Preliminary agenda:

Participants:
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December 8th:
Morning session
Topic: Differentiation in language learning.

Sintija presented the Zvaigzne publishing house. They have a lot of bookstores all over Latvia. In 2011 they organised a reading campaign. The children were asked to produce videos for YouTube in order to show the advantages of being able to read and to use foreign languages. Reading was for instance shown by professional actors reading scenes from some stage plays. They also organised a national reading congress. Then Sintija gave a presentation on “early language learning: the case of differentiation in 'Jump with Johnny the Rabbit”’. The project was aimed at children age 6 to 8, i.e. from kindergarten into primary. The material makes use of different learning styles. The greatest challenges were: teachers have different teaching methods and approaches; big differences among the learner population form 6 to 8 years old. The title Jump with Johnney the Rabbit indicated with the word jump something dynamic, and the rabbit is your friend. Values like family, friendship and empathy play a big role in the material. We discussed the problem of having texts in material aimed at 6 year olds. They have listed nicely the characteristics of the three different age groups targeted. Next topic was multiple intelligences (Gardner). There exercises to elaborate all the
intelligences. Finally there a guide book for teachers and parents explaining all tasks and answers to exercises, including ideas for additional exercises. At the end of the presentation Sintija gave a very inspiring list of questions for consideration (please click here to see the presentation).

There followed a long debate about the fact that especially English publishers for English as a foreign language are approaching the markets and that teachers often ‘think’ these publishers are better because they are natives. But the impression is rather that they do not know the learners’ needs as well as the local educational publishers.

Coffee break

Discussion on how to combine theoretical and methodological knowledge with the author’s vision of a textbook, focussing on the implementation of
differentiation in language learning materials (examples and ideas to be presented by the participants)

Christina presented the series English for you and gave a presentation with the title ‘Differentiating instruction’, the series is for grades 8 to 10 covering A1-C1 of the CEFR. Four principles have been guiding the whole approach: Authenticity, Accuracy, Affect and Attention. Different learning styles and different intelligences are also taken into account. Also the material includes a lot of interactive computer based applications. Interactive activities help develop basic interpersonal communication skills and cognitive academic language proficiency. Every module works on developing different skills (listening, speaking, reading, cooperative learning in groups or pairs etc). Both visual and auditory learners are taken into account when planning the different activities. There are also specific assessment packs for each part/unit of the material (please click here to see the presentation).
Taina presented the procedures used at Otava when integrating differentiation in foreign language textbooks by using the series ‘Top 7’ as an example: differentiation up and down, humour as motivation, teacher feedback plays a central role in the planning process, learning to learn hints, grammar taught with cartoons and later exercises, basic text for all learners plus bonus texts for better learners. Often the texts are dialogues easy to be acted out by the learners. In addition there are bonus exercises for better learners. There are also lots of digital materials (please click here to see the presentation).

Camilla presented ‘Colores’, material for Spanish for Swedish learners of ages 12 to 15 years. Here differentiation mainly means the option to use parts of the individual textbooks or the whole content. Each book is divided into 5-6
different topics/themes. Each theme has basic texts for all learners, in addition optional texts at 3 levels for interested learners. The teachers’ guide tells the teacher what grammar has been skipped if they skip one or more themes. These parts of the grammar are dealt with in specific exercises indicated in the teachers’ guide. An important feature is the many revision modules, seeing language as a circle that grows bigger and bigger all the time. In addition she presented a series for Swedish as a second language, where there are sound files for each lesson – these listening exercises are offered at three difficulty levels (please click here to see the presentation).

Ilme presented the differentiation approaches used in the series ‘With flying colours’ for secondary school. They made the textbooks as flexible as possible. The books all have 10 units with warm-up, main reading and
speaking texts and vocabulary exercises and language tests in each unit. To make differentiation possible the teachers are recommended to use pair and group work plus a wide selection of different activities. There are also taken considerations for learners with specific visual or auditory approaches to language learning. Instead of a teachers book there is in each books a special teachers CD with exercises, additional texts etc. plus Powerpoint slides for use in the classroom, and of course keys to all exercises. This solution has been chosen because it is much cheaper to produce than a teacher’s guide book. The best way to use differentiation should perhaps be that the students do not notice it?

Natasa showed a textbooks series for German, adapted to Slovenian environment. Differentiation in schoolbooks for German (high school level). They have been adapted from the series “DaF kompakt A1-B1” from Klett Verlag. One way of differentiation was to develop additional components (worksheets, exercises, worksheets for better learners, and e-workbook and e-textbook versions. Another way of differentiation was to add repetition exercises for slower as well as faster learners, and extra categories after every second unit in the textbook. Furthermore two types of vocabularies (basic and extended) are being added. Also they have added worksheets for slower learners accessible online.

Lunch break

Afternoon session

Topic: New technologies and language learning/teaching: How to satisfy the needs and expectations of contemporary learners (“digital natives”) in language lessons, possibly an invited speaker to warm up the debate, or
participants presenting ideas from attending conferences and/or interesting internet resources, in short new technologies and language learning

Sintija talked about the digital natives and digital immigrants. Digital natives will use their thumbs to press anything because they are used to use it when writing Text Messages. Social networks are here to stay and they are being used by digital natives. In Facebook for instance we older people never use the I like button.

She also presented Bloom’s Digital Taxonomy:
1. remembering – search listen
2. understanding – write blog entries, comments
3. applying – edit, collaborate, share information
4. analysing – compare, create metadata
5. evaluating – perform tests, monitor social networks
6. creating – programming

(please click here to see the presentation).

Next was Natasa about new technologies and language learning using as an example ‘Alles stimmt!’ for German as Second Foreign language. The application is to be downloaded from their web site ‘irokus’. The package includes IKT exercises and other types of exercises (e.g. project exercises where the learners have to incorporate the internet search into the learning process. They are also using modern text genres like SMS and email. The idea was to offer the material first for free and later start requiring license fees. Furthermore she showed other examples of e-books where all contents are accessible online within seconds. The user can annotate the books and listen to exercises and upload exercises you as a teacher have constructed.
Coffee break

*Linking the topics of the day together: if all students are so different and there should be differentiation and various forms of assessment, and moreover most students are "digital natives", is it possible to make a universal language textbook (or another kind of learning material) that addresses all issues equally and provide a successful teaching-learning platform?*

Camilla presented the web site of Natur & Kultur and focussed on the digital books. Now planning to add interactivity and for also interactive whiteboard. Among other things she showed Wings 9 English for 9th grade, now totally digital. All text selected in the books can be listened to read aloud by a native speaker. In addition she presented an authoring tool with which the publishing house and its authors can create their own exercises that are later presented to end users.

Taina showed online materials for their project Top7 to be used and downloaded by the teachers. All exercises of the books are accessible in an interactive way.

**December 9th**

**Morning session:** School visits, the hosts will organise school visits where language classes can be observed by the participants looking especially for differentiation in practice.

After the participants returned to the seminar room after two lessons of English or German, there was general agreement that these visits were very
inspiring and interesting, especially because the participants experienced different levels and methods of differentiation in practice. Half of the participants attended 2 English lessons (grades 10 and 11), while the rest attended German lessons.

Lunch break

Afternoon session: *Summary of and comments on the school visits – discussion*

Coffee break

Evaluation and looking for topics for coming meetings

The following topics were suggested:

1. School visits
2. Language and new technologies
3. Pedagogical strategies in relation to different language skills to be taken into account when planning the production of interactive applications for language learning
4. How to motivate learners to learn languages (with specific attention to the role of digital learning applications)
5. How to give the learners more often the opportunity to utilize their existing knowledge and skills to improve the actual process of language learning which includes a change in the role of the language teacher from educator to coach and motivator
6. Investigation of existing English learning materials (beginners and say 9th grade) – to be sent a month before to all participants who will prepare at home how to define the language learning strategies and learning styles presented in the material
Further topics will be added according to the suggestions given in the evaluation sheets.

On behalf of the participants I would like to thank Sintija and her colleagues for organising this excellent network meeting.

December 2011-12-13
Preben Spāth