INTRODUCTION

Across the world, over 775 million people over the age of 15 are non-literate. When these people for one reason or another move to societies based on written language, they encounter many difficulties. Motivated by this fact, the first Low-educated Second Language and Literacy Acquisition (LESLLA) annual symposium was held in 2005 in Tilburg, the Netherlands. The main aim of the symposium was to establish an international forum on research and classroom issues concerning the second language acquisition and literacy development of adults with little or no native language schooling and literacy skills. Since then, the symposium has rotated between an English speaking country and a non-English speaking country, and it has been held in the UK, Belgium, Canada, Germany, and the USA.

In 2012, the 8th annual LESLLA symposium was hosted by the Language Campus of the University of Jyväskylä, Finland. In Finland adult non-literacy has been virtually non-existent until recently when immigration from countries with low literacy rates has increased. Now approximately 1300 non-literate immigrant adults participate in language and literacy training every year. The number is rather small when compared with many other Western countries but it is predicted to grow in future, due to the immigration from countries like Somalia and Afghanistan with very low literacy rates. Consequently, research-based knowledge and experiences of adult literacy education are much in demand.

From August 29 to September 1, LESLLA symposium brought together nearly 90 educators and researchers from 10 countries. Plenaries, workshops, paper sessions, poster sessions, and research projects on display, as well as pre-conference visits to LESLLA classrooms in Jyväskylä, took place over four intensive days. The main themes of the symposium were 1) learner placement and assessment of progression, 2) instructional methods and techniques, and 3) teacher professionalization.

The articles in this collection, reviewed and accepted by anonymous scholars in the area of literacy acquisition, second language development and language testing, and the editors of this volume, are mainly based on studies presented at the LESLLA 2012 described above. They have been grouped under three headings. Teachers and teaching are naturally in the centre of the daily life of the LESLLA learners as well as that of many LESLLA researchers. Teachers are also crucial in the development of literacy education. For this reason we have placed the two articles focusing on the needs of the teachers first in this volume, followed by two articles on what the learners need. The second section takes us into classrooms, discussing the learning processes. The final section leads into a wider perspective: policy and assessment provide the framework for teaching and learning. Policy makers are responsible for the resources and teaching arrangements which largely define the quantity and quality of literacy teaching available for LESLLA learners. Assessment also

determines teaching due to washback effect: teachers teach what learners are tested upon.

The first section, Teachers and Teaching, is opened by Patsy Vinogradov. The main goal of her article is to present a framework of LESLLA teachers' proficiency. Even if the article is written from L2 English point of view, the ideas can be adapted worldwide. Vinogradov also describes the unique characteristics of teaching and learning in LESLLA context, and summarizes the limited number of studies that exist on teaching LESLLA learners.

Raichle Farrelly bases her study of the teaching worlds of literacy teachers on Engeström's Activity Theory. She explores the relationships and tensions the teachers experience in their working context. The study brings forth the need of in-service training and highlights the necessity and benefit of promoting professional collaborative learning opportunities for LESLLA teachers.

In her contribution, Jean Marrapodi evaluates the teaching methods traditionally used in English speaking countries in relation to LESLLA learners' cognitive and educational foundation. She explores the pros and cons of these methods in instruction of this particular group of learners. Using task analyses, Marrapodi suggests some existing gaps between the predictions embedded in the methods and the realistic skills of LESSLA learners. She also makes some recommendations to benefit the literacy instructors in their work.

Stefan Markov and Christiane Scheithauer discuss the role and need of counselling for L2 literacy learners. Their context is the German integration courses with a literacy component but their findings apply to any classroom with low-educated learners. To learn one must learn to learn, making the teaching of strategies of utmost importance. The study also provides examples of ways enhancing learning skills.

The next section then takes us inside the classrooms. Learning to read and write is based on oral skills – it hardly makes sense to read words or phrases one does not understand. Developing oral skills is the theme of Susanna Strube's, Ineke van de Craats', and Roeland van Hout's article. They focus on differences between classes, not between individual learners. They find notable differences between the classes in achievement on many areas of language learning and look for explanations by comparing learner characteristics, classroom hours and attendance, and classroom practices between the classes. The age of arrival and the use of the computer prove to be of significance.

Learning the basic technical skills of reading such as decoding is not easy for people with no earlier experience of written language. However, when these very basic skills are learned – although not yet fully mastered – the next step is to make them so automatized that most of the cognitive capacity needed in reading can be directed to benefit reading comprehension, which is the ultimate goal of reading. In their article, Ineke van de Craats and Mark Peeters discuss the role of speed in the path to reading comprehension. They introduce a method of reading a tailored list of words against time as a training method in reading speed. For the learners it is a motivating method for several reasons: practicing outside the lessons is easy, each learner's list can be tailored

according to personal needs, learners can set their own goals in terms of reading time and the progress is very concretely seen as a shortened time needed for reading the list.

The last section of this collection leads us to issues of policy and assessment. The problems of testing the linguistic and communicative achievement or proficiency of low-educated learners are the topic of Jane Allemano's article. She addresses the fundamental and difficult-to-solve issue of testing a skill which itself is involved in the testing process. At very low levels of literacy, reading the instructions and test questions may involve a higher level of reading skills than reading materials in the test itself. Even when test writers are aware of this dilemma and do their best to overcome this problem, the test taking situation itself may not be familiar enough for the test takers. The test tasks are of necessity decontextualized: the test takers are not functioning in their real-life role and environment where the same text might make sense to them and they could actually function in a relevant way, while in the test situation they often answer in a inappropriate way, basing their answers on their knowledge of their own situation, rather than the content of the texts.

In their critical article concerning the Dutch language test which is used as an entrance criterion Jeanne Kurvers, Ineke van de Craats, and Danielle Boon provide us with a scary picture of how the decisions done in the test planning crucially affect especially the lives of low-educated and non-literate people planning to build a new life in the Netherlands. The authors show, how the implementation of the new language test and the practicing material designed for it has decreased not only the number of test takers but also the proportion of those who have actually passed the test.

The last article in this volume, by Mirja Tarnanen and Eija Aalto, leads us to the Finnish school system and to immigrant pupils with low writing skills in the Finnish lower secondary school. The authors are concerned about how these pupils can show their knowledge and skills in a school, which is very much based on literacy skills as a medium of both learning and demonstrating learning. However, a closer look at writing tasks written by these poor writers suggests that the CEFR scale (Common European Framework of Reference) does not fully acknowledge the pupils' writing skills, since their texts seem to include varying combinations of properties mentioned only on higher CEFR levels. This obviously calls for further discussion of assessment methods. What is highly promising in this final article is that despite the low ratings on the CEFR scale these pupils did use their writing skills in various ways in out-of-school contexts.

The writers of this issue are concerned about the people whose language learning they describe and explain. This is true of people working in applied linguistics in general: not only the theoretical issues but also the connections and applicability of the results in real life are in focus. Research questions, albeit expressed within a theoretical framework, often arise from the experiences of the researchers or their students. This is visible also in this book: the writers

care. This may show as more space given to practical applications than is customary in research articles, or as an overall attempt to make the theory-based reasoning behind the decisions concerning the reaserch design, data and materials accessible also for the practitioneers who might benefit of the results in their work.

Publishing the book would not have been possible without the unpaid labour of all the anonymous reviewers. We cannot list here your names but nevertheless want to entend you our warmest thanks for your valuable contribution! Many reviewers, albeit principally concerned about the scientific quality of the articles, as they shoud be, also called for improvements in ways the design, data and methods were described and the results presented, with the less academically experienced teacher-reader in mind.

Finally, the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and the Federation of Finnish Learned Societies deserve thanks for making it possible for the LESLLA symposium 2012 to take place. The University not only provided the human resources for planning and organizing the event but also supplied the meeting rooms free of charge and accepted these proceedings in its series Jyväskylä Studies in Humanities. The Federation of Finnish Learned Societies grant payed for the costs of the invited speakers and also helped to fund the publication of the proceedings. The LESLLA core group and the organizers of the previous LESLLA symposium in Minneapolis in 2011 were most helpful, lending us their knowledge and experience. We hope that we can help out the future symposium planners in a similar way where needed.

We hope that this book will be useful for both researchers and practitioners in their important work for the benefit of all those who did not have a chance to go to school and learn to learn as children and who for many reasons find themselves in a society where their language(s) and skills are not enough. This book is dedicated to all the adults struggling to gain access to the world of reading and writing while acquiring the language of their new environment. It is not easy but as members of the worldwide LESLLA community we hope to ease it, step by step.

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Taina Tammelin-Laine
Lea Nieminen
Maisa Martin