as early as possible, and the private schools now have formal English lessons for pre-school children, that is for the age groups from 3 to 6 years old.

Children as young as 3-6 cannot usually read or write and that is an obvious challenge for the English teachers. Furthermore, there are no established teaching materials for this age-group. Most course books used for English learning are designed for a later stage and begin with the alphabet and basic reading.

According to Piaget, children's stages of development play an important role in how they learn. The target group (pre-school and primary school) have just gone into the "operational stage" (where the social instinct starts developing) and which occurs 'towards the age of 7 or 8' (Wood 1998:28; Brumfit 1991:2). These learners are now at the stage where 'speech comes to form the higher mental processes which are culturally formed in social interaction' (Brumfit et al. 1995:3). In order to adjust the children's conceptual development, the teacher must provide for alternative organizational patterns for his or her class.

Setiaryni (2011) points out that teaching English to young children and teaching English to teenagers or adults are different because the former not only lack reading and writing skills, but also have different characteristics in terms of their cognitive level, interests, needs, and environment. Such differences invite teachers to introduce child-friendly and enjoyable activities into English lessons for young learners (Setiaryni 2011: 1).

One of the possible solutions for early English teaching is to apply alternative teaching methods, such as language games, songs, role-play, storytelling etc. Many language teaching specialists world-wide (Nunan 1988; Brumfit et al. 1991; Ellis and Brewster 1991; Wood 1998, Brewster et al. 2004; Write 2004 and others) suggest that storytelling is an appropriate and effective way in enhancing young learners' skills and interest in English and improving their learning output. Rokhayani (2010) holds that storytelling provides an outstanding opportunity for young learners to master the foreign language. In addition, stories can bridge the gap between language study and language use and also link classroom learning with the world outside (Rokhayani 2010). Numerous books devoted to storytelling as a teaching technique (Ellis and Brewster 2002; Wright 2004 etc.) advocate the use of authentic stories, written entirely in English, accompanied by English instruction, that is using a method of full or partial immersion in the target language. It is not stated to what extent the native language is supposed to be used to help children acquire new lexicon and understand the plot of the story.

From my 10-year experience as an English teacher in Ukraine, I can attest to the difficulty of using the storytelling approach with full language immersion successfully with Ukrainian young learners of English. One reason is the absence of an English-speaking culture and environment in Ukraine: children get little or no reinforcement of their acquired language skills outside the classroom. With a lesson frequency of 1-2 academic hours a week, original English stories and fairytales are difficult to grasp for Ukrainian learners and using them requires too much time spent on preparatory activities (such as teaching children new words through drawing or miming, guessing the plot, role-playing a related dialogue etc.) which is not always rational in view of restricted lesson time. On the other hand, the use of internationally known stories or native stories translated into English appears often not to provide the necessary motivation because the novelty

element is missing. That leaves us with an option of partial use of the native language in the story-telling lessons.

Unfortunately, there is little information found in the scientific literature about concrete ways of teaching English to pre-school and primary school students in non-English speaking countries, Ukraine included. More specifically, little is known about how storytelling is actually used in Ukrainian schools and the problems Ukrainian teachers experience with storytelling. Ukrainian specialists in early language teaching pay special attention to the psychological traits of young learners and stress the importance of enhancing the learners' motivation through a number of techniques. We find, among others, the method of associative symbols and body language (Gunjko 2010); the use of comics as a method of stimulating the learners' interest (Olshanskij 2004); the use of games and their elements in the English classroom (Shepeljuk 1999; Barkasi 1998; Cherniakova 2002); grammatical fairytales (Filatov 1998); storytelling (Ksenofontova 2008; Schukin 2004), songs and rhymes (Stom 2004), teaching English through drawing (Roman 1995). Most of these articles describe techniques that require additional materials: preparing flash cards, power-point presentations, blackboard drawings, music, toys, costumes and other attributes. Despite wide-spread recommendations to deliver lessons only in English and turn to explanations in the native language only in exceptional cases (Roman 1995, 1998; Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009), many authors who share their classroom experience and draw conclusions on the basis of classroom experiments with young children, argue in favour of using the native language for instruction, checking the understanding, discussing the plot of the stories etc. (Cherniakova 2002; Schukin 2004; Olshanskij 2004; Ksenofontova 2008 and others).

The hypothesis of my research project is that the lack of appropriate teaching material constitutes a challenge for teachers in Ukraine who work with children in the pre-reading period and that there is a need for developing new didactic materials based on storytelling in a mixed language for the target group (pre-school and first year of primary school). The main idea of my project is to investigate the possibility of creating a series of specifically-designed set of didactic materials based on storytelling for successful use in the Ukrainian classroom.

In order to get a firmer basis for my approach, I decided to contact teaching professionals for their expert opinion on the issue. Using the opportunity of studying in Norway, I decided to divide the research project into two parts: investigate English teaching in the primary classroom in Ukraine and in Norway, compare the teaching formats and methods, and examine the possibility of bringing the Norwegian experience into the Ukrainian classroom. For the research purposes I developed an interview guide, which was tested during the pilot stage of the project.

1.2 Pilot study

Prior to this master's thesis, I conducted a pilot study, which had a similar research question: how and to what extent do English teachers in Ukraine and Norway use the storytelling approach in their lessons? This was during the course EDID4010 – Fundamental Concepts of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, at the University of Oslo. The main goal of the pilot study was to obtain general information about the teaching of English to young learners in Ukraine and Norway, that is state regulations, the English language teaching status in primary school, the amount of instruction, course programmes, course books in use and teaching methods. In my pilot study, I used a combination of semi-structured interviews with observations of lessons. In addition to collecting the primary information and an overall impression of the similarities and differences between the language teaching systems of the two countries, I used the opportunity to test the interview guide, rule out some of the original questions that were misleading and add others instead. This also gave me useful experience in how to ask follow-up questions that provided answers relevant to the study. I conducted the pilot study at four different educational institutions, one kindergarten and one primary school in Ukraine and two primary schools in Norway. Some of the teachers who participated in the pilot study were later on engaged in the main study as well. In addition to the background information, the main topics for my interviews were:

- How often do the teachers use the storytelling technique in their lessons and for what purposes?

- Do they often experience a lack of ready-made materials for use in storytelling in their lessons?

- To what extent do the teachers use the native language in their lessons?

1.2.1 Findings from the pilot study

1.2.1.1 The status of English language teaching in Ukraine

Teaching English in private languages schools has been an industry in Ukraine for many years. For the past decade English as a foreign language has been taught in the state school system as well. The age of children who begin education in English has recently gone down considerably. Ten years ago the state standard for the beginning of foreign language education was 9-10 years old. Nowadays English is an obligatory school subject from the first grade (age 6-7 years old). The lessons come in 30 minute periods 1-3 times a week, depending on the school. English teachers do not teach other subjects than English. There is no one accepted state school course book in English, teachers are free to choose from the variety of available editions by Oxford University Press, Cambridge, Longman etc. English has also now been introduced in the majority of pre-school institutions from the age of 3-4. It is not obligatory, but is supposed to help children get some alphabet and lexicon skills before they start school. As there are no available course books for kindergarten, most teachers use flashcards, cut-outs from first-grade course books and individually designed material for their lessons. For a course to have a coherence of purpose, it is imperative that the aims and objectives of the syllabus 'are not contradicted at the classroom level' (Nunan 1988:96). Adapting teaching materials to every single lesson is undoubtedly a highly challenging methodological task for a teacher. Not surprisingly, storytelling as a didactic tool is only occasionally used, because of a lack of adapted teaching materials and, as a consequence, high requirements for preparation from the teacher.

1.2.1.2 The status of English language teaching in Norway

English is often not treated as a separate subject in the first two grades in the Norwegian school. In the first and second grades at the school that I observed, English is included in the general development programme and taught 10 minutes of the teaching time every day by the regular teacher, based on the theories of the short attention span in young children. For these English sections teachers do not use any course books, only flashcards aimed to teach children lexical units. It seems English is not considered a priority subject in the Norwegian primary school until the moment when children start acquiring reading and writing skills. These findings differed so much from the Ukrainian model, that I decided to consult the documents on the Norwegian school planning (LK06). My observations were supported by the following information: The teaching plan does not mention any course book preferences. The amount of English teaching hours in grades 1-4 is approximately 1 hour (60 min) per week. I have not found any statement concerning the form in which this hour should be delivered. So, 10 minutes of English every day can definitely be one of the possible formats.

It needs to be pointed out that the two Norwegian teachers who were interviewed acknowledged that English sections are not very structured in the first grades and that the main goal is that children can “pick up some lexicon”; a mix of Norwegian and English is used in the teaching process. Both interviewees also answered that they use storytelling a lot in their lessons for other subjects than English. For their English teaching they do not see storytelling exclusively in English as an effective tool because children do not possess a large enough English vocabulary at this stage. And, as English is not considered a priority lesson, they do not see it as necessary to change the situation with the teaching materials.

In general, though, both teachers interviewed expressed a positive attitude towards the idea of storytelling with the use of a mixed language, as they use Norwegian a lot at the beginning for explanations.

1.2.2 Summary of the pilot study

Generally, the teachers' attitudes to storytelling in both countries indicated that they see it as an efficient didactic tool, on condition that storytelling is conducted in a mixed language: part of the storytelling in English and part of it in the L1. At the same time, teachers are also reluctant to use storytelling frequently in the classroom, because this method requires a lot of preparation from the teacher when there are no educational materials covering storytelling in a mixed language.

The main conclusion drawn during the pilot stage was that storytelling appeared to be in an intermediate position, as it was neither totally integrated nor completely excluded from the teaching of English in primary school in Ukraine. However, it also appeared possible to change this situation by developing a set of specially designed teaching materials for primary school in Ukraine, which could use storytelling in a mixed language.

There are natural limitations to the pilot study. As only a limited number of schools were observed and teachers interviewed, the findings could not be generalized into a larger context.

These findings inspired me to bring the research project further. I felt that particular topics needed more detailed investigation. Following the advice of the interviewed teachers, it seemed fruitful to gather more information about teaching methods in the primary classroom from other schools throughout Norway and Ukraine, and I felt I needed more information about the course books in use, how much teaching and accompanying materials teachers would like to have, and how much and which type of materials they would need to conduct more lessons based on storytelling.

1.3 Research questions

In my thesis I would like to address the following research questions:

1. How is the storytelling approach perceived and used amongst L2 (English) teachers in Ukraine?

2. How is the storytelling approach perceived and used amongst L2 teachers in Norway?
3. What are the differences and similarities between Ukrainian and Norwegian teachers' use of storytelling and what can be learned from the Norwegian experience?
4. Which challenges do teachers and students experience while working with the storytelling technique and how do they deal with these challenges?

2 Theoretical framework

In this chapter I present the theoretical framework on which the present study is based. I start with a general introduction which is a research summary on children as young learners, more specifically peculiarities of the learning process of children in the pre-reading period. The process of teaching English to young learners is then elaborated on. Finally, the essentials of the storytelling approach found in the scientific literature is presented.

2.1 Children as young learners

Children are natural language learners. Almost without exception, they learn their native language with apparent ease. Moreover, children who are brought into a second-language setting and immersed in a new situation – for example, an elementary school taught in the foreign language – often begin to function successfully in the new setting at a sufficient linguistic level after around 6 months. Curtain and Dahlberg (2009) note that these examples of children's natural language learning ability may seem to suggest that the best way to help a child learn a language is simply to place him or her in the target language setting, but, unfortunately, this is not an approach that will be available to most children. The authors point out that both linguistic and psychological theory can help explain children's seemingly effortless second-language acquisition and provide insights

that can make the classroom a better place for such language acquisition to take place (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009).

As learners of a foreign language, children have their own psychological characteristics, which are different from those of adults. These characteristics include their ways of thinking, their attitude, their aptitude, et cetera. This should, of course, influence the way they are taught. To give them the best quality of English teaching, their teachers need to know and understand the children.

Pre-school children are in a sensitive period for language development. They absorb languages effortlessly and are adept imitators of speech sounds. Because they are very self-centered, they do not work well in groups, and they respond best to activities and learning situations relating to their own interests and experiences. Although they have a short attention span, they have great patience for repetition of the same activity or game. Pre-schoolers respond well to concrete experiences and to large-motor involvement in language learning (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009).

Some studies have shown that the human brain is more open to linguistic development during the years between birth and pre-adolescence and that children who learn a language before the onset of adolescence are more likely to develop native-like pronunciation (Strozer, 1994).

The linguistic apparatus of a 3-5 year old child is already formed, but still retains its flexibility. According to linguists and psychologists such as N. V. Imedadze, M. P. Bahurova and others, these physiological abilities allow children to learn a foreign language without slowing down their further speech development. W. Penfield states that the physiological reason for the success of language learning at this age is that the child's brain has a special ability to learn a language – an ability that decreases with age. Scholars who advocate early bilingualism mention the existence of a comparison mechanism in the mind of a child. This mechanism of comparing a foreign and a native language enables the child to master two languages simultaneously (Roman 1998).

On the basis of experimental research, Imedadze (1998) concluded that in their bilingual language development children pass two stages:

- 1) mixing both languages while speaking;

2) independent functioning of the bilingual system.

The basis for the successful switching from one language to another, in the author's opinion, lies in the stability of differentiation. That is, the clearer the differentiation is, the easier it is to switch from one language to another, and the fewer cases of language mixing occur.

Another view is shared by N. S. Karapetova (2000) and N. A. Malkina (2004). The authors insist on creating a "pure" language environment before beginning to teach foreign language classes to young children. They recommend avoiding any use of the native language and to give the students an impression that the teacher does not understand the native language at all. These authors suggest teaching a language by applying the full immersion method, through painting, singing and body movements.

It is widely recognized that children in language immersion programs work toward full proficiency in the second language and reach higher levels of proficiency than those in other programs (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009). Immersion programs allow children to spend part or all of the school day learning in a foreign language. In total immersion programs, (which are available in a limited number of schools in Ukraine), children learn all their subjects (e.g., maths, social studies, science) in the foreign language. But for the rest of the schools, as studies show, the immersion method does not work equally well for all students, if applied only to the English lessons, and additional native language instruction is required (Olshanskij 2004).

The teaching of children has been profoundly affected by the works of Jean Piaget concerning stages of cognitive development (1975), but also by Kieran Egan (1989) on educational development, Howard Gardner's multiple intelligences theory (1983) with applications by Thomas Armstrong (1994), and Neil Fleming's model of learning styles (VAK) (Fleming, 2001).

Jean Piaget identified four stages of cognitive and affective development in childhood and adolescence. The child develops cognitively through active involvement with the environment, and each new step in the development builds on and becomes integrated with previous steps (Piaget, 1928:1). Because two of the four shifts in the developmental stage normally occur during the elementary school years, it is important for

language teachers working with children to keep the characteristics of each cognitive stage in mind.

The thinking skills of most children in elementary school are at the concrete operations stage, and experience plays a major role in all learning. Piaget (1928) points out that children are not simply miniature adults who have less experience and thus less knowledge to work with as they approach problems and new situations. They do not think like adults because their minds are not like adult minds. It is the privilege of the elementary school teacher to share their world and learn to work within it.

The work of the Canadian educator Kieran Egan (1989) provides insights about educational development that are especially applicable to elementary and middle school language programs. Egan describes development in terms of the characteristics that determine how the learner makes sense of the world. He thinks of educational development as a process of accumulating and exercising layers of ability to engage with the world. As individuals develop, they add new layers of sophistication without leaving behind the qualities characteristic of earlier layers. As he puts it, “Each stage contributes something vital and necessary to the mature adult’s ability to make sense of the world and human experience” (1989, p. 86). Egan distinguishes four educational layers: the mythic layer, the romantic layer, the philosophic layer and the ironic layer. The final stage, the ironic layer, is made up of essential contributions from all the earlier stages, governed by the ironic orientation to the world.

The pre-school age group corresponds, according to Egan, to the mythic educational layer, the characteristics of which are as follows:

The mythic layer: Ages 4 to 5 through 9 to 10 years:

- For these early elementary-school learners, emotions have primary importance. The students always want to know how to feel about what they are learning. They make sense of things through emotional and moral categories (e.g., good versus bad, happy versus sad, etc.).

- Young children are drawn into a topic or an idea through simple polar opposites. For example, they find it hard to resist the appeal of very tiny versus really huge, freezing

cold versus burning hot, a wicked witch versus the perfect princess, and so on. Once presented in this way, concepts can be developed by filling in between the poles.

- The world of the imagination is vivid and real to these children, so they move easily in and out of a world where animals talk or activities take place on a magical trip to another world.

- Learners in the mythic layer often believe that the world thinks and feels as they do.

- These learners interpret the world in terms of absolutes, in the same way that a fairy tale world operates. The wicked witch is all bad; the daring prince is all good.

- Using story form is the ideal approach for teaching mythic layer learners. Like a fairy tale, instruction should have a clear and strong beginning, middle, and end; it should introduce things using strong opposites; it should address absolute meanings; and it should have strong emotional and moral appeal. Although it does not have to be a story, instruction should incorporate these strong story elements (Egan, 1989:88).

The model of learning styles, described by Neil Fleming (2001) has received a wide application by educational specialists. It is called the “Visual Auditory Kinesthetic (VAK) model”. Fleming (2001) defines a learning style as “an individual’s characteristics and preferred ways of gathering, organizing, and thinking about information. VAK is in the category of instructional preference because it deals with perceptual modes” (Fleming 2001:1). According to the VAK model, most people possess a dominant or preferred learning style; however some people have a mixed and evenly balanced blend of the three styles:

1. Visual learners
2. Auditory learners
3. Kinesthetic learners

Visual learners tend to:

- Learn through seeing
- Think in pictures and need to create vivid mental images to retain information
- Enjoy looking at maps, charts, pictures, videos, and movies

- Have visual skills which are demonstrated in puzzle building, reading, writing, understanding charts and graphs, a good sense of direction, sketching, painting, creating visual metaphors and analogies (perhaps through the visual arts), manipulating images, constructing, fixing, designing practical objects, and interpreting visual images

Auditory learners tend to:

- Learn through listening
- Have highly developed auditory skills and are generally good at speaking and presenting
- Think in words rather than pictures
- Learn best through verbal lectures, discussions, talking things through and listening to what others have to say
- Have auditory skills demonstrated in listening, speaking, writing, storytelling, explaining, teaching, using humour, understanding the syntax and meaning of words, remembering information, arguing their point of view, and analysing language usage

Kinesthetic learners tend to:

- Learn through moving, doing and touching
- Express themselves through movement
- Have good sense of balance and eye-hand coordination
- Remember and process information through interacting with the space around them
- Find it hard to sit still for long periods and may become distracted by their need for activity and exploration
- Have skills demonstrated in physical coordination, athletic ability, hands-on experimentation, using body language, crafts, acting, miming, using their hands to create or build, dancing, and expressing emotions through the body (Fleming, 2012:1-4).

Curtain and Dahlberg (1994) point out that when students are asked to learn in a way that makes them uncomfortable, they experience stress. In a classroom where a student's learning style is never included, that student is constantly operating under stress,

and learning is likely to be seriously affected. The authors recommend that teachers should be aware of when an activity or an assignment will cause stress for one or more groups of students, and try to find ways to make the activity more comfortable. For example, some students who prefer very linear, clearly defined tasks will be under stress when assigned to create a skit with a group (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009: 12).

The work of Howard Gardner (1983) and applications by Thomas Armstrong (1994) make us aware of eight distinct forms of intelligence that exist in students (tab 1.1).

According to Armstrong (1996), each of the forms of intelligence is valuable and necessary in society, although most schools have tended to support and nurture only the first two: linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence. This practice has tended to leave other forms of intelligence with far less recognition in the school setting.

As language teachers in a system that has long valued linguistic and logical-mathematical intelligence above all, as Curtain and Dahlberg (2009) point out, we are in a good position to support other kinds of intelligence, too. Some teachers, as they plan their units and lessons, lay out all the intelligences on a grid and systematically include some activity for each type of intelligence. Such an approach respects the value of all the intelligences and encourages students to do their best work at all times. The authors hold that our goal as language teachers is to support the learning of every student, appealing to a variety of learning styles, and to nurture all the forms of intelligence represented in each of our classes (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009).

Harmer (2007) concludes that in the process of teaching and learning, teachers should use appropriate media and techniques based on the students' ability, and that instruction is vital in foreign language classrooms because it can provide comprehensible input for the learner at the right level. Understanding linguistic and psychological theory, showing consideration of learner differences, and understanding the principles of child development and the characteristics of children at different stages of development will help prepare the teacher to create curricula and activities that bring languages and children together effectively.

TABLE 1.1 Multiple Intelligences and Their Applications to the Language Classroom (adapted from Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009).

Intelligence	Excels at	Language Application
Linguistic	Reading, writing, telling stories, playing word games, etc.	Almost everything we do in class!
Logical-Mathematical	Experimenting, questioning, figuring out logical puzzles, calculating, etc.	Surveys, making charts and graphs
Spatial	Designing, drawing, visualizing, doodling, etc.	Creating a picture of an object by writing the word for the object over and over
Bodily-Kinesthetic	Dancing, running, jumping, activities adding motions to songs and chants	Total Physical Response (TPR), building, touching, gesturing, etc.
Musical	Singing, whistling, humming, creating melodies for favourite rhymes	Using songs and rhythmic chants, tapping feet and hands, listening, etc.
Interpersonal	Leading, organizing, relating, mediating, partying, etc.	Small group and partner work
Intrapersonal	Setting goals, meditating, dreaming, planning, being quiet	Journaling, portfolio building
Naturalist	Understanding, categorizing, explaining things in the world of nature	Photography, field trips, classifying

2.2 Teaching English to young learners

Based on their work, experiences and discussion at the Language Resource Center at Iowa State University, Curtain and Dahlberg (2009) listed some of the most important issues related to second language acquisition for young learners. They offer the following concise summary of their current understanding of effective foreign language pedagogy for young learners:

- Second-language acquisition proceeds according to predictable stages.
- The degree of acquisition is correlated with the time available for instruction.
- Children acquire language best in a low-anxiety environment.
- Culture is closely related to language and is an essential component of instruction.
- Meaning can be communicated in L2 without the use of L1.
- Children acquire language through a focus on meaning rather than on grammar.
- Children involve many senses in the acquisition process.
- Meaning in L2 is established, in a school setting, through thematic, integrative approaches incorporating the content of the general curriculum.
- Meaning is established through visual cues.
- Children acquire language through extended listening experiences and negotiation of meaning.
- A relevant, meaningful context is necessary for effective language acquisition.
- The teacher can use a variety of techniques to make the language understandable to children (comprehensible input).
- Children acquire language through tasks appropriate to their developmental level.

- More manipulation is necessary for younger students.
- Language analysis begins later (philosophic layer/late adolescence).
- Older students often demand more translations.
- The rate and the degree of L2 acquisition are affected by differing student learning styles.
- Learner-centered instruction facilitates second-language acquisition.

(Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009: 4-5)

All language teachers must be aware of how languages are learned and of essential concepts of second language acquisition, and this is especially the case when teaching early learners.

According to Stephen Krashen (1982) children acquire language, while adults learn it. In contrast with learning, language acquisition is a subconscious process; language acquirers are not usually aware of the fact that they are acquiring language, only that they are using the language for communication. The result of language acquisition, acquired competence, is also subconscious. We are generally not consciously aware of the rules of the languages we have acquired (Krashen 1982: 10). Curtain and Dahlberg (2000) hold that paying attention to input focuses on the importance of listening skills and on the potential benefits that can come from increased listening opportunities for students. This is particularly true for those at the beginning level. An extended listening period gives young learners the opportunity to gather meanings and associate them with language. They can give their full attention to understanding the messages that are being communicated, without the pressure to imitate or respond immediately (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2000: 11).

Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis states that the most important factor in language acquisition is the amount of comprehensible input to which a learner is exposed. The hypothesis provides a powerful reason for the exclusive use of the target language for all classroom purposes (Krashen 2004). However, as is made clear by Curtain and Dahlberg (2000), simply deciding to use the target language is not enough. It must be used

in such a way that the message is understood by the student at all times, even though every word of the message may not be familiar. This is accomplished through the use of gestures, examples, illustrations, experiences, and caretaker speech (see below) (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009). Krashen has put forward the idea that the amount of comprehensible input equals $i+1$ (to move from the current level of acquisition, represented by i , to the next level of acquisition, represented by $+1$, that is comprehensible input is input that contains a structure that is “a little beyond” the current understanding). This means that learners who are presented with language much more difficult than their current level may not profit from the lesson at all. Curtain and Dahlberg (2009) point out that an important part of the teacher’s planning time for a classroom based on the principles of second language acquisition must be devoted to strategies for making the target language comprehensible to the students.

Creating comprehensible input for language acquirers also consists of using different strategies for making the message understood. One such strategy is known as “caretaker speech” or “teacherese”. Van Patten (2010) explains that caretaker speech refers to the language adults use to talk to children. The speech the children are exposed to is generally simpler than the speech used between adults. Researchers believe that these adjustments play an important role in helping children learn a language. Adapted speech in the acquisition of an L2 is generally referred to as modified input. It is defined as language used by native speakers and instructors to L2 learners to facilitate comprehension. Among the characteristics of modified input are a) slower rate, b) increased use of high frequency vocabulary, c) simplified syntax (e.g. short sentences, repetition, fewer clauses), d) discourse adjustments (e.g. clearer connections between pronouns and their antecedents), e) use of gesture and visual reinforcement, and f) alterations in prosody (e.g. increased acoustic stress on content words) (Van Patten 2010:70).

Second language acquisition is affected by many factors: the input factors (the quantity and quality of the instruction) on the one hand and factors related to the individual characteristics of the learner (age, L1 proficiency, aptitude, motivation, learning style etc.) on the other; language proficiency is the interaction between the two (Brown 1973). As

pointed out by Curtain and Dahlberg (2009), the best input can also fail a student if it does not take into account the attributes of the individual learner. Every learner brings significant cognitive abilities to the classroom. These are related to the student's capacity for analogy and intellectualization. Each learner has a unique array of abilities and capacities, of intelligences, and of learning styles and strategies. All these elements affect the types of experiences that will best facilitate language acquisition for a specific learner, independent of the learner's age (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009:7).

Time spent in language instruction and the intensity of that instruction are the two most critical input factors in the development of language acquisition (Met and Rhodes, 1990). Scholars identify 30 to 40 minutes per day, 5-7 days a week as a minimum time allocation for the successful teaching of English to young learners (Met and Rhodes 1990:438; Swender and Duncan 1998:482). Curtain and Dahlberg (2009) point out that given the hours allocated to language in the school day, it is important to have a clear view of how much time is actually spent on language instruction. Classes are often cancelled because of school programs or field trips, some of the lesson time may be spent moving the students to the language classroom, or taking out and putting away materials, or handling discipline problems. All these factors cut into allocated time, while only the time spent on the task is the real measure of the input available during a class period (Curtain and Dahlberg, 2009: 6).

In addition to the time allocated, the quality of that time should be considered. The appropriateness of the activities and the use of the target language are the key elements of the input quality. Krashen's Comprehension Hypothesis (2004) also helps us with the issue of whether and how to use the student's first language in foreign language education. According to Krashen, the Comprehension Hypothesis predicts that the first language helps when it is used to make input more comprehensible: this happens when the teacher uses the first language to provide background information. This could be in the form of short readings or explanations by the teacher before a complex topic is presented. But on the other hand, first language use can be unhelpful when it is implemented in ways that do not

encourage comprehensible input. An example of this would be when the teacher translates and students have no need to attend to the second language input (Krashen, 2004:6).

Age is strongly related to learning foreign languages (Halliwell 1992; Cameron 2001; Nikolov and Djigunović 2006; Larson-Hall 2008; Munoz 2010; Curtain and Dahlberg 2009; Djigunović 2012 etc.). It is experimentally proven that children are more likely to develop native-like proficiency before age 10, and that is also when they are most open to other cultures. (Larson-Hall, 2008: 37). Moreover, authors who advocate learning the language as early as possible argue that young learners easily acquire a second language in what seems an almost effortless way; they are interested in learning, and motivated and curious to participate in creative activities (Nikolov and Djigunović 2006). Children learn by doing, and are not conscious of the learning process, unlike older learners who are more aware of what is expected of them. This leads to the conclusion that second language acquisition in young learners appears more natural (Halliwell 1992, Cameron 2001).

Motivation is another vital factor influencing SLA. Young learners generally have a more positive attitude towards SLA and are highly motivated. Nikolov (1999) has shown that motivation is normally high at an early age but has a tendency to decrease with time. Therefore it is extremely important to provide young learners with the appropriate learning environment at the beginning of the learning process. The teacher is thought to play an exceptionally significant role during the early learning period, as the impact changes and other factors influence the ups and downs of young learners' motivation as they grow older (Djigunović 2012). Torfadóttir and associates show that many schools in Europe introduce foreign/second languages at an early stage. To provide the necessary motivation, the authors suggest making the classroom environment alive with pictures, posters, flashcards and real objects that stimulate learning. Moreover, they argue that the exposure needs to be sufficient and that the more students listen, the more they get used to hearing the language. The methods used in the classroom can have significant influence on how young learners learn the second language and the type of vocabulary used can influence their learning process (Torfadóttir et al., 2006).

2.3 Storytelling as a foreign language teaching technique with young learners

Storytelling is considered one of the most efficient and motivating approaches to teaching English to young learners, and there are numerous books and articles on the subject by different authors (Nunan 1988; Brumfit et al. 1991; Ellis and Brewster 1991; Wood 1998, Wright 2004 and others). Rokhayani (2010) holds that with meaningful contexts, natural repetition, engaging characters and interesting plots, stories can be used to develop children's language skills, such as listening, using their imagination and predicting. In addition, young learners are always eager to listen to stories, naturally want to understand what is happening in the story and enjoy looking at story books, which increases their motivation to grasp the meaning of new English words, when they start English lessons (Rokhayani 2010).

Storytelling has been widely examined and practiced by several teaching scholars, Andrew Wright, Jean Brewster and Gail Ellis among others. Authors provide many examples of the advantages of using storytelling in language teaching. Ellis and Brewster (1991) give several reasons why teachers should use storytelling in the English classroom:

- Storybooks can enrich the students' learning experience. Stories are motivating and fun and can help develop positive attitudes towards the foreign language.
- Stories exercise the imagination and are a useful tool in linking fantasy and the imagination with the child's real world.
- Listening to stories in class is a shared social experience.
- Children enjoy listening to stories over and over again. This repetition allows language items to be acquired and reinforced.
- Listening to stories develops the child's listening and concentrating skills.
- Stories create opportunities for developing continuity in children's learning (among others, school subjects across the curriculum) (Adapted from Ellis and Brewster 1991:1-2).

Wright (2004) holds that stories, which rely so much on words, offer a major and constant source of language experience for children. Moreover, he suggests that stories can motivate children, stimulate children's imagination and arouse children's interests, etc. Wright provides the following reasons for advocating the use of storytelling in the classroom:

1. Stories provide meaningful contexts.

Language is used to communicate. When we use storytelling, we are not only using language in the text but also the whole context which brings out the meaning. In stories, children learn the language in a meaningful way. In the teaching and learning process, when the teachers are telling stories while the students are listening, they focus on meaning first. Some teachers may present the new language by repeating the stories several times, and they require students to listen carefully. They think that the more the teacher repeats the new language, the better the children will remember it, and that in this way, they will learn some single words or some sentences. However, some children complain that it is hard to retain them. They quickly forget the new words or sentences because the new language is not presented in a context. They would probably remember the words if they encounter them in a story.

2. Stories can provide natural repetition.

When the students read the stories, they tend to pay attention to the key words, and new language can be naturally repeated in stories.

3. Children have another instinct in language learning – picking up chunks.

4. Children's listening skill can be developed.

The use of storytelling also enhances students' listening skill. While children listen to stories, they try to guess the meaning of the new words and to grasp the main idea. Thus storytelling develops children's listening skill – seeking details. Some teachers require children to listen carefully when they begin to say the new sentences or words. The result may be that while listening, the children just concentrate on the pronunciation of the words or sentences, but not their meaning or the meaning of a context (Wright 2004:2).

In the previous chapter we looked into general guidelines to successful input while working with children. Here are some more specific recommended storytelling techniques adapted from Brewster, Ellis and Girard (2004):

a. If students are unfamiliar with storytelling, begin with short sessions which do not demand too much from them and over time extend their concentration span;

b. Read slowly and clearly. Give the students time to relate what they hear to what they see in the pictures, to think, ask questions, make comments. However, do vary the pace when the story speeds up;

c. Make comments about the illustrations and point to them to focus the students' attention;

d. Encourage students to take part in the storytelling by repeating key vocabulary items and phrases. Teachers can invite students to do this by pausing and looking at them with a questioning expression and by putting the hand to the ear to indicate that they are waiting for them to join in, then repeat what they have said to confirm that they have predicted correctly, and if appropriate, expand by putting the word into a full phrase or sentence;

e. Use gestures, mime, and facial gestures to help convey the meaning;

f. Vary the pace, volume and your voice;

g. Pause where appropriate to add dramatic effect or to give children time to relate what they hear to what they see, and to assimilate details in the illustration;

h. Disguise your voice for the different characters as much as you can to signal when different characters are speaking and help convey meaning;

i. Ask questions to involve the children;

j. Do not be afraid to repeat, expand and formulate. This increases the opportunities for exposure to the language and gives the children a second chance to work out the meaning and have it confirmed (Brewster et al. 2004: 21).

Despite the numerous benefits of the storytelling method in the classroom, some teachers experience certain difficulties in applying it. Setyariny (2011) points out some

obstacles faced by teachers in implementing the storytelling method in their teaching such as:

- 1) A large number of students is a challenge to the teacher's ability to manage the class well. The students seem reluctant to concentrate and follow the teacher's instruction;
- 2) The students' diversity is another challenge because the teacher needs to understand their individual characteristics;
- 3) The teachers need time to prepare the story, media, and classroom activities;
- 4) The time allotment is not sufficient to fully implement the storytelling method based on learning objectives;
- 5) Stories that exist in the market are limited and not adequate for teaching, and teachers therefore have the challenge of having to create their own stories (Setyariny, 2011: 4).

3 Methods

In this chapter I will describe how the present study was conducted: research methods, setting, sample and informants (including research ethics), data collection and analysis. Towards the end of the chapter, the study's validity, reliability and transferability are commented upon.

3.1 Research methods

The research questions addressed in this study were as follows:

1. How is the storytelling approach perceived and used amongst L2 (English) teachers in Ukraine?
2. How is the storytelling approach perceived and used amongst L2 teachers in Norway?

3. What are the differences and similarities between Ukrainian and Norwegian teachers' use of storytelling and what can be learned from the Norwegian experience?

4. Which challenges do teachers and students experience while working with the storytelling technique and how do they deal with these challenges?

To receive answers to the research questions, I used qualitative research methods, more specifically semi-structured interviews. According to Johnson and Christensen (2012), qualitative research methods are well suited for studies where “little is known about the topic or phenomenon, and when one wants to discover or learn more about it” (2012:33). As was mentioned earlier, it is difficult to come by information about Ukrainian English teachers' practices and attitudes concerning the use of storytelling in language teaching. Therefore, a qualitative approach to the issue appears sensible. It would have been interesting to combine qualitative interviews with a statistical survey with a large number of teachers addressed, but, due to the scope of this project, I find it necessary to limit the study to qualitative research. Duff (2012) notes that the greatest strength of qualitative studies is their ability to exemplify larger processes or situations in a very accessible, concrete, immediate, and personal manner. In qualitative research, new directions for the field may result from insights generated by the data collected. As qualitative studies seek depth rather than breadth in its scope and analysis, its goal is not to universalize but to particularize and then yield insights of potentially wider relevance and theoretical significance. (Duff 2012: 96). In addition, conducting qualitative studies has considerable practical value because only a small number of individuals and sites are normally involved, and participants may thus be easier to recruit and permissions may be easier to obtain than in a study with a different design for which hundreds of permissions from institutions etc. might be required. (Duff 2012:103).

3.2 Settings and informants

The setting in this study relates to where and when the data was collected, the informants are those individuals who provided the empirical data.

In qualitative studies it is particularly important to consider the kinds and the number of participants one wishes to study closely, and the criteria for their recruitment and selection. (Duff 2012:105). In my study it was important to include several informants representing both Ukraine and Norway, as one of the research aims was to compare the experiences of the teachers. As I saw it, there were clear conditions and criteria for choosing the informants. The main focus of the study was children in the pre-reading period, and as a result, I was interested in recruiting informants who teach English to children in the last years of kindergarten and early in school, independent of gender or age.

Using my own and my supervisors' contacts, I approached five schools and one kindergarten, one private and two public schools in Ukraine, one public school, one special needs school and one private kindergarten in Norway. There were six informants, five female teachers and one male teacher. The six participants in this study are between 23 and 65 years old and their amount of experience as teachers of English varied from one to forty-five years (tab.2).

Tab. 2 Participants

Teacher	Country	Teaching experience	Type of educational institution
Anne	Norway	39 years	Boarding and day-school for children with special needs
Therese	Norway	9 years	Public school
Jessica	Norway	10 years	Kindergarten
Nina	Ukraine	45 years	Private school
Victor	Ukraine	2 years	Public school
Marina	Ukraine	1 year	Public school

The goal of my research was not to generalize from a representative sample, but to gain a deeper insight into the subject through in-depth talks with a few teachers about the nature of the phenomenon. The focus of my study was children in the pre-reading period, and the type of the educational institution was of less relevance. In a discussion with my supervisor it was decided to add informants who work at other types of educational institutions than ordinary primary school to widen the research and get a wider range of

children. We managed to secure an interview with a teacher at one of the very few kindergartens where they teach English, and also at a unique school where the classes for historical reasons consist of both children whose intellectual development has been normal, and others, whose intellectual age require pre-school type teaching.

3.3 Research ethics

As there are ethical aspects involved in interview research, the research process must rely on research ethics. Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) suggest the following areas to be taken into account: informed consent, confidentiality, potential consequences and the researcher's role.

The research participants were fully informed about the main purpose of the research and its main design features. They were also informed that their participation was voluntary and they could withdraw at any moment. For these purposes, each time before interviewing I delivered a short oral introduction on my project and the interview procedure itself.

To ensure the anonymity of the teachers, they have been assigned aliases: Anne, Therese and Jessica from Norway and Viktor, Marina and Nina from Ukraine.

The next ethical consideration is the researcher's responsibility to evaluate whether the project might lead to negative consequences for the informants in relation both to their participation in the study and to the researcher's interpretation of the data. To make sure I was not misinterpreting the answers, I repeated them to the informants during the interview, checking that I had understood correctly, and at the same time giving them the opportunity to add other comments.

The researcher's role is to conduct the interviews competently, ask good follow-up questions and generally be able to lead informants to speak freely on the topic of interest. Testing the questions on my fellow students and colleagues prior to interviews and preliminary practice helped me feel comfortable with the interview guide and have more focus on the informants.

According to the regulations, when conducting research with informants, the project must be approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). We applied to the NSD for approval to conduct the study and received the answer that the project was not considered subject to notification.

3.4 Collecting data

For research purposes I decided to conduct face-to-face interviews with three English teachers in primary school in Ukraine and three English teachers in primary school in Norway. For my project I prepared semi-structured interviews, which ask open-ended questions of the interviewee (Johnson and Christensen 2012). As is the norm for semi-structured interviews, topics and questions were prepared beforehand by making an interview guide (see appendix 1). This allowed me to adjust the questions for each interview situation, and the use of the guide made sure that all the important topics were discussed during the interview.

Each interview began with some opening questions about the teachers' background in terms of working experience and education. This information is relevant for the later analysis, as I am interested in looking for a correlation between the teachers' background and their attitude towards the storytelling method. Considerable attention was paid to general questions about teaching methods and materials used in the classroom and the teachers' experience with them. This approach provided the interviewees with an opportunity to talk spontaneously about the positive and negative aspects of the different techniques they use. As the overarching aim of my study is to investigate the need for new teaching materials, many of the questions were directed specifically at any drawbacks and inconveniences the teachers might experience with the existing materials and at a discussion of what could be improved.

The use of a digital recorder is undoubtedly the most common method of recording interview data because it has the obvious advantage of preserving the entire verbal part of the interview for later analysis. The main drawbacks with recording are the possible malfunctioning of equipment and that some respondents may be nervous to talk while being recorded. As my methodology was pilot-tested before the main study, I had an

opportunity to try both recording and taking notes during the interviews, and finally decided in favour of taking notes. The main reasons were that I received an impression that the interviewee did feel to talk freely while being recorded. In addition, this method frequently produced awkward pauses between the questions, particularly when the respondent didn't show any attempts to elaborate more on the subject. On the contrary, taking notes filled the pauses, giving respondents more feeling of interaction, cooperating (as they could see us "working" together, them speaking and me writing) and plenty of opportunities for respondents to change, augment, or improve their answers.

3.5 Analyzing the data

How the data is analyzed is completely dependent on the goal and content of the study (Kvale and Brinkmann 2009:199). Materials obtained in the study comprised a combination of notes taken during the interviews, and extensive notes made during the analyzing process. The notes were coded and structured according to the three subsections mentioned in the interview guide (background information, general teaching methods and materials and the storytelling approach).

As often in qualitative studies, the analysis of individual interviews is presented first, and then a cross-case analysis is done of issues that arose across the set, with a discussion of how they relate to the literature reviewed earlier.

3.6 Reliability, validity and transferability

Reliability relates to potential errors and is concerned with how consistently the researcher is measuring what he or she set out to measure (Ary, Jacobs and Sorensen 2010: 239). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), the reliability of qualitative interviews is related to the consistency and credibility of the findings. They connect the reliability first of all with the quality of the interview and the analyzing process, and they suggest that consistent and neutral questions will enhance the reliability (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009:208).

To ensure the reliability of the study, the informants were interviewed with the same interview guide and the same questions were asked of them all, but the order of the questions varied in a natural way. Semi-structured interviews, despite the inner structure, also open up for free conversation which ensures the authenticity of the conversation and ideally helps the informants give more sincere answers while retaining the reliability. To further enhance the reliability all the informants were provided with the same information about the research topic and goals, all the interviews were conducted in the same settings – at the teachers’ offices, and all the interviews followed the same analysis procedure.

Bordens and Abbott (2005) define the validity of a measure as “to which extent it measures what you intend to measure” (Bordens and Abbott, 2005:127). The pilot study, completed prior to this master’s thesis, had the same topic as this study, and the interview guide had been tested beforehand. Some of the original questions were ruled out as misleading and others were added. This gave me useful experience in how to ask follow-up questions that provided answers relevant to the study.

Transferability is defined by Ary (2010) as “the degree to which the findings of a qualitative study can be applied or generalized to other contexts or to other groups” (Ary et al. 2010:501). The greatest limit to the transferability of the present study is the low number of participants. Although the results cannot be generalized to a larger context, it has provided valuable insight into the educational situation of English language teaching in kindergarten and primary school.

3.7 Researcher bias

The researcher plays a central role in constructing knowledge during qualitative research, and bias is therefore considered difficult to avoid. Although the researcher’s personal views are not seen as detrimental to the qualitative study, it is recommended that the researcher informs about his or her background and personal motivations for conducting the study, and how these factors may affect the research findings (McMillan 2008: 298). I will therefore give a brief outline of my relation to the topic that I am writing about, and discuss how my preconceived ideas might possibly affect this thesis.

As a teacher of English in Ukraine I had plenty of opportunities to experiment with different methods, techniques and teaching materials with all age groups. Based on my experience, I could conclude that the most challenging group in view of preparation and delivering the lesson itself was the target group of this study, that is children in the pre-reading period. Due to the short attention span and the importance of concrete experience, as discussed above in Chapter 2, this group requires a highly dynamic approach with frequent shifts of activities and accompanying materials. When teaching new lexical units, I often found myself using the storytelling technique or its elements, and my students seemed to take a liking to the approach. At the same time, at an early stage I discovered that preparing pedagogically structured motivating lessons was time-consuming and that the methodical choice of the lesson technique was often influenced by the available ready-made materials and course books. It is possible that my personal interest in storytelling has influenced this study in some respects, and that the project would look different if written by a person who did not appreciate the phenomenon. Being aware of this tendency of mine, however, I hope that I have been able to carry out the study in a fairly balanced manner.

4 Findings

In this chapter, I present my findings from the interviews. Interviews 1-3 are with the Norwegian teachers, Anne, Therese and Jessica, and interviews 4-6 are with the Ukrainian teachers, Nina, Victor and Marina. As will be seen, the teachers have different practices and outlooks on storytelling in language teaching, but their accounts share many characteristics as well. The findings will be discussed in Chapter 5.

4.1 Norwegian Interviews

4.1.1 Interviewee no.1: Anne

Anne works as a primary school teacher at a Norwegian school for children with special needs. It originally functioned as a boarding school for asthmatic and allergic

children, which also took non-boarders, but in the recent years it has also started to accept children with other health problems, ranging from severe respiratory disabilities to acute heart problems and syndromes connected to brain damage. Anne has taught at this school for 39 years, which has given her a perspective on how practices there have changed over time. The most important difference is that recent advances in medicine and pharmacology have made it possible for severely ill children, who previously would have been completely dependent on the school with its adjacent hospital, can lead relatively “normal” lives, go to their local school and participate in a wide range of activities which would have been impossible a decade or two ago. As a result the school now offers places to children with a wider range of medical conditions. These are often conditions which have also impaired their cognitive abilities in different ways. It is of great importance to these children to be taught in a class and be with other children, but because of their very different cognitive levels, all the students in the class need a differentiated approach. Some even need to receive medical treatment during the lessons. One common feature for nearly all the students at the school is that these children have a very short attention span and therefore require frequent changes of activities.

Anne has a degree in Special Education from the Institute for Special Education (Statens spesiallærerskole). As a primary school teacher, she teaches all subjects to the students, including English, but does not have a separate degree in English.

According to the curricula, students in the first grade are to receive 45 minutes of English instruction per week. They are supposed to follow the plan designed for first-graders in normal schools, but, in view of their specific situation, each pupil receives pre- and post-tests, and the instruction in class is adjusted in accordance with their mental and physical abilities.

Another feature of the classes at this particular school is that the children come from a wide range of ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. For example, Anne mentioned that some of the students have not yet mastered the Norwegian language. As a result, both English and Norwegian language instruction has to happen simultaneously.

The main teaching materials used for the course are course books written by Norwegian authors and approved for use in schools by the Norwegian educational authority. Anne provided the following examples:

“First Choice 1,2,3,4” by Liv Bønter, Gitte Frandsen, Tania Kristiansen, Fiona Whittaker.

“Stairs 1,2,3,4” by Heidi Håkenstad, Kristin Morten and Marianne Undheim Vestgård.

“Junior Scoop” by Patricia Anne Bruskeland and Cecilie Teigen.

Anne pointed out that in view of the special needs of some of her students, she uses course books in the lessons only up to a certain point. Students get involved in the book-oriented activities depending on their abilities. Some have the capacity to follow the exercises fully, some do not, and therefore receive less demanding, simplified tasks, for example only colouring or matching.

According to the Norwegian school plans (LK06), first-year students are supposed to acquire simple vocabulary for everyday objects (be able to understand spoken words and name objects, but not write or read). Anne explained that she organizes the relevant lexicon into thematic groups (for example, colours, animals, fruit, food etc.). To reinforce the acquisition process, Anne makes use of flashcards, toys, computer programmes, a smart board, children’s books and storytelling.

In our discussion of positive and negative experiences with the teaching materials and techniques she mentioned, Anne pointed out that the design of the material plays a central role in raising learners’ interest in it. To illustrate the point, she said that pop-up books are more popular with children than plain story books, toys capture more attention than flashcards, related animation included in the approved computer programmes is more beneficial than unrelated animation etc.

Storytelling appears to be a permanent component of Anne’s lessons, and is repeatedly used throughout the programme. With regard to the type of stories chosen for the lessons, she prefers well-known international stories existing in many cultures (for example “The Three Bears”), in view of the international composition of the classes. This helps children overcome the difficulties in understanding the language of the story. Anne observed that children who possess very poor vocabulary and cannot grasp the plot of an unfamiliar story quickly get demotivated and lose interest in it. In general, she concluded that there are two key criteria for choosing a successful story: colour and shortness.

During our interview, Anne had several suggestions for how storytelling can best be incorporated into teaching English to young learners. In her opinion storytelling activities are most beneficial to children if they are introduced through toys. It had been her experience that a combination of visual and tactile sensations play an important role in establishing cognitive links during educational activities for young learners. Given this, Anne felt that the greatest draw-back when using storytelling in language teaching is a lack of ready-made storytelling “kits”. She would like such kits to include a nicely illustrated storybook and, most importantly, a set of toys to accompany the activity.

4.1.2 Interviewee no. 2: Therese

Therese works as a primary school teacher at a Norwegian school. She has a degree in education from a Norwegian university and nine years’ teaching experience. In her classes she teaches all the subjects on the programme, not only English, as English is usually not treated as a separate subject in the first two grades in the Norwegian school system.

Therese teaches English for approximately one hour per week to children in the first grade. In practice this hour is divided into smaller sessions which are incorporated into other lessons. In her view, the time allotted is not sufficient for in-depth learning, but English sessions are not very structured in the first grades and the main goal is that children “pick up some vocabulary connected to the objects and situations surrounding them in everyday life”. Therese suggested that the directives, which are not very strict, encourage teachers to use their creativity in the classroom. In her view children in primary school learn best through games, physical activities, stories and other motivational types of teaching formats, and that is why she tries to experiment with a large range of possible teaching techniques, including storytelling supplemented by other activities.

The main teaching materials she uses for the course are the books “Stairs 1,2,3,4” written by the Norwegian authors Heidi Håkenstad, Kristin Morten and Marianne Undheim Vestgård. The course books gradually present all the usual primary school English language topics, and provide a good base on which to build further. As additional materials and a source for storytelling activities Therese also uses the eight-volume story book series

“The Magic Box” by Philip Newth. She finds this series very convenient to work with as it contains stories at different levels of difficulty, covers structured topics such as colours, numbers, weather, everyday situations and short conversations, as well as providing useful follow-up activities, such as songs, games and exercises. However, for some classes extensive pre-listening exercises are required. One of Therese’s favourite pre-listening activities is to give each child the task of extracting one word from the story in order to teach the others these words afterwards. Later on, while listening to the story, the students are asked to clap their hands when they hear the word they have pre-learned.

Therese noted that although their school library has many good illustrated story books which are very useful later when the children have learned to read and write, these books are of little help as resource materials for teachers who work with children in the pre-reading period. For that age group, additional adaptation and extra preparation is essential. Therese also mentioned that it is sometimes easier to invent a short story yourself than to spend time searching for one which corresponds to your current teaching tasks. Based on her own experiences, her view was that for most children even very simple stories, containing not more than two to three sentences, but told in an emotional way and with accompanying flashcards or toys, can provide extra motivation to attend to what the teacher is saying.

When making up short stories for the class, Therese takes care to include several words from the word list they are currently working on. She explained that she usually puts in between three and ten new words, depending on the class, and if the children manage to learn fifty percent of the vocabulary they are presented with, she would consider it an effective storytelling lesson.

In Therese’s view the fact that so little time is allocated to English within the school programme for the first grade makes it impossible to use the immersion method and avoid speaking Norwegian in the class. Although ideally she would have liked to stay within the target language, she frequently has to resort to Norwegian to help the children follow the story and to avoid possible frustration and loss of motivation among her students.

Despite including the occasional lesson of this kind in her first-grade classes, however, Therese said she does not use storytelling as much as she would like when teaching English at this level. This is because of the lack of resource materials available to

support storytelling to pre-reading age groups. To illustrate her point, she compared storytelling with songs and rhymes. She uses the latter extensively in her lessons with young children, as there is a large amount of simple adapted materials devoted to singing and chanting, which makes it easy to pick up a song or rhyme for nearly any vocabulary topic on the programme. Because the teacher does not always have the time and energy to put in extra work to prepare a story and accompanying materials, it would have been very helpful if many more stories adapted for this age group were available.

4.1.3 Interviewee 3: Jessica

Jessica is from England and has lived in Norway for ten years. After leaving school with 9 GCSE's and 4 A levels, she went on to do a one-year diploma in Art foundation studies and a three-year Bachelor degree in Theatre Design. She is currently coming to the end of a second degree in Norway, studying to become a pre-school teacher (førskolelærer).

Jessica has worked as a kindergarten teacher for the last ten years, and although she does not have a degree in English, teaching English is part of her job description. Over the years she has worked with all age groups, but says she discovered early on that she was at her best with 4-6 year olds, primarily because she felt she had more to offer them and enjoyed seeing the progress they made based on the response they received.

In our discussion of children with special needs, Jessica pointed out that much depends on how you choose to classify the term. In her opinion, every child has special needs and part of being a successful teacher is deciding what teaching methods you can offer that best enable a given child to learn. She explained that much of her teaching is based on play and visual stimuli, and that the children are asked to participate actively. Over the years Jessica has worked with children with behavioural disorders and, whilst their concentration span is generally shorter than that of the rest of the group, as long as the content of the lesson is visually and actively engaging, and allows all children to participate and feel a sense of accomplishment, they can get as much enjoyment out of it as the rest of the group.

Describing her working routine, Jessica noted first of all that there is no national curriculum for English for this age group in Norway (kindergarten group: 4-6 years old). When English is taught, it is purely an initiative of the management and an “extra” offered, as is the case in the kindergarten where she works. “Rammeplan for barnehagens innhold og oppgave” (Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens) is the foundation on which the kindergarten bases its teaching. The document contains one chapter devoted to communication, language and text (page 40). This does not specify the teaching of English, but it does highlight the importance of language development in young children.

English language education is fashionable nowadays and many modern parents see it as desirable for their children. In response to demand, Jessica’s kindergarten has established a routine with English lessons (“engelsksamling”, i.e. English assembly) 3 times a week for approximately 20-30 minutes. Jessica explains that her English teaching extends beyond the lesson time, as she uses every possibility and all other situations during the day as learning opportunities too. For example, meal times, toilet training, and getting dressed are all perfect opportunities to incorporate English, “What are you eating today? Is that a potato?”, “Have you washed your hands?”, “Can you please put on your shoes?”

According to Jessica, visual stimuli is the key to successful work with young learners. Children need to be able to make a connection between a word and an object in order for them to relate it to what they know it is called in Norwegian. They need to be able to both see it and handle it. Most of the teaching materials Jessica uses in the classroom, though, are things she has made herself over the years to specifically suit her teaching needs. They include number cards, picture/colour cards, games and puppets.

Jessica has an established routine for most of her lessons. She always begins with the same song, followed by welcoming each child individually. “Good morning! What’s your name?”. The main part of each lesson consists of three different activities, e.g. a game/song/rhyme or story, and finishes with everybody forming a circle, holding hands and chanting “thank you very much, thank you very much!” together, ending in a big cheer.

Jessica stressed the importance of being adaptable and always having a plan B. This might for instance mean that if the teacher sees that one of the three activities is not

working, i.e. not engaging most of the group, she should stop and bring out plan B. It would however be vital to reflect afterwards on why it didn't work, and perhaps adapt it and try again another time.

Jessica does not make use of any course books for young learners. In her view children in the pre-reading period do not possess the necessary reading or writing skills to follow a course book, and that is also why she puts a lot of energy into creating her own sets of adapted games, rhymes, stories, songs, flashcards, toys etc. to base her lessons on.

Storytelling appears to be a regular part of Jessica's teaching. During our interview, Jessica shared her insights and experiences with storytelling:

“The choice of book/story is very important here. I often use books that don't have too much text but are visually effective. I will begin by reading a new story in English, but translating as I go as well as pointing to the pictures as a reference to what I'm talking about. I think it's important to repeat the same book often in one particular period, each time using less and less translations. I also practice storytelling without the use of books, but with props/visual representations instead. For example, a suitcase that I have adapted into the house of the three bears and puppets I have made for the characters. This allows you to be freer to “play” with the story and take into account the children's reactions and questions as you go along. Once they have seen me do it a few times, they are then given the opportunity to become the storytellers themselves and play out the roles with the puppets. The disadvantage of using a book, is finding a way of being able to both read it and show the pictures to a whole group without breaking up the story. I try to learn the story as much as possible so that I don't have to keep turning the pages over, but I have also photocopied books and written the story on the back. For me, the best is to read a book in small groups, or using props and puppets in a large group.”

Jessica went on to add that there is a lack of predesigned teaching materials that can be used for storytelling in the English lesson. She observed that the main reason for this may be the absence of state regulations on English in the kindergarten, which leads to a situation where teachers have to create programmes and supporting materials at their own initiative. Jessica said she would be happy to use storytelling to an even greater extent, if a ready-made programme and materials were available.

Here is an extract on communication, language and text from the state directives “Framework Plan for the Content and Tasks of Kindergartens 2013” which Jessica was referring to during the interview:

“3.1 Communication, language and text

Providing early and good linguistic stimulation is an important part of the role of kindergartens. Communication takes place through an interplay of receiving and interpreting messages, and sending messages oneself. Both non-verbal and verbal communication play an important role in developing good verbal language skills. Varied and rich experiences are essential prerequisites to understanding concepts. It is necessary to converse about experiences, thoughts and feelings in order to develop a rich use of language. Text covers both written and oral stories, poetry, rhymes, nonsense verses and songs. Important aspects of the transfer of cultural values are linked to communications, language and texts.

Through work on communications, language and texts, kindergartens shall help to ensure that children

- listen, observe and respond to mutual interaction with children and adults
- develop their understanding of concepts, and use a varied vocabulary
- use their language to express feelings, wishes and experiences, to solve conflicts and to create positive relationships through play and other social interaction
- develop a positive relationship with texts and pictures as sources of aesthetic pleasure, knowledge and conversations, and as inspiration for fantasies and creativity
- listen to sounds and rhythms in the language and become familiar with symbols such as numbers and letters
- become familiar with books, songs, pictures, the media, etc.

In order to work towards these goals, staff must

- be conscious of their position as role models for how to listen and respond constructively, and how to use body language, speech and text

- promote trust between children, and between children and adults, so that children enjoy communicating and feel confident using different types of language and texts in their everyday lives
- facilitate meaningful experiences, and create time and space for the use of non-verbal and verbal language in everyday activities, play and in more formal situations
- create an environment that stimulates all children to use language well, and that encourages listening, conversation and play involving sounds, rhymes, rhythms and fantasies with the aid of language and song
- understand the importance of children's mother tongues
- encourage children with bi- and multilingual backgrounds to use their languages, whilst helping them to gain experiences that build up their conceptual understanding and vocabulary in Norwegian
- support children who have various communication difficulties, who do not use language much or who are late developers in terms of language
- allow children to encounter symbols such as letters and numbers in everyday situations, and support children's initiative in terms of counting, sorting, reading, playing at writing and dictating texts
- create an environment in which children and adults every day experience excitement and joy through reading aloud, telling stories, singing and conversation, and being conscious of the ethical, aesthetic and cultural values that they are communicating.”

4.2 Ukrainian Interviews

4.2.1 Interviewee no. 4: Nina

Nina has worked as an English teacher in primary school for nearly 50 years. For the last fifteen years she has been teaching at a private school in Ukraine, where her students are between the ages of 4 and 10. The school has the following primary school system:

Children begin school at the age of 4 or 5; first they go to the “pre-school class” where they stay for one or two years, depending on their age and on the results of an aptitude test consisting of reading, writing and maths exercises. After the pre-school class children attend four years of primary school. English is taught as a separate subject throughout, starting from the pre-school class. The teaching plans for years 1-4 are drafted in compliance with the English subject requirements issued by the Ministry of Education. However, the course plan for the pre-school class is quite flexible and teachers can make decisions on their own, according to the current needs of the students. The Ministry of Education sets the standards and specifies the objectives and goals that primary school children are expected to reach, but the programme allows a free choice of course books and supportive materials.

Nina explained that the private school where she works is in competition with other schools of the same status in Ukraine and is therefore making considerable efforts to retain its leading position. The school is equipped with cutting-edge technical educational innovations, and the teachers have access to all they require in the way of technical support and teaching materials. The management stresses the necessity to stay professionally updated and deliver interesting, highly motivating lessons. The teachers also have to provide regular open lessons for parents, as well as various kinds of school shows, concerts and master classes. Because the fees are high in this private school, classes have relatively few students: up to twenty in one class. Furthermore, because English is considered one of the most important subjects, the class is divided once again – into two groups which each has two English teachers. English is taught three times a week in the pre-school class and five times a week in the other years. Having this many English lessons sets the school apart from the schools in the state system, where children normally receive from one to three hours of English per week, depending on the class specialization.

In her classes Nina basically makes use of recent Longman, OUP and CUP textbooks for young learners. She specifically mentioned the following titles:

“Excellent” Levels Starter, 1-3, by Carol Skinner

“Blue Skies” Levels Starter, 1-6, by Ron Holt

“Welcome” Levels 1-3, by Elizabeth Grey and Virginia Evans

“Get Ready” Levels 1-2, by Felicity Hopkins

“Set Sail” Levels 1-4, by Elizabeth Grey and Virginia Evans

Nina made it clear that she never relies on only one book for the course. She explained that most of the topics need constant repetition and reinforcement. To avoid the students getting bored with the same material and characters, she often copies relevant pages from other course books and uses those in class for variety. Nina only works with primary school children, and in her teaching plan certain topics appear to follow on from each other, mostly lexical ones to begin with and later also grammatical ones. In addition to producing different hand-outs, she prepares a power-point presentation for each topic, a set of flash cards, a couple of rhymes or songs and sometimes a short story, and cartoon or computer-based activities. Teaching the English alphabet takes a large part of the lesson in the pre-school class and the first semester of the first year. Due to the long period of time spent on the alphabet, many of the other simple topics, for example animals, colours, food etc. must be incorporated in the alphabet topics.

Nina admitted that, despite the obvious advantages with what she called “a multi-material approach”, there is a considerable amount of work involved because the teacher has to collect, sort out, prepare and update all the necessary materials, not to mention the administrative challenges of getting the technical support ready, and getting access to computer rooms, audio rooms etc. On the other hand, this type of preparation has gradually become a routine, and after many years of hard work Nina has collected a substantial core of teaching materials that can be used repeatedly with few changes necessary. Moreover, the foreign language department at her school has regular staff meetings where the English teachers to a large extent co-ordinate the contents of their teaching, and that makes the work process easier. These meetings often have a brain-storming character and give her many new creative ideas.

Answering my question about the use of the storytelling technique in her lessons, Nina expressed the opinion that storytelling activities should be used to train the students’ competence in various areas of English, and not be chosen as an isolated curriculum component for the sake of the story itself. Most modern course books contain some elements of storytelling in the presentation of new topics. In the *Starter* courses, for example, these stories sometimes consist of just a few words and are designed as comic

strips. Nina said that she found this type of storytelling a very effective form of presenting new vocabulary. However, storytelling that goes beyond pre-designed material is used only occasionally in Nina's lessons. This is because she experiences certain difficulties in choosing a story and also in adapting it to the students' level of English. As regards the choice of the story, Nina explained that well-known fairy tales and stories work less well. Her students prefer new, unfamiliar ones, but if she chooses an unknown story, it is a rather complicated task to adapt it so that the students can understand it easily without translation. And the younger the children, the more difficult it gets in terms of preparing the story. That is why her most common practice is to tell the story in both English and Russian at the same time, and in addition use flash cards for the key words. However, she added that if she were able to adjust the story and supportive materials according to the level of the students, she imagined storytelling would be a beneficial pursuit.

In conclusion Nina drew attention to the fact that her students receive comparatively more English teaching every week than state school children. That provides her with excellent opportunities for trying different techniques and reinforcing the programme with the help of various approaches. She supposed that the situation would have been different if she had had fewer hours, in which case she would have been forced to abandon some of the options. Considering the lack of ready-made storytelling material which adequately satisfies her teaching needs, Nina was quite certain that she would not have insisted on using additional stories in her lessons without pre-designed materials.

4.2.2 Interviewee no. 5: Viktor

Viktor started working as an English teacher two years ago, after graduating from the National Linguistic University, and in addition to English he teaches German and works part-time as a translator. He teaches at a state school that takes students from the ages of 6 to 17.

Viktor explained that Ukrainian state schools experience a shortage of foreign language teachers because of uncompetitive salaries and stressful working conditions. The profession is not sufficiently attractive to young people, and this again leads to constant changes of language teachers in schools. This fact in itself, in Viktor's opinion, creates an

unhealthy pedagogic situation in classes and demotivates students, especially in the primary school, where children tend to have a greater emotional connection with teachers. In addition to that, “overpopulation” is often a problem in the classes. In line with the state regulations for foreign language teaching, classes must be divided into two groups if the number of students exceeds 30. Consequently, a class of 29 students must continue to learn the language as one large group, and that obviously makes it extremely difficult for the teacher. Viktor teaches several primary school classes in which the number of students varies from 25 to 30, and described his working conditions as extremely stressful.

The primary school classes Viktor is working with receive 1 hour of English per week in the first and second year and 2 hours per week in third and fourth year.

So far in his career, Viktor has not incorporated storytelling activities much in his English teaching. He explained that at the Linguistic University, in the course devoted to the methodology of English language teaching, they were taught that storytelling, role play and games are the best approaches to teaching young learners. One of the basic examples of a combination of these approaches was a course book called *English through Communication*, designed by a group of Ukrainian English language teachers. The course is based solely on communicative exercises and games. He explained that during his university course they looked closely at many of the exercises and practiced the methods on each other. This proved successful and felt like a right approach. Later on, at the beginning of his teaching career, Viktor tried using some of the exercises and activities from the course book with his classes, but they did not work well, partly because additional, colourful teaching materials were not available. However, he thought the main reason for the lack of success lay in the uncomfortable working conditions and limited access to technical aids and teaching aids in general. Viktor said first of all that he considered working with large groups of up to 30 children as having little or no pedagogic effect. In such a situation the teacher has to be very aware of discipline problems and, as a result, will tend to make sure that the majority of the classroom activities do not make it difficult to hold the students’ attention, and will therefore choose writing, repeating after the teacher, chanting etc. On the other hand, poor technical facilities, such as the absence of a smart board, overhead projector or computer in the classroom for demonstration, no copying machine for making enough copies of hand-outs for all the students etc., create a situation in which the teacher, if he hopes to give interesting lessons and motivate students

through extra material, is forced to provide every single detail himself, without any external help. Viktor mentioned that he experiences considerable time pressure in his job and that the lack of time affects his preparation for the lessons.

In his work Viktor uses books that are provided for all the students by the school library. The main English teaching materials for the primary school in Ukraine nowadays are a series of course books written by Ukrainian authors and approved for use in schools by the Ukrainian Ministry of Education: *Dive into English 1-4* by V. Burenko and O. Mykhaylik.

Viktor pointed out that the books are nicely illustrated, but one of the largest drawbacks of the series is that the new thematic words presented in pictures in every section, have a very poor connection, or none at all, with the short stories contained in those sections and, moreover, are not incorporated in the following sections at all. That gives the children no chance to learn properly or remember new vocabulary.

Viktor felt that storytelling activities or other kinds of additional activities need to be used to raise students' motivation, especially if the main course book is unsatisfactory. He said he had tried to change the usual routine on several occasions. He felt that these experiments had been fairly successful, but they required extra preparation making flashcards and simplifying the language. What he had tried was storytelling and also showing videos. For storytelling he chose well-known fairytales, on the assumption that it would be an advantage that the children were familiar with the plot. He thought this activity had worked well as a break from the usual routine, but he had doubts concerning its longer-term teaching value, as the students did not show a lot of interest in follow-up activities. He imagined that the reason could be that the story was not fresh and new, and that it was therefore less interesting for the children to discuss it further. For one of the classes he arranged to have some sessions in a classroom with a video player and showed the *Big Muzzy* series to the children. For follow-up activities he used copies from the accompanying teacher's book, provided by the authors. In Viktor's opinion it is very convenient to have a ready-made activity design that contains both pre- and follow-up exercises, as well as a simple adapted story. Like the other teachers, Viktor deplored the lack of such ready-made materials for young learners at the beginner stage.

To sum up, Viktor was of the opinion that adapted teaching can be a very time-consuming undertaking if the teacher is forced to begin his preparations from scratch. At the same time he was certain that under the right teaching conditions, storytelling would be a beneficial technique for young learners of English.

The interview with Viktor provided me with these main findings: firstly, his account implied that technical and material support for the teaching process, as well as the pedagogical conditions, influence a teacher's practices to a large extent. He occasionally used storytelling activities in his English classes. The objective of these activities was to raise motivation and provide a relaxing activity for students when necessary. His use of storytelling in his teaching appears to be limited mainly by time restrictions. However, to some extent Viktor also seemed to think that storytelling activities are better suited for learners who have a large enough vocabulary to grasp the plot. This outlook is interesting since theorists suggest that storytelling activities provide a good start for young learners with a limited vocabulary.

4.2.3 Interviewee no. 6: Marina

Marina has a specialist degree in English Language and Literature and graduated from the National Linguistic University of Ukraine only in 2013. Prior to our interview she had had some trainee teacher experience from her last year at university, and half a year of working experience as a teacher of English at one of the state rural schools. In addition to that, she works frequently as a substitute English teacher at an evening course for schoolchildren organized by a local tutorial center.

Describing the working conditions, Marina explained that, first of all, rural schools experience a lack of foreign language teachers, and as a consequence of this, the school does not always have a capacity to provide the required number of lessons. If the regular teacher gets ill, or changes his or her job, classes are sometimes brought together for the lesson or, even worse, English lessons are replaced by other subjects. Marina felt that such irregularities in the educational process first and foremost pose considerable challenges for the teacher, both because it is difficult always to follow one pedagogic line and follow

up the taught material, and also because children forget new lexical and grammatical units easily without sufficient reinforcement of the topics.

Marina teaches English to children in their 1-7th year, but in addition to that, she also works as a substitute teacher at the local evening courses for schoolchildren. Most of her students are average schoolchildren, but answering the question about students with special needs, Marina pointed out that one cannot avoid dealing with several “problematic cases”, that is children who experience difficulties in learning the language. Some of Marina’s students study slower for different reasons, such as problems with the prolonged memory or ADHD syndrome, so she feels that she needs to repeat some points over and over again with them. In Marina’s opinion, to help children with such learning difficulties, a teacher should use varied teaching techniques to introduce lexical and grammatical units. She pointed out that it would have been most optimal to also integrate some elements of individual approach, but this doesn’t seem very realistic given her present working conditions.

According to the curricula, students in the first grade are to receive one 45-minute lesson of English per week. The course plan for the first grade, which Marina uses as a base for her lessons, presupposes that by the end of the first year of school children have learnt the English alphabet, a key lexicon on 8-10 major topics (such as family, colours, in the house, weather, clothes etc), have acquired basic writing, reading and communication skills (have learnt how to conduct simple dialogues on two to three topics), and have learnt to answer simple questions about themselves (“What’s your name?”, “How old are you” etc.).

The school is using student books approved by the Ukrainian Department of Education and Science. From Marina’s point of view they do not fully satisfy the teaching needs, as they are not consistent enough in terms of presenting and following up new material, the stories in the book are rather dull and not captivating. She made the remark that “It would be nice to have them [books] examined in detail before using them in schools.” To improve the situation, Marina often searches for printable worksheets for ESL students on the internet to make her lessons more motivating. She admits that, being a young teacher and lacking experience in managing the class, she feels a constant pressure and necessity to be thoroughly prepared for the lesson, have a clear plan and enough

interesting accompanying materials. During her lessons, Marina relies heavily on the course book content, and her main teaching techniques are writing new words, reading, blackboard drawing, singing songs and role-playing. She says that she often chooses group activities that help control the class better, such as writing, repeating after the teacher or singing songs.

Discussing the storytelling approach, Marina revealed that she finds this very motivating for children. She had not had many opportunities to use it in her lessons so far, but she had enough experience with the technique during her teacher practice at University. This was at one of the very good schools with English specialization, which had 5 hours of English a week. In her practice she was using the storytelling approach extensively and it was also easy and comfortable to do, as their supervisor provided them with adapted stories and materials, and also because the level of the students was fairly high and the children could follow new, unknown stories with minimal help of the native language.

After starting to work on her own, she attempted to try storytelling on a couple of occasions. Instead of flash cards, Marina prepared power point presentations on her laptop computer with a sequence of pictures, representing both separate lexical units and the situations in the story. Marina said that this approach was quite successful, her students were excited to see the laptop in the classroom, as well as by the new pictures, and the idea of being engaged in a novel activity. On the other hand, to make the story comprehensible, Marina was forced to explain almost every single word in the native language and it took much more time than expected.

In Marina's opinion, the main disadvantages of using storytelling are the time-consuming preparation and that it takes a considerable time to complete at least one story with children, while the program requires much more lexical material, reader training and writing skills for 1 academic hour. The ideal conditions for using the storytelling approach, in her view, would be to have a connected storytelling-based course for young learners, adapted to the average level of Ukrainian learners and completed with hand-outs, flashcards, etc.

5 Discussion

This section discusses the practices and attitudes towards storytelling as a didactic tool found among the teachers interviewed. All in all, the differences in the extent of their use of storytelling appear to be related to the teachers' background, attitudes and consequent decisions, whereas the differences in the type and purpose of use can probably be explained as a consequence of a natural development of the students' proficiency, comprehension level and age.

Before beginning a discussion of these two main areas, however, it is necessary to make some general remarks about the interviews, and discuss the interviewees' relation to the theoretical field of language learning.

5.1 Remarks on the interviews

It needs to be pointed out that the three Ukrainian interviewees (Viktor, Nina and Marina) had a tendency in the course of the interview to veer off the topic of storytelling in English teaching, and move onto subjects that pertained to their job as teachers in more general terms. Their experience of the current curriculum, their relations with students and parents, financial and administrative issues, assessment forms and time pressure were subjects which were brought up on several occasions throughout the interviews. When this occurred I attempted to steer the conversation back to the issue of storytelling, but I cannot be sure that I was persistent enough in this undertaking. Perhaps I would have obtained more material on their practices and views of translation if I had managed the conversations more strictly. However, one of the characteristics of semi-structured interviews is the participants' ability to address topics not anticipated beforehand by the interviewer. It should also be kept in mind that in a phenomenological study, the researcher is interested in gaining a perception of the life-world of each case. It is evident that the above mentioned subjects constitute central elements in the everyday lives of the teachers.

The fact that the teachers brought up other issues than storytelling can perhaps also be interpreted as symptomatic of not having a strong relationship to it: if they felt they had

little to say about storytelling, they may – consciously or not – have talked about other subjects in order to compensate for this.

Although Nina stands out from the other two Ukrainian interviewees, both in terms of her years of teaching experience and her concern about the teaching process itself - (she talks extensively about preparation for the lessons and the use of different materials and technology in the classroom) - it is obvious that a considerable part of the various techniques and approaches she advocates are due to the high standards of the private school she works at and the directives from the management. Moreover, she mentioned on several occasions that because of the strong competition between schools of this type in Ukraine, considerable efforts are made to produce the right impression and retain the interest and positive attitude of parents. Therefore it seems fair to conclude that a large part of Nina's efforts in the classroom serve the practical purposes of the school rather than the educational process itself.

All the Norwegian interviewees (Therese, Anne and Jessica) go straight to the point and extensively discuss their classroom routines, textbooks and additional literature, the challenges they encounter using different techniques and practical solutions to them. As Anne teaches English at a boarding- and day-school for asthmatic and allergic children, some of whom have other physical handicaps, in addition to a very detailed description of classroom methods, she paid considerable attention to describing the everyday challenges for the students and teachers and the special measures taken to adjust the instruction in class in accordance with the students' mental and physical abilities.

Overall, it appears that the Norwegian interviewees tended to maintain focus on the practical issues relating to the educational process itself and did not have any big concerns for the external factors, such as the size of the groups, or technical or financial issues.

5.2 Relationship with theory

A common characteristic of the six interviews is that the teachers show little orientation towards contemporary theory and research pertaining to teaching English to young learners. While the Ukrainian participants give a few general references to theory

and research while talking about their classroom practices, the Norwegian participants do not mention the theoretical basis at all.

There is a substantial difference between the Ukrainian and Norwegian groups of teachers. As mentioned in chapter 4, according to the requirements of the state educational system in Ukraine, it is obligatory to possess a narrow specialization as a teacher of English from a linguistic university to have the right to teach English at any level, while the Norwegian educational system does not impose the corresponding requirements. Anne has a degree in Special Education, Therese has a degree in Education and Jessica is finishing her studies to get a degree as a pre-school teacher. This might imply the Norwegian teachers do not possess sufficient knowledge concerning the theoretical framework of particular classroom techniques such as storytelling.

The few general remarks on the theoretical issues were obtained from the youngest participants, Viktor and Marina, the Ukrainian teachers with the least experience in the field of teaching. Compared to the other teachers interviewed, who mostly speak about the subject in a matter-of-fact manner, Viktor and Marina came across as philosophically oriented. This tendency can perhaps be explained by the fact that both Viktor and Marina recently graduated from university, and therefore are more practiced at reflecting on theoretical issues regarding language teaching. During our conversation, both drew comparisons between the theoretical knowledge of English teaching methodology and the real work as a teacher in a classroom. According to them, the university lecturers portrayed exclusively positive attitudes towards the different “entertaining” techniques to be used with young learners, storytelling amongst them, both in relation to them being a valuable motivating tool, and in relation to the introduction of new lexical and grammatical units. However, as Viktor and Marina pointed out, they experience a large gap between the textbook ideas of the ideal classroom activities and their implementation in the daily lessons.

On the whole, the findings show that, despite the interviewees being not very oriented towards contemporary language teaching theory, one can nonetheless observe that their actual teaching practices, based on experience, are in line with arguments posed by the scholars referred to above in Section 1. Jessica’s and Anne’s views on the classification of students’ special needs and their arguments concerning the differentiated approach

reflect the model of learning styles (visual, auditory and kinesthetic), described by Neil Fleming (2001). They both appear to pay particular attention to engaging kinesthetic activities, designed to help children learn through moving, doing and touching, which is in agreement with the observations of Curtain and Dahlberg (2009) about pre-schoolers responding well to concrete experiences and to large-motor involvement in language learning. The study shows that all the interviewees advocate the benefits of varying teaching techniques and materials to provide different types of input aimed at different learning styles and types of intelligence (according to Howard Gardner, 1983 and applications by Thomas Armstrong, 1994). This way of reasoning has been put forward by a number of scholars (Thomas Armstrong, 1994; Curtain and Dahlberg, 1994; Foss, 2009) indicating that when students are asked to learn in a way that makes them uncomfortable, they experience stress, which is likely to lead to a situation where their learning is seriously affected.

Theresa argues that storytelling is an effective didactic tool for introducing new lexical units, as it provides a necessary emotional background. Moreover, she often finds it convenient to create her own short stories with a simple plot to adjust her current teaching needs. In the writings of Egan (1989) we find a description of the so-called mythic layer, corresponding to the elementary school learners, which stresses the importance of emotions, simple polar opposites and appeal to children's imagination for successful learning. According to Piaget (1928), the thinking skills of most children in elementary school are at the concrete operational stage, when experience plays a major role in learning and children respond best to the situations concerning themselves first and furthest. We can see that Jessica extensively uses the everyday experiences of her students outside the formal classroom (such as meal times, toilet training, and getting dressed) as learning opportunities too.

5.3 The role of pre-designed materials in working with young learners

On the whole, the findings show that the teachers' views on preparation for lessons and the use of pre-designed materials vary depending on the amount of teaching

experience they have. I could observe a more relaxed attitude from the teachers with a greater experience. Nina, Therese, Anne and Jessica reported having collected a substantial core of teaching materials that can be used repeatedly with few changes. Their collections include flash cards, toys, pop-up books, adapted stories, games, rhymes and songs. They explained that, due to the existence of relatively structured topics to be taught in the elementary school, such as colours, numbers, weather, everyday situations etc., the process of creating and collecting sets of accompanying materials for every topic becomes a routine over the years. Nina, Anne and Therese extensively use the materials they have collected in their classes to enrich the lessons outlined in the course books. Jessica goes even further and does not use any course books in her teaching at all, assembling every single lesson out of her own materials.

In contrast with the aforementioned experienced teachers, Viktor and Marina showed more dependence on course books and adapted materials for teachers. They both complained about poor technical facilities at their schools and a lack of pre-designed materials that could be copied and given out to children.

A common characteristic of all the interviewees is that they responded reluctantly to the idea of using more storytelling in their classroom given their present resources, as it implied spending more time on time-consuming preparation creating accompanying flashcards, toys etc. and adapting the stories themselves. However, when the teachers were given the opportunity to elaborate, they admitted finding it attractive to adapt and use ready-made didactic stories in the classroom had they been available.

5.4 Variations of the native language use

Based on this study, it appears that the students' age and proficiency level, as well as the time allocated to the English language instruction are the main factors influencing of the amounts of native language use.

As specified by Met and Rhodes (1990), scholars identify 40 to 60 minutes per day, 5-7 days a week as a minimum time allocation for successful teaching of English to young learners. My study showed that an average frequency of English lessons at the elementary school in both Ukraine and Norway is 60 minutes per week. This amount of time cannot be

considered sufficient to provide for the successful development of language acquisition without additional input. The difference between Ukraine and Norway lies in the existence of an English speaking environment in Norway (English TV, books, general high level of English proficiency etc.), while Ukrainian learners depend solely on the instruction delivered by their English teacher during lessons.

The only school that stood out in the experiment was the private school where Nina works, where English is taught 5 hours a week. However, in line with Olshanskij (2004), there was agreement among all the participants that the immersion method would not work equally well for all students and that additional native language instruction is required.

When using storytelling in their classroom, the participants would ideally have liked to stay within the target language, but they frequently resort to the native language to help the children follow the story and to avoid possible frustration and loss of motivation among the students.

6 Conclusion

In this final chapter I discuss the implications of the study's findings and provide some suggestions for further research.

6.1 The most important findings

The point of departure for this study was to investigate how and to what extent storytelling is being used as a didactic tool in English teaching in Ukraine and Norway and to explore the teachers' attitudes towards storytelling. I also set about exploring the differences and similarities between Ukrainian and Norwegian teachers' use of storytelling to discover how the Norwegian L2 teaching experience can be applied to the Ukrainian classroom.

According to the teachers interviewed, both Ukrainian and Norwegian, storytelling constitutes a certain part of their English teaching, but it is not very structured and is only picked up occasionally. This tendency seems to a large extent to be rooted in the fact that

storytelling is not highlighted in the current national curricula and textbooks for the primary school, which explains the lack of ready-made adapted materials for storytelling to young learners in the pre-reading period. On the occasions when storytelling is used, it appeared often to be employed by means of constructed short stories, made up by teachers themselves in accordance with their current teaching needs. The teachers reported that this type of classroom activity is obviously efficient, but rather time-consuming. The teachers interviewed suggested that time restrictions in their everyday life may reinforce the tendency of relying heavily on the contents of course books, and may indirectly make storytelling less relevant to include in the teaching.

In addition, the teachers felt that there is not enough time allocated to their lessons in the primary school, and children in the pre-reading period do not possess the necessary vocabulary to be taught English by the immersion method.

As was stated earlier, time spent in language instruction and the intensity of that instruction are the two most critical input factors in the development of language acquisition. Neither Ukrainian nor Norwegian national curricula for English allocates 40 to 60 minutes per day, 5-7 days a week to English teaching, which is identified by scholars as a minimum time allocation for successful use of the immersion method with young learners. This scientific data was supported by the data collected. The teachers interviewed admitted having difficulties in conducting storytelling lessons entirely in English and they have to resort to help from the first language to make the input more comprehensible.

The teachers' attitudes to storytelling indicate that they primarily see it as a tool to raise their students' motivation, to introduce new vocabulary or to reinforce acquired vocabulary. Ukrainian teachers appeared to be more concerned about the lack of ready-made storytelling materials to support the structured introduction of lexical and grammatical units required by the programme.

Comparing English teaching in primary school in Ukraine and Norway, we may conclude that in Ukraine structured English learning begins at an earlier stage than in Norway, long before children can read or write, while in Norway schoolchildren start having full-time English lessons only in the 3rd grade, when they can read and write in L1. This explains the absence of problems with methodology in the Norwegian English classroom.

Generally, the teachers' attitudes to storytelling in both countries indicate that they see it as an efficient didactic tool, provided that it is conducted in mixed language: part of the storytelling in English and part of it in the L1. At the same time, teachers are also reluctant to use storytelling frequently in the classroom, because, due to a limited variety of simple adapted educational storytelling materials, this method requires a lot of preparation from the teacher.

For the time being, despite the total approval storytelling has as an efficient teaching technique with young learners, it does not seem to have a particularly strong position in the teaching process itself. However, the teachers appear to be willing to use storytelling to a greater extent if provided with ready-made storytelling kits. Judging from the data received, we can conclude that it may be possible to facilitate a more solid establishment of the storytelling technique in the teaching process by developing a set of specially designed structured teaching materials for the Ukrainian young learners in the pre-reading period. Moreover, it appears worth consideration to blend English with the native language at the early stages of the storytelling programme, decreasing gradually the amount of the native language in the stories.

6.2 Further Research

It seems reasonable to bring the project further. This study suggests two main directions for further research. Obviously, a larger sample comprising more informants in different countries could be used to obtain more accurate results. It would be interesting to conduct a quantitative study with statistical evaluation of a number of significant variables. The second and more practically oriented direction would be, following the advice of the interviewed teachers, to create a sample adapted storytelling programme and investigate its efficiency, usability and motivational factor over a certain period of time in one of the young learner classes. One might make a set of materials for introducing lexical units according to the educational programme for a period of one or two semesters. In this type of study, one would be able to compare the results of the experimental and control groups at the end of the period.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. The Interview Guide

Background questions

1. Where are you from?
2. What is your education?
3. How many years of work experience as an English teacher have you got?
4. Which age groups do you work with?
5. Do you work with students who have special needs? If yes, in which way does this influence the educational process?
6. How many hours of English teaching a week do you have with the same group? In your opinion, is the amount of teaching given enough to cover the requirements specified in the national curriculum for English for this age group?

Questions on general teaching techniques and materials

7. Which teaching materials do you use in your lessons?
8. Do you think the available materials satisfy your teaching needs?
9. Which teaching techniques do you use / use most in your lessons?
10. Do you have techniques that you feel work particularly well for your students?

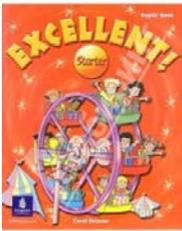
Questions on the storytelling approach

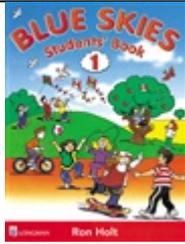
11. Do you use “storytelling” in your lessons?
12. Could you describe the usual “storytelling” routine with your class?
13. Do you use books/flashcards/blackboard drawing etc.?
14. How much of the native language do you use to help children understand the story?
15. Do you choose new stories or well-known ones?
16. What kind of materials do you use for storytelling?

17. Have you experienced any disadvantages with using the storytelling technique with your groups?

Appendix 2. Course books

The books mentioned by the teachers in the course of our interviews are not single course books but complete series of course books, designed to cover several years of the English education at school. As my investigation is centered around teaching English to young children in the pre-reading period (that is kindergarten and first grade of the primary school) I was naturally most interested in the first levels of the book series, Starter or Level 1. Below is a short description of the course books mentioned in the interviews, as presented by the publishers or other official sources representing the authors.

	<p>“Excellent!” by Carol Skinner</p> <p>Excellent! is a four-level Primary English course that offers the right level of challenge to help students achieve real results. Students practise the four skills from the beginning through tasks set within a stimulating and meaningful context. In the Starter level language is introduced in a gradual way in order to build students' confidence and ensure success.</p> <p>Key features of the Starter level:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Motivating cartoon stories introduce key language and engage students' interest;• Plentiful handwriting practice provides a solid foundation for students new to the Roman alphabet;• Guided pair-work activities using puppets make learning memorable and fun;• Songs and chants enable students to enjoy the language in the security of a group;• New structures and vocabulary are introduced in a carefully controlled way to build the confidence of complete beginners.
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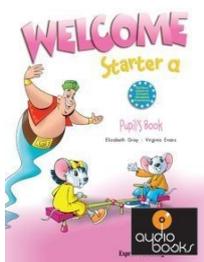


“Blue Skies” by Ron Holt

Blue Skies is a gently paced, six-level course with all the basic grammar and communicative activities you need to give children a strong and successful start in English.

Key features of Level 1:

- “Building-block” approach, with a solid, structural syllabus;
- Practice exercises in the Students’ Book with optional extra material in the Activity Book;
- Picture dictionary and illustrated grammar reference in the Students’ Books help reinforce language Step-by-step lesson plans, photocopiable tests, and simple craft activities in the Teacher’s Books;
- Each unit presents language and activities relating to a single theme, and is introduced through rhymes, poems, songs, stories, comic strips, cartoons, dialogues and practical tasks;
- Revision is continuous and is carried out in both the presentation and practice pages;
- Contains quizzes which provide an assessment activity covering every four units of study.



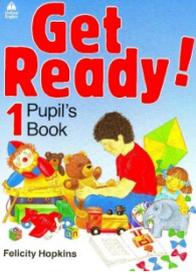
“Welcome” by Elizabeth Grey and Virginia Evans

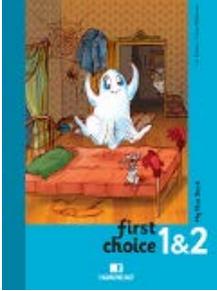
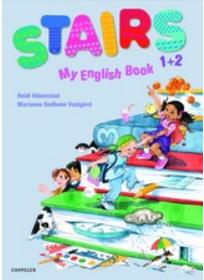
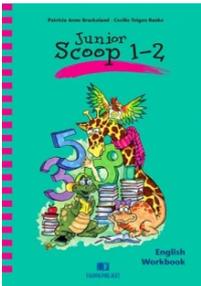
Welcome Starter A and B is an early-primary course specially designed to meet the needs of students in their first years of English language learning. Students experience the world through the adventures of two mice, Cecil Mouse and Ellie May, along with the all-time-favourite Masid, the genie!

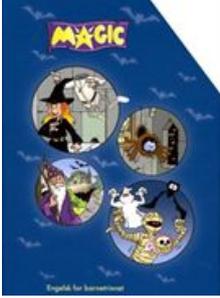
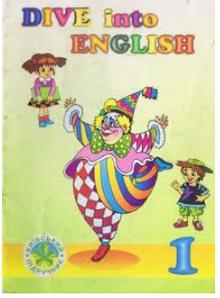
Welcome Starter A comprises three modules of two units each. It focuses mainly on Listening and Speaking, but also offers pre-writing and pre-reading activities as well as a subtle introduction to the alphabet.

Key Features of Starter level:

- Presentation of vocabulary through colour flashcards and posters;
- Songs, chants and games;
- Stickers;
- Total Physical Response activities;
- Circle-time activities;
- Cartoon story in every unit;
- Introduction to the British way of life;
- Module check at the end of each module;
- Traditional story told in rhyme within the Pupil’s Book;
- Full-colour Activity Book;
- Nursery songs and rhymes;
- Board games;
- Teacher’s Book with additional activities and games;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fully dramatised audio CDs; • Fully animated DVD; • Puppet (Masid).
	<p>“Get Ready!” by Felicity Hopkins</p> <p>Get Ready! is a lively two-level course for children who are learning English for the first time.</p> <p>Get Ready! teaches students to say and understand a basic English vocabulary and a small number of useful expressions. It teaches numbers and the letters of the alphabet and introduces students to the early stages of reading and writing. The Get Ready! Activity Books are designed to help develop these basic reading and writing skills. They also provide extra practice of the language taught in the course. Other materials in the Get Ready! course are Pupil's Books, Handwriting Books, Numbers Books, and cassettes. For each level there is a Teacher's Book, providing detailed guidance on the use of the materials.</p>
	<p>“Set Sail!” by Elizabeth Grey and Virginia Evans</p> <p>Set Sail! is an early-primary course. Two captivating characters, Larry and Lulu, along with their pet, Chuckles the chimp, take young learners to a world of fun and adventure!</p> <p>Set Sail! 1 promotes listening and speaking whilst leading children gently into practising all four skills through pre-reading and pre-writing activities.</p> <p>Set Sail! 2 provides practice in all four skills, progressing to more demanding tasks designed to fully equip young learners with the ability to communicate in the target language.</p> <p>Each level of the Set Sail! series consists of six themes. The Pupil's Book and the Activity Book are designed to be covered in 70 hours of classroom work.</p> <p>Key Features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of vocabulary through colour flashcards; • New language presented through lively dialogues; • Songs, chants and games; • Pronunciation "twisters"; • Constant recycling of vocabulary and grammar; • Revision and evaluation at the end of each theme; • A play for performance purposes; • Full-colour Activity Book; • Stickers; • Story book: a book of stories for each level; • Step-by-step interleaved Teacher's Book with additional activities and games (Kids' Corner); • About me (Projects); • Craftwork cut-outs;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Picture (word) cards; • Fully dramatised audio CDs; • Puppet (Chuckles); • DVD.
	<p>“First Choice” by Liv Bønter, Gitte Frandsen, Tania Kristiansen, Fiona Whittaker.</p> <p>First Choice 1and2 is an educational pack for teaching English in the first and second grades, composed to enable a teacher to conduct both shorter and longer English lessons, as well as to build inn English teaching into teaching of other school subjects.</p> <p>First Choice 1and2 has mostly focus on the vocabulary relating family, house, animals, numbers, days of the week, weather and free time activities. The English language is introduced through songs, games, rhymes, activities and rules. The little ghost Ooh is a main character throughout the book and an engaging and motivating company on the way.</p>
	<p>“Stairs” by Heidi Håkenstad and Marianne Undheim Vestgård.</p> <p>Stairs is a colourful book serie with topics directed at building students word bank. The main characters Sam and Sophie present the new material in the book and invent things on the way. The book contained easy drawing, reading and speaking activities, which are fun for students to participate in.</p> <p>Chapters begin with clear teaching goals and finishes with the language check and Diploma.</p>
	<p>“Junior Scoop” by Patricia Anne Bruskeland and CecilieTeigen.</p> <p>The authors write that “language is communication”. Junior Scoop 1has focus on the cooperation between the teacher and student and gives structure to acquisition of new words and expressions. The learnt words and expressions are taken further and integrated later in the new topics. The book corresponds the English teaching goals stated in the Norwegian teaching plan for 2013.</p>

	<p>“The Magic Box” by Philip Newth.</p> <p>The Magic Box is an 8-book series, which contains storybooks of 2 levels: easy and advanced. The main topics in the books are written in the fantasy genre, but the texts are designed also to cover numbers, colours, weather, days of the week, hobbies, rhymes, rules etc.</p> <p>Every book has also a page with suggested follow-up exercises; and the teacher’s book has suggestions for extra activities, songs, additional literature and topics for dialogs and speaking moments.</p>
	<p>“Dive into English 1-4” by V. Burenko and O. Mykhaylik</p> <p>There is not a very large description found in the official sources about the book. It states that the course book is directed at practical mastering of communicative skills, developing cognitive abilities of children and providing for effective English teaching activities in the lessons.</p>