

TALLINNA ÜLIKOOL
SOTSIAALTEADUSTE DISSERTATSIOONID

TALLINN UNIVERSITY
DISSERTATIONS ON SOCIAL SCIENCES

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Anne Uusen

WRITING SKILLS OF 1ST AND 2ND STAGE STUDENTS

Abstract

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Faculty of Educational Sciences, Tallinn University, Estonia.

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RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- I. Anne Uusen 2006. Establishing goals of national curriculum in Estonia. [*Paper to JTET's conference "Education for Democracy as a Part of Education for Sustainable Development", Helsinki, May 3 –June 3 2006. Üle antud 2006*]
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INTRODUCTION

Lately the poor writing skill of students has become an issue among the teachers and the press. As the writing skill of our students has been considered poor for at least 20 years, one might think that the teaching methods were insufficient until the execution of a new curriculum in 1996 (Puik 1989; Sepp 1989; Siilbek 1987).

The methods of teaching the mother tongue and as well as writing are more human nowadays. The key-words are **language as a whole** and **communication**, but still the skill of writing is poor and getting worse (Hennoste 2004; Maila 2003; Puik 1997). As it was hard to agree with the fact, it was necessary to study the skill of writing of the 1st and 2nd level students of our middle-school students.

If one wants to assess the level of writing skills, one must bear in mind **at least three aspects**: a) what is meant with the skill of writing and writing as a whole; b) how to assess the skill of writing as objectively as possible; c) what are the children capable of according to development psychology.

Often the teacher has not declared to him or her what is the essence of writing and what are the main goals of teaching and learning writing. Usually, when people talk about not knowing how to write, they often mean spelling, which is actually only one element of writing. Therefore I have pointed out one of problems concerning writing. Often it is not taken into account that the skill of writing consists of different components and just saying that a student cannot write is unfair and uninformative.

Another set of problems is due to the fact that it is commonly believed that a student at a certain age should write without spelling mistakes. The fact that the skill of writing develops in a certain order is rejected. When evaluating the texts that the students have written, the teacher must know what the skill of that age group should be and what to expect.

In the **theoretical** part of my thesis I focus on describing and clarifying the notions that were mentioned earlier, taking into account the theoretical basis of **teaching writing**. Correct assessment and the **principles of assessment** also play an important role. Therefore the thorough overview of the theoretical part gives an insight to **analytical assessment**.

The problems mentioned earlier are thoroughly studied by Caroline Lieberg (1990) in her thesis about teaching Swedish in a **traditional** way or as a **language as a whole**. She also says which students would benefit most from the first and which students would benefit most from the second method.

Lieberg also differentiates two types of writing and reading: 1) effective reading and writing; 2) grammatical reading and writing.

Effective reading and writing means activities, when the system of writing is used in an environment, where the text works effectively in the „world of meanings”, where the reader or writer lives. The reader or writer is linguistically tied to the text. According to this point of view effective reading and effective writing mean using writing in different situations and for different reasons. In other words, it can be called as functional reading and writing. As the main goal of teaching the mother tongue is to manage in a correct manner in different communication situations, then it also should be referred to as functional skill of writing and speaking. Therefore in schools the notion „writing” must be referred to as effective writing.

Grammatical reading and writing is referred to as an activity, which takes places in the activities of a grammatical met language (meaning the language is an object). Writing and reading words out loud (phonetic distinction), copying, making exercises in the exercise book, verifying spelling rules etc.

Relying on research results, Lieberg finds out that grammatical reading and writing is a great tool, when something goes wrong in the use of a language. Figuratively speaking one can compare it to dancing. If something goes wrong, a time-out is taken and some combination is worked through step by step. This technical process is not referred to as dancing. As dancing, reading and reading is not just steps, which are part of an analysis, but more like actions and processes: dancing, reading, writing. Likewise the writing of exercises should not be called effective writing, rather practicing spelling or grammatical learning or even grammatical writing.

Grammatical reading and writing is necessary to achieve effective reading and writing – the first is connected with the second. To find out what went wrong in the first place or to find out what needs to be improved on, language must be used, which from the point of view of writing is creating text. Creating text is a complex process, where attention must be simultaneously given to many aspects: spelling, choice of words, sentence

fluency, message etc. and not to focus solely on orthographic and linguistic rules. Therefore when creating text we find out whether grammatical writing is connected with effective writing or not.

This study and several others I supervised (Lumberg 2002; Parve 2002; Pikkmetts 2002; Roots 2002; Törnpuu 2003; Vahesaar 2002) confirmed my belief and gave grounds to speculate that when making students focus on text creation, it would have no effect on the amount of mistakes. Furthermore, the more longer and substantial the text, the smaller amount of mistakes. This hypothesis is based on spelling, because as mentioned earlier, usually when talking about poor writing skills, people mostly think about spelling.

The other hypothesis grew out of a statement made by the speech therapists that the amount students, who needed special education, has grow over the years (Maila 2003), reaching almost 40% (Õpetajate Leht nr 17, 27. 04. 2001). Templeton (1997: 103) claims that the percentage is near 10 in the United States of America. The numbers have decreased in Finland over the last 20 years reaching 16% in 1995 (Ahvenainen & Holopainen 2000: 128). The differences in the results are rather big. In the empirical part I try to find out how many of the students in the 1st and 2nd level of middle-school lack in writing skills and who theoretically need the help of a speech therapist. I believe that the number is smaller than 40%.

Studies have unfortunately shown that the language skills of girls are better than of boys of the same age (Pandis 2004). The empirical part of this thesis also shows that the figures almost of all the components of writing are better for girls than for boys of the same age.

Although studies have not been made (because all the teaching has been done in a traditional way), every person connected with teaching or students, knows that problems are the same as Caroline Lieberg (1990) described. There will not be a significant rise in the skill of writing, until only the method of grammatical reading and writing is used.

The last paragraph states the main idea of this thesis: what level is the skill of writing of 1st and 2nd level middle school students (what parts of the skill of writing are known best/worst) and whether there is a difference in the skill of writing of students of various teachers (how big are the differences by grade)

The **empirical** part of this thesis concerns analysis of texts, describing four components of writing – vocabulary, sentence fluency, correct use of language and content.

The object of research of this thesis is therefore the skill of writing and subject is writing as a whole.

The **goals**:

1. To give a theoretical overview of the process of writing, of different approaches to teaching writing and the possibilities of evaluation.
2. To compose and overview of the writing skills of 1st and 2nd level middle school students, based on the texts they wrote.
3. To analyze and compare the writing skills of different students of different teachers.

For this thesis to proceed with a goal, I set up the following assignments for myself:

- a) to define the concept of writing based on different literary sources;
- b) to bring out different skills need to create text – different components of the skill of writing;
- c) to introduce different possibilities of teaching and evaluating pieces of writing;
- d) to compose a guideline for text component analytical evaluation;
- e) to determine the skill of writing of 1st and 2nd level middle school students;

The research in hand was done taking into account the theoretical and practical needs and it has three outputs.

The **theoretical** output of this thesis is to declare the complexity of writing and writing skill and that the skill of writing does not only mean spelling.

The **practical** output is a guideline on how to evaluate texts analytically and an overview of the writing skill of 1st and 2nd level middle school students. Both will be used as guidelines for teaching teachers. Furthermore, both will be used in the handbook for teachers.

The **international** output of this thesis is to compare the writing skill and teaching strategies with results from other European countries. This will take part in the TWAKS project (“TWAKS – Text Awareness, Content and Purpose Focused Writing in a Knowledge Society”). As a final result a handbook for teachers, on how to teach writing, should be published.

THE ESSENCE OF WRITING

Writing has been defined by different authors in various ways: writing is producing visual symbols for the reader; the process of using a language to give an experience a meaning; a process with multiple features, where meanings and messages are created for the reader to interpret; using the writing system or orthography created by man in connection with their mundane activities; ideas in writing; expressing ideas using letters, words, art or media, something that can happen only if mental operations (processes) are mobilized to express ideas; writing is a skill that integrates knowledge and skill, it is an action which contains language, thoughts, experience, feelings, emotions, mechanical actions and different strategies; etc (Ahvenainen & Holopainen 2000: 28; Dahl & Farnan 2000: 5–6; Harris, Hodges 1995: 284; Hennings 2000: 319; Sarma-vuori 2003: 85; Siniharju 1997: 106–107).

Although the author's wording may be different, they all share a common idea – the idea of writing is to forward a message or a meaning to the reader (in writing). It is important for the reader to understand what has been written. (Buss, Karnowski 2000; Indrisano, Squire 2000; Parker 1997: 55–57; Templeton 1997; Wilkinson 1999: 3).

The components of writing

<u>Contents</u> (composition)	<u>Form</u> (secretarial aspect)
thoughts, ideas	handwriting
the purpose of writing	spelling
vocabulary	syntax
build-up, clarity	
taking the reader into consideration	
	punctuation

Graph 1. The components of writing

Writing, in short, is a complex process of creating text. It contains multiple components (see Graph 1). In general, and when simplified, one must bare in mind that there is composition (contents, its development and forming) and there is transcription (in linguistics transcription means to make a copy of what has been said in writing, using phonetic symbols), the latter being more connected the secretarial aspect. Punctuation is an important part of both, as it is connected with syntax (grammar) and semantics (meaning) (Allan, Miller 2000; Riley, Reedy 2000). Contents also affect the author's choice of genre and form. The writer must decide how to organize and express the contents (Templeton 1997: 146).

While writing, one must bare in mind various aspects: spelling, phonetic analysis, punctuation, choice of words/vocabulary, syntax, the purpose of writing, build-up, clarity, rhythm, reaction of the reader etc. To sum up – the skill of writing combines all the mentioned components. The contents and form of the piece are directly connected with the purpose and the meaning – the function of writing.

ABOUT TEACHING OF WRITING

The main principles of modern teaching are bound with the principles of teaching the mother tongue and therefore the goals of teaching writing are derived from the goals of teaching the mother tongue.

A SHORT OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN DIRECTIONS OF TEACHING MOTHER TONGUE

The main direction in developed countries is interpretive studying. The students are encouraged to understand, lead and analyze their studying process. The same direction is clearly visible when teaching mother

tongue and writing (Donoghue 1991; Jansen 1989; Lahdes 1997; Magga 1991; Meriläinen 1997; Shrum & Glisan 1995).

The other trend in teaching mother tongue is proceeding from the whole. Mother tongue is taught as a whole, proceeding from true to life situations and needs, focusing equally on different parts of communication: listening, speaking, reading, writing (Allan & Miller 2001; Ashcroft & Palacio 1995; Blair-Larsen & Williams 1999; Clay 1998; Eisele 1991; Jansen and others 1978; Kullberg 1991; Lieberg 1990; Templeton 1997; The National Curriculum).

APPROACHES TO TEACHING WRITING

Overall there have been different approaches to teaching writing. In a mundane teaching process one can come across all of them, but usually they are blended and not so distinct from each other anymore.

The elements of using prose examples are reading, analysis and writing. The students read an example text, analyze its contents and style and write their own based on what they have learned.

The basis of the approach based on experience is a vision that children of all ages have a huge treasure-store of experience: wishes, fears, happenings, visions, dreams etc. They are given an opportunity to write different texts: poems, plays, stories etc. They are reminded to take the readers into consideration – the same story is written in a different manner, whether it is addressed to grandmother, school principal, kindergarten children, friends etc. (Sarmavuori 1993: 120). Expressive writing is also based on experience. This can be, for example, imagining a color and trying to remember a happening concerning that color. This feeling or happening must be reflected in the text and that text is read to the class, without mentioning the color itself. The task of the listeners is to guess what the color was (Wicke 1999: 12–13).

The Epistemic approach focuses on the writer, the language and reality. No books are used in teaching. The materials are composed of carefully picked texts written by kids. The students write 1 to 3 essays a week and the teacher does not correct or grade. Only comments and questions are written. This kind of approach has reached neither the northern countries nor us, though the elements are clearly present (Sarmavuori 1993: 118–121).

Process writing is used widely (Zaragoza, Vaughn 1995; Sarmavuori 1993; Eisele 1991; Parvela 1989). Nowadays process writing is not a certain approach to teaching writing, but more of a natural part of writing. It is a very natural process of writing not just a special method. This method was already mentioned several decades ago (Maanso 1972; Unt 1973; Villand 1969; 1971).

This approach was started out in the United States of America, when studies, concerning bad writing skills, were conducted. A project for teaching writing was created – The Bay Area Writing Project and it spread to 43 states and other foreign countries (Canada, Australia, Finland, Sweden and Norway) (Sarmavuori 1993: 122).

The main idea of process writing is that writing is a process, which contains multiple phases: preparation, planning, content and structure correction, language and style fine-tuning and spelling (Dahl & Farnan 2000; Hennings 2000). Also the teacher must write herself. That way he or she can familiarize with the levels of difficulty and periods of work (Linna 1994: 16–19).

Writing is a fun group task. The objective of the teacher should not just be grading and inspiring, guiding and encouraging. The students should teach each other as well, because they are the ones who know the interests and way of thought of their peers better than anyone else.

Learning to write to the point and in practical way, one needs to focus on the reader. The class gives an excellent possibility to develop reader awareness.

Publishing gives the students motive to repair and improve their writings. It is important for the skill of writing, that the students write their texts taking into account different readers. Also expanding the readership is a good idea.

The most important thing is not to grade texts with a mark, but to study. If writings are graded, the main focus should be on the ideas in the text and how clearly and well are they presented. It is important to study the working habits, which are true to life.

A lot of discussion, since the end of the 80's and beginning of 90's, has been about writing seminars/workshops and genre approach/teaching (Ahang 1999: 49–61; Bright 1995: 7–11; Dahl & Farnan

2000: 37–50; Daniels 2002: 11–12; Hennings 2000: 314–390; Hindley 1996: 9–81; Riley & Reedy 2000; Templeton 1997: 145–232). None of these are stand-alone and they are present in real-life studying activities.

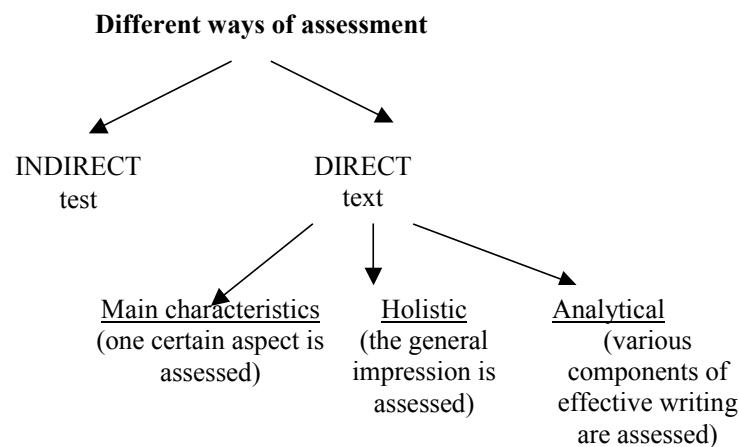
GRADING WRITING

The main purpose of grading writing in school is getting information. In more detail – getting information about what the student knows or can do or what he does not know and cannot do. And on the basis of that the teacher can coordinate and organize his or her work better (Harris, Hodges 1995: 12; Dahl & Farnan 2000: 112). That information is also forwarded to the students to let them know of their progress (Trice 2000; Montgomery 2001). Good grading can have nothing to do with grades and a good grader focuses more on the things that are right, not on the things that are wrong (Burkhardt 2002: 253–254).

At first it must specify, which information about writing skills is needed: about the outcome/text, writing process or social context (Myers 1985: 9). As I was more interested in skills that are visible in text, then I will describe text assessment in detail later on.

There are many ways of assessing the student’s texts. In general one can differentiate direct and indirect assessment (Dahl & Farnan 2000: 111). For indirect assessment there are various tests, which are easy to compose, conduct and assess with a certain number, but which mostly assess transcriptional skills of the writer. These kinds of tests show the writer’s knowledge of spelling, grammar and sentence structure, and in addition to that vocabulary, but not creating text as complex skill (Writing Assessment: A Position Statement). In other words, indirect assessment measures different components of writing.

Direct assessment assesses the text and gives information about what should be improved on and what should be focused on. Often three ways of direct assessment are used: main characteristics, holistic and analytical assessment.



Graph 2. Different ways of assessing writing

The first kind of assessment is useful, when one wants to assess a certain aspect of a piece of writing. The teacher might want feedback whether the main goal is achieved or not.

Holistic assessment gives a general assessment and it means that the student gets one certain grade. For each grade there is a description: what level should the outcome be on. The highest grade meaning the writing is excellent and the lowest grade meaning that it is of lower quality. Still, the one grade does not give the student any information concerning what was done well or what should be improved on (the research part of this thesis is assessed with one grade). Assessing with one grade is useful when it is needed to give an overall opinion of the student’s work. In planning the curriculum and assessing the skill of writing, giving just one grade is not very useful for the teacher and as well as the student.

Analytical assessment takes into consideration, as of opposed to holistic, several characteristics or components of effective writing. Of the three mentioned methods, analytical assessment gives a more thorough overview

of the quality and the skill of writing. Analytical assessment has been used before, but it has become more and more popular since the beginning of 80's, when teachers started to look for new, more thorough, methods of assessing writing (Six trait analytical writing assessment: scoring guide 1998). They hoped to find a method that gives exact and reliable feedback to the teachers and to the students. The components that were to be assessed were picked after reading thousands of works (Moskal 2003).

Spandel and Stiggins (1997) offer 7 characteristics or traits of effective writing: ideas, organization, voice, word choice, sentence fluency, conventions (contains spelling, punctuation, grammar) and presentation (Bellamy 2005; Chapman 1990; McMackin & Siegel 2002; Spandel & Culham 1993; Tierney & Marielle 2004). The analytical model gives the most objective information about improving teaching and feedback, because all the components are evaluated separately. For example a well built-up and organized piece of writing may get the maximum points for that component, but an average score for fluency, because the sentences are primitive, occasionally not spelled correctly and the meaning is somewhat unclear (Mertler 2001). For all of the reasons mentioned earlier, all the writings in this thesis have been assessed analytically. Not all the elements of the method must be used, but three, four or five depending on the purpose.

STUDYING THE SKILL OF WRITING

THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The aim of the empiric study was to create an overview of the writing skills of 1st and 2nd level middle school students. Another goal was to test the assessment guideline I created and to compare the teaching preferences of different teachers.

To reach my goal, the following research objectives were created:

1. to compose different writing tasks to compare different types of text;
2. to create a guideline to assess pieces of writing as objectively and as informatively as possible;
3. compare the writing skills of 3rd and 6th grade students by sex and type of text;
4. study the connection between teaching preferences and the skill of writing.

The basis of comparing and evaluating was the medium of all the results. As the number of students that participated was quite big then one can say that the medium of the results was objective and showed the satisfactory level. The satisfactory level – obtainable by all students. Therefore if the skill is better than satisfactory, one can call them as good and very good and vice versa.

Relying on previous studies, personal teaching experience in school as well as in the university, I am looking for a proof for the following hypothesis in the empirical part: a) the longer and the more richer in content the text, the fewer spelling mistakes; b) the number of students with insufficient skill of writing is less than 40%; c) the results, for all of the components of the skill of writing, are lower for boys than for girls.

ORGANIZATION AND THE METHOD OF GATHERING DATA

To evaluate the writing skills of 3rd and 6th grade students, texts were gathered using the help of the students of Tallinn University (former Tallinn Pedagogical University). Students were given a choice between two types of text: narrative or convincing writing. I chose different types of text because the students should be able to write prose, fiction, stories based on facts and further the students are different in nature – some like to fantasize and make up stories, characters and some like to write stories based on facts. In this way the students (at least they thought so) had the chance to write pick a writing assignment based on what they liked, and the researcher could also gather information about the preferences of the students.

Writing procedure

Every student of the university could pick a 3rd or 6th grade class (not their own). The writing assignment was explained to them and they were encouraged to write like they always do. The only difference from their

everyday writing was that there was no pre-writing discussion. The maximum allowed time was 90 minutes (2 teaching periods). One could finish his or her work early and turn it in.

The student that conducted the writing assignment read the instructions to the students wrote it on the blackboard or just gave copies with the instructions to the pupils.

The guideline to evaluating texts

As I explained in the theoretical part, one can evaluate a piece of writing taking into account different aspects of the text. Relying on the literary sources pointed out in section 2.3 and the advice from Viivi Maanso, I chose the analytical method of assessment (adapted to the needs of this thesis). I evaluated four aspects: idea (content), vocabulary, sentence fluency and correct use of language (spelling and punctuation).

In cooperation with Viivi Maanso I realized that when determining writing skills, one must definitely evaluate: a) word choice; b) a very important part of communication – sentence fluency; c) conventions (orthography, orthology); d) content (ideas).

I chose these aspects, because it is possible to evaluate the vocabulary, sentence fluency and correct following of rules set earlier, objectively. Secondly I concluded that these aspects have been given always given special attention. Also they have a big role to play in the text quality point of view.

It is quite hard to evaluate content objectively, because we all have our preferences in that field. Evaluating the ideas and content of the story is a bit more complicated, because it is quite hard to assess that objectively. It would be fair to evaluate ideas if a single person did it and therefore I evaluated all the 740 pieces of writing myself.

EVALUATING VOCABULARY

One key factor when evaluating vocabulary is the amount of words used. The words carry the message and the ideas. The more words in the text, the more advanced the pupil's vocabulary is. Furthermore vocabulary somewhat reflects the amount ideas. At the same time, the student might have a lot of ideas that are not expressed due to lack of vocabulary (Hennings 2000: 245–247). Therefore when evaluating the vocabulary I took the number of words as a basis. As it would take too much time just to count all the words, I chose the “verb” as a basis of evaluation. At first I tried to monitor the number of different verbs compared to the number of all verbs. As the numbers turned out to be very different I decided that they were not objective enough, so I used that ratio as an extra factor.

Every word misused creates communication disturbances and makes it harder to comprehend the text and understand the meaning (which is the main idea of writing). Therefore I subtracted the words used incorrectly from the amount of all words used.

Therefore the sentence fluency and vocabulary figure was a result of adding the number of words to the amount of verbs in the text and from that sum misused verbs were subtracted. That figure shows the difference in students' vocabulary quite objectively.

EVALUATING SENTENCE FLUENCY

The smallest and the most important unit of information is a sentence. The creation of sentence shows how well the student grasps the whole, feels the borders of a sentence and connects the words creating an idea and reflecting his or her clarity of thought.

The key figure in assessing sentence fluency was the number of sentences, added the average length of a sentence. As more complex sentence structures show a more advanced grasp of reality, a more complex way of thinking and of course better sentence fluency. The student gets an extra point for a compound-sentence (including a contracted sentence and an abbreviated sentence) and for a sentence with direct speech. A sentence must be understood in a similar way and that helps to guarantee a correct syntax. In other cases a point is deducted if a sentence:

1) is not logical (the meaning of the sentence is unclear or not understandable)

- 2) is incomplete (the sentence lacks a part)
- 3) has wording mistakes (constructional mistakes, rection)

EVALUATING THE CORRECT USE OF LANGUAGE

As mistakes concerning the meanings of words and the construction of a sentence were already taken into account, then the correct use of language concerns only orthographic mistakes. To give a better overview of the mistakes, I categorized the mistakes:

- a) phonetic orthographic mistakes;
- b) solid and separate eriting;
- c) punctuation mistakes;
- d) capital letter mistakes;
- e) a mistake done when being careless.

The total amount of mistakes is the sum of all mistakes. As mistakes that were done when being careless do not reflect the skill or knowledge of a student then they were excluded.

EVALUATING CONTENT

When evaluating the content of a text several criterions were taken into account.

A very well written piece of writing (grade 5) is clear in thought, easily understandable by the reader and also interesting. The student does not array from the main subject. The ideas are fresh and the reader gets the answers to all of his or her questions. The content is sometimes surprising and there are details in the story that enrich the main idea. The attention of the reader is kept and held till the end.

In a good piece of writing (grade 4) some aspects before mentioned aspects are weaker.

In a satisfactory piece of writing (grade 3) one can see that the writer tries to explore the subject but manages just to grasp the main ideas in a shallow manner. The theme is not very certain and the key words and structure are hard to detect. The ideas can be clear but shallow. Several aspects remain unclear for the reader and the reader does not get all the answers to his or her questions.

A weak piece of writing (grade 2) has the following characteristics: it has no central idea or it is very unclear. To understand the text completely the reader has to invent details. The piece of writing contains more than one of the following problems:

1. The writer seems to explore the theme of the story, but has not quite decided yet, what the main idea of the text should be.
2. The amount of information is limited or insufficient or the length of the story is not adequate to the level of the student.
3. The text is rather a list of thoughts and ideas; it lacks in detail or does not have any details at all.
4. The writer does not manage to open the subject in a personal manner.
5. The reader finds it hard to understand the key points of the text.
6. The text can be repetitive and can be referred to as unconnected, random array of thoughts with no connecting ideas.

THE SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION TO THE WRITING SKILLS AND EVALUATION OF THE 1ST AND 2ND LEVEL MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS

One can evaluate the writing skill in several ways. In schools the pieces of writing are mostly evaluated with two grades – a grade for content and a grade for spelling. Actually several other skills are needed to compose a text (creating text requires the management of different components. As the current curriculum holds writing as whole, complex activity, then one needs to evaluate it as such. Therefore two basis of evaluation just is not enough. Therefore to assess a text as objectively as possible one must take into account several skills that are needed to produce a good text: vocabulary, sentence fluency and correct use of language. Furthermore the results of boys were compared to the results of girls.

VOCABULARY

As one of the goals of this thesis was to evaluate the writing skills of students as objectively as possible and to create a method that was as informative as possible, then I will try to give some advice and pointer on how to conduct evaluation.

Let me remind that common vocabulary index was calculated by dividing the sentence fluency index by 5 in case of the narrative text and by 2 in case of the convincing text. The divider was different because the narrative and convincing texts are different by nature. Writing a narrative, creative thinking and lively imagination are required. Creating a convincing text, critical way of thinking and knowledge of the subject or event are required. Therefore it is likely, yet understandable that the total amount of words of convincing texts compared to the total amount of words narrative texts is somewhat different. Also the variety of different words used. The figure for fluency was comprised from the total amount of words and verbs from which the spelling mistakes were subtracted.

The total amount words and the common vocabulary index was a lot bigger for 6th grade students compared to the students of the 3rd grade. Although in both grades the girls wrote more words than boys, the difference was not statistically different. The same cannot be said about vocabulary, because the vocabulary of 3rd grade girls was significantly bigger than the vocabulary of 3rd grade boys. Furthermore, the difference was bigger in the convincing texts. The girls that wrote the convincing texts in the 3rd grade had a wider vocabulary. The differences were not that noticeable when comparing the narrative stories. Therefore it is important to encourage the younger boys to write different kinds of texts.

When analyzing the total amount of verbs used (both 3rd and 6th grade students), I noticed that one verb had 4-5 arguments (3rd grade average of 4.5 and 6th grade average of 4.6 arguments). It was quite predictable that amount verbs used was directly connected to the total amount of words. When studying the usage of verbs I discovered that the amount of verbs in narrative and convincing stories was equal – the amount of verbs is not connected to the type of text. Therefore little knowledge was gathered from the verb point of view when comparing vocabulary. The most common verb used was “be” (“olema” in Estonian).

Mistakes in words were quite uncommon and words were never used with a wrong meaning. As the amount of mistakes was directly connected with the total amount of words for the 3rd grade students then for 6th grade it was not the case. The most common reason for making mistakes in words was the intention to use more uncommon words. As the 6th grade boys tended to force themselves to fantasize more, it also reflected in the amount of mistakes. As the number of mistakes was not directly connected with the total amount of words used, then encouraging the students to write more would not affect the number of word-mistakes.

The total amount of words, as well as the common vocabulary index was somewhat different by class. In general the order of schools when comparing these figures was quite equal – especially in the 6th grades. It is understandable because one of the components of the common vocabulary index was the total amount of words. Another proof for that is the correlation between the amount of words and the common vocabulary index ($r = 0.88 > r_{\text{critical}} = 0.05$). As the sentence fluency index was divided by 2 in case of the convincing text (by 5 in case of the narrative) then it also reflected in the order of the schools. As a surprise I found out that in the 3rd grade the students that wrote the convincing stories, had a better vocabulary. The changes were not that drastic in the 6th grade. Four schools that had the biggest total amount of words also had the biggest common vocabulary index.

Evaluating the vocabulary of the students is therefore easier when comparing the same type of text – the circumstances are similar and one can just analyze the total amount of words. It is also possible to compare the vocabulary when the students are given the opportunity to choose between the types of text.

SENTENCE FLUENCY

The smallest, also the most important unit messaging is sentence. The skill of composing sentences gives vital information about communication skills. It also shows in what way the writer grasps the whole and manages to combine words into a thought. The complexity of the sentence shows way of thinking, understanding and sentence fluency. A shorter sentence usually shows primitivism. As a sentence is the main communication unit, then the reader must understand it. This calls for correct wording. Therefore the result of analyzing sentence fluency was a figure, which combined the number of sentences and complex sentences, average length of a sentence and sentence fluency mistakes.

As sentence fluency is very important, it was analyzed in depth. Without creating sentences that are understandable by the reader it is not possible to deliver thoughts and ideas.

When studying the sentences written by the students I noticed that there was a strict connection between the number of sentences and the total number of words (in the 6th grade it was almost the same). It was quite logical that the number of sentences written by 6th grade students was significantly bigger than of 3rd grade students and the number was equal when comparing boys and girls. It is usually thought that at the same age girls exceed the boys, then when comparing the flexibility of thought, it showed that they are equal.

Sentence number analysis of narrative and convincing texts showed that in the 3rd grades it was equal, but in the 6th grade there were lot less sentences in the convincing texts. As one can recall the vocabulary of 6th grade students, who wrote convincing stories, was smaller. Therefore the students of the 2nd level of middle school seem to be better at writing stories. One the one hand it seems to be logical (preparing for the final essay), on the other hand it makes little sense because expressing one's opinion is vital in everyday communication. Therefore practical and true to life writing tasks should be give more often, especially knowing the fact that the amount of sentences of both levels was almost equal when writing convincing texts (narrative stories of 6th grade students were remarkably longer). It is explainable, because the idea of a narrative is somewhat different of convincing text.

There were a lot of complicated sentences in the texts; furthermore the number was bigger for 6th grade students (only narrative texts). The number of complicated sentences was equal for both levels (boys and girls) when comparing convincing texts. Therefore it is another difference between narrative and convincing texts. One of the reasons for this is probably the fact that narrative stories are written in schools more often.

The number of sentences, that were not correct, was also quite big. Sentence construction exercises should be given to students more often. Furthermore, 6th grade students made mistakes constructing sentences as much as 3rd grade students. Therefore in three years a student has not improved much on sentence construction, or the skill develops quite early. The amount of mistakes for boys and girls of both 3rd and 6th grades was quite equal (narratives and convincing stories). The thesis also shows that it is easier for students to construct sentences when writing narrative stories and it seems that construction mistakes are usually permanent.

The mistakes in sentence construction were due to the fact that students tried to write long sentences. The study showed that the optimal sentence length of 3rd grade students was 9 - 12 words and longer sentences than that usually had mistakes in them. For 6th grade students the optimal sentence length was 10–14 words. As the connection between sentence fluency mistakes and the average sentence length was more vague, one can assume that the skill of sentence construction was more or less obtained. Seems that there has been enough practice in that field. The average sentence length of 3rd grade students was longer in case of narrative stories and the sentence length of 6th grade boys was longer than of 3rd grade boys. In the case of boys, the length of sentence would show whether it was primitive or not, then when studying the results of girls I noticed that the lengths of sentences were quite equal for 3rd and 6th grade students. As sentences that are longer than the aforementioned lengths do not contribute much to the meaning of the text, the teacher should not encourage them to write longer sentences than that. Studying the average length of a student gives the teacher an idea on whom to teach sentence expansion and whom to teach sentence fluency.

The final figure that was comprised of different comparable parts showed that the sentence fluency skills of 6th grade students exceeded the one of 3rd grade students (narrative stories). The sentence fluency skills con-

cerning convincing stories were equal. Therefore the development was only visible in narrative stories; furthermore it leads us to the fact that in the older grades that type of text is practiced more. Boys and girls of both levels have the same level of sentence fluency.

In general the result of sentence fluency was connected with vocabulary (and the total number of words). The connection was especially strict in the 6th grade. Meaning that if you can improve sentence fluency of younger students independently (the dancing steps being taught individually), then for older students it is much more effective to write texts as a whole, because the figures for vocabulary and sentence construction were connected functionally.

As a result I can say that the guideline for evaluating sentence fluency was quite informative and can be used effectively by teachers.

CORRECT USE OF LANGUAGE

The mistakes concerning correct use of language included orthographic mistakes (phonetic orthographic mistakes, solid and separate writing, punctuation mistakes (half of a mistake), capital letter mistakes and mistakes made being careless). The latter was not taken into account.

Although the skill of writing consists of many parts (which I am trying to prove with this thesis), still people often talk about the skill of writing when they actually mean spelling. That is wrong and one of the practical outputs of this thesis is to change that way of thinking.

If one were to combine all the mistakes (phonetic orthographic mistakes, solid and separate writing, punctuation mistakes, capital letter mistakes) with words then there was a mistake in 5% of the words, which actually is not much. To sum up, 3rd grade students made about two times more mistakes than 6th grade students (about 2 times more 3rd grade students took part in the study). So actually the sum of mistakes was almost equal. The most common type of mistake was a punctuation mistake (equal for both 3rd and 6th grade students). But 3rd grade students made a lot more phonetic orthographic mistakes. Solid and separate writing and capital letter mistakes were quite rare.

The average number of orthographic mistakes per student for both age groups was equal, which was quite surprising, because the older students had studied spelling longer and more thoroughly. There was a slight correlation between the total amount of words and orthographic mistakes ($r = 0.20 > r_{\text{critical}} = 0.05$), but the 6th grade students had more words in total as well. The average amount of punctuation mistakes was also equal. The fact that older students tended to write more complex and longer sentences showed that one cannot compare the average amount of mistakes.

Both younger and older students did solid and separate writing and capital letter mistakes equally. Also the same amount of mistakes was done when comparing by type of text. I got a feeling from the research results that the students of the 2nd level of middle school just were not learning anything new in that field. Furthermore that theory was backed up by the analysis of punctuation mistakes. Convincing letters of both 3rd and 6th grade students had an equal amount of mistakes, but 6th grade students made a lot more mistakes in narrative stories. That can be compensated by the fact that there were a lot more compound sentences. Phonetic orthographic mistakes were more common in the texts of 3rd grade pupils.

Therefore in general the 6th grade students had worse punctuation results than the 3rd grade students: mostly because they used more complex sentence structure and more compound sentences. 3rd grade students had more phonetic orthographic mistakes. In other parts the results for correct use of language were similar by age and type of text.

As I tried to prove a hypothesis wrong (the percentage of pupils that need speech therapy is smaller than 40), I analyzed punctuation mistakes and spelling mistakes separately. Punctuation mistakes are not connected with the fact whether a student hears the phonetic elements correctly in a word. Because punctuation marks are connected with sentences and spelling mistakes with words, it made sense to compare the number of punctuation mistakes in a sentence to a spelling mistake in a word.

Punctuation mistakes were quite common (0.49 mistakes per sentence), being the same compared by age, sex or type of text. Older students did not make fewer punctuation mistakes as one might have thought. The amount of punctuation mistakes of younger students was somewhat understandable, but the results of the 2nd level students should have been better.

For younger students, the amount of mistakes per sentence was not connected with the amount sentences or the amount compound sentences. The amount of mistakes was the same whether the student wrote 10 or 2 sentences. For older students this connection to both figures was slightly negative. Seems like if the student has obtained the punctuation rules, then he or she can replace a sentence that is not quite certain with a sentence that is simpler and correct. In both 3rd and 6th grade the amount of mistakes was equal for both boys and girls, furthermore the amount of mistakes was not connected with the type of text. The skill of punctuation seems not to be connected with age and type of text, therefore one can teach it independently without using a text as whole.

Spelling mistakes were not as common as punctuation mistakes (0.04 mistakes per word). So when we talk about the poor writing skills of students we should talk about poor punctuation skills. Spelling mistakes were vaguely connected with the overall amount of words and the grade for the content. A student could have more words in total and fewer words misspelt than a student who did not write as many words. Therefore we should not encourage students to write fewer words, rather tell them to make sure which in which words' spelling they are sure and where should they check the spelling. Also I found out that the richer the content and the more words the student writes, the fewer spelling mistakes.

6th grade students made a lot less spelling mistakes than 3rd grade students, therefore one can claim that the spelling skills have improved a lot, but this only stands for narrative stories. The convincing text writers made an equal amount of mistakes, although the 3rd grade students should have made more. Yet again the figures for convincing story writers of the 6th grade students were a lot worse than the figures for narrative story writers. It is not likely that the students with poorer writing skills would choose the convincing text task. This indicates that the older the students are the more they write narrative stories.

Therefore the skill of writing of 3rd and 6th grade students was somewhat different. The minimum amount of mistakes per word in the 3rd grade was 0.01 and the maximum 0.15. In the 6th grade the same figures were 0.01 and 0.05. Overall the writing level was more even for classes that had smaller figures. For both boys and girls of 3rd and 6th grade the figures were equal, therefore boys and not poorer writers than girls.

59% of 3rd grade students and 54% of 6th grade students had good or very good spelling skills. One can claim that the overall level was good. Furthermore, only 8% of students had an inadequate level of spelling. One can always hope that every student would write without mistakes, but that is unfair towards students. There are and always will be students that will have a hard time spelling correctly and who must be encourage to look up words in dictionaries and other materials.

21% of students made more than 5 spelling mistakes (who were also referred to as "in need of special education"). That is almost two times less than 40%. The percentages by class were 26% for 3rd grade and only 13% for 6th grade. Therefore 40% of our students do not need special education. There were classes in both age groups where the overall level was insufficient. I was not able to determine the reasons for that in this thesis.

CONTENT

A very good text is thrilling, surprising, yet understandable. The reader's interest must be kept up until the end of the story. Enough details must be given to the reader to comprehend the central idea and also original ideas must be included.

In general the pieces of writing were quite rich in content (as opposed to the overall belief). Only 4% of the works were insufficient, 68% were very good or good and 28% of the works were satisfying. The age of the writer was also taken into account. It probably would not have been fair to compare these results to the results of the survey conducted in 1991. The students then were given the task to write 20 sentences and the actual goal of the research was to study their self-esteem as well as the writing skills.

Comparing the grades for content by age, sex and type of text one could conclude that there was no statistical pattern, meaning the quality of the content was not connected with the age, sex or type of text. Students of both sexes and levels of middle school managed to fantasize and convince. The students have had their chance of expressing their opinions and wishes.

In the 3rd grade the average content grades somewhat differed from the grades of the 6th grade students (3rd grade: 3.15–5.0 and 6th grade: 3.5–4.63). On the other hand there were 1st level classes in which all the students received a 5. Those classes were in the 26th and 34th school, where the pupils also wrote a rough copy. In general 54% of the students of the 3rd grade wrote a good or a very good text and 62% of the 6th grade.

13% of the 3rd grade classes had an insufficient average grade for content. There was a class, where there were children with health problems. There were no 6th grade classes where the average grade for content was insufficient. The minimal average was 3.5, which is sufficient.

The boys and girls of the 2nd level of middle school managed to fantasize and convince equally. The average grade for content of convincing texts for 3rd grade boys was remarkably lower than the average grade of 3rd grade girls. The grades were equal in case of narrative stories. Therefore boys should be given more opportunities of expressing themselves verbally as well as in writing.

In the 6th grade a common denominator for rich content texts was the lack of spelling mistakes. The teaching style of teachers was also different. All the teachers believed that a lot of work must be done before the test and they also were convinced that guiding and directing before, during and after writing was necessary.

CONCLUSION

The skill of writing is perhaps the most visible and criticized product of education. The use of language is a lot more free when we talk. When writing, especially when writing at school, one must strictly follow rules of official written language and concentrate at a number of different aspects.

Most people do not have a correct understanding of writing. Starting with the fact that effective writing is a drill exercise and ending with the fact that a bad writer is the one that makes the most spelling mistakes. People tend to forget that the aim of writing is to deliver a message. For the reader to understand that message correctly, the writer must follow certain rules and agreements and a lot more.

The aim of my thesis was to announce that writing is complex process, during which attention must be lead to a lot of aspects, and that the process of writing consists of many components. Equally it was important the declare that mastering all the aspects is a process that needs time. The skill of writing, as any other skill develops with the overall development of the child. The writer must pay attention to how to write down words and letters, how to compose sentences, how to grab the reader's attention, how to place the text on the paper, what words to use to express ideas etc. All this was considered in the first chapter of the theoretical part.

The second chapter was about teaching writing. The reader received an overview of the main principles of teaching a mother tongue, because teaching writing is a part of it and must be derived from the same basic elements. Attention was given to grammar and spelling and writing style. Special attention was given modern teaching methods. In detail, the process of writing was under consideration, because the student should have a possibility of following the process of writing when creating text. The process of writing should turn into a habit.

The last chapter of the theoretical part was evaluating writing, proceeding from the essence of writing and evaluation. The aim of evaluation and grading is not a text scribbled with red, but a constructive feedback for the student and the teacher.

Answers to the questions, which have been around for years and decades, were sought in the empirical part, moving towards the goal, which was to create an overview of the skill of writing of middle school students. Special attention was given to vocabulary, sentence fluency, content and correct use of language. Which of these components are best/worst known by the students? Does the analytical evaluation give enough information about the components of writing? What is the level of writing of 1st and 2nd level middle school students? How great are differences by class? Those were the main questions that received an answer studying 740 pieces of writing.

The texts written by 6th grade students had more words in total than the texts written by 3rd grade students. The figure was equal for boys and girls of the 6th grade but the boys of the 3rd grade had fewer words in total comparing to the girls. The teachers should encourage the boys in that field. Almost half (45%) of the texts of 3rd grade students were quite rich in words. Only 8% had remarkably fewer words than the rest. The figures were more even in the 6th grade (31% and 15%). In the 2nd level of middle school more attention must be drawn to ideas and thoughts before beginning to write. None of the students that took part in this research used any extra help.

Sentence fluency is an integral part of communication and special attention was drawn to it in this thesis as well. It was quite surprising that sentence fluency of 6th grade texts was a lot better than of 3rd grade texts in

case of narrative stories and not that much better in case of convincing texts. Older students must therefore be given more opportunities of writing convincing texts. Furthermore, that type of text is quite common in later life.

Important information about optimal sentence length, use of difficult sentences and sentence fluency mistakes, was gathered. Sentence fluency mistakes were quite common and of the entire sentences 13% contained mistakes (equal for both age groups). Usually people believe that boys and girls of the same age would have different results but the research proved otherwise.

The correct use of language showed that students have more problems concerning punctuation than phonetic orthography. The results for the latter were impressive: 59% of 3rd grade and 54% of 6th grade students made few or very few orthographic mistakes. The spelling level of only 8% of the students would be considered insufficient. The level of narrative writers was quite equal but the level for convincing text writers was not. Therefore more attention should be drawn to the fact that students should be given more opportunities of writing different types of text (e.g. manual, guide-line, explanatory text, commercial, advertisement, contract etc).

Spelling was also studied and the results were as follows: a text richer in words and content would not have more spelling mistakes and the amount of students that need special education is smaller than 40%. The spelling skills of both boys and girls of the same age were equal.

The fact that the level of spelling is quite does not mean that teachers should stop teaching it. It rather gives an opportunity to develop other aspects.

In content point of view the level was the most equal. No significant differences were detected in any of the categories (sex, age, type of text). The average grade for content was either good or very good. In the 6th grade "good" was more common though. At the same time the grade for content was the only element connected with the teaching habits of the teacher. Students of the 1st level of middle school, whose teacher thought it was important to analyze the text before taking action, had better results. That fact was also proved when analyzing the rough-copies.

As one can see the guideline created for evaluation really proves itself and gives necessary information about writing skills. The fact that all the students had their own stronger and weaker sides and that no class was exceptionally weak or strong, shows that when evaluating skill of writing one must pay attention to several aspects.

In conclusion I must say that I enjoyed doing this research. It gave me joy of discovery, new knowledge, satisfaction and answers to many questions, creating new ones as well. Why is the skill of writing different by class? What are the main reasons for that? Why are the students of some teacher better writers than the students of some other teacher? What is a good piece of writing like? If the same students would write different types of text, what would the results be? And a lot more. These were only a few of the questions that would need an answer and not just in Estonia. Taking part in an international project called "TWAKS – Text Awareness, Content and Purpose Focused Writing in a Knowledge Society" would give an opportunity for that.

PÕHIKOOLI 1. JA 2. ASTME ÕPILASTE KIRJUTAMISOSKUS

Kokkuvõte

Kirjutamisoskus on üheks hariduse nähtavamaks ja ehk sellepärast ka üheks kritiseeritavamaks tulemuseks. Rääkides on inimene keelekasutuses tunduvalt vabam kui kirjutades ja omapärane kõnepruuk pigem hinnatav kui taunitav. Kirjutades, eriti koolis kirjutades, tuleb aga keelekasutuses järgida täpselt kirjakeele nõudeid ja pingsalt keskenduda samaaegselt veel mitmele muulegi aspektile.

Kirjutamisest ja kirjutamisega seonduvast on nii mõnelgi asjast rääkival inimesel vää arusaam. Alustades sellest, et efektiivse kirjutamise all mõeldakse õigekirja või mingi keelelise nähtuse õppimise eesmärgil tehtavate drillharjutuste tegemist ja lõpetades sellega, et viletsateks kirjutajateks peetakse neid, kes teevad õigekirjavigu. Unustatakse ära, et kirjutamise peamiseks mõtteks on sõnumi edastamine. Selleks, et lugeja sõnumist õigesti aru saaks, peab selle kirjapanemiseks järgima teatud reegleid ja kokkuleppeid ning veel paljut muudki.

Doktoritöö üheks eesmärgiks oli teadvustada, et kirjutamine tähendab eelkõige teksti loomise kompleksset protsessi, mille käigus tuleb tähelepanu pöörata paljudele aspektidele ja et kirjutamisoskus koosneb seega sama paljudest komponentidest. Võrdselt oluline oli teadvustada, et kõikide nende komponentide korrektset valdamist saab eeldada alles teatud vanuses õpilastelt. Kirjutamisoskus, nagu iga teinegi oskus, areneb järkjärgult koos lapse üldise arenguga. Kirjutaja peab kirjutades mõtlema, kuidas tähti ja sõnu kirja panna, kuidas neist arusaadavaid lauseid moodustada, mil moel lugeja tähelepanu kõiata, kuidas tekst paberil paigutada, milliseid sõnu ideede väljendamiseks kasutada jne. Kõike seda käsitleti töö teoreetilise osa esimeses peatükis.

Teine peatükk tegeles kirjutamise õpetamisega. Esmalt sai lugeja kokkuvõtliku ülevaate üldistest emakeele õpetamise põhimõtetest, sest kirjutamise õpetamine on üks osa sellest ja peab seega lähtuma samadest alustest. Eraldi võeti vaatluse alla grammatika ja õigekirja ning kirjatehnika õpetamisega seonduv, teades, et õpetajad peavad õigekirjutuse ja kauni käekirja valdamist oluliseks kirjaoskuse tunnuseks. Põhjalikumalt tutvustati kirjutamise õpetamise võimalusi, pöörates rohkem tähelepanu tänapäeval enimsoosituile. Täpsemalt oli juttu protsesskirjutamisest, sest ükskõik millist lähenemist õpetaja pooldab, võiks õpilasel ka koolis olla võimalus teksti loomisel järgida kirjutamise protsessi loomulikku kulgu. Sellest peaks saama koguni harjumus oma tekstiga tööd teha.

Teoreetilise osa lõpetas alapeatükk kirjutamise hindamisest, tehes seda lähtuvalt kirjutamise ning hindamise olemusest ja tegelikust eesmärgist. Hindamise mõtteks ei ole punasega parandatud töö, vaid võimalikult konstruktiivse tagasiside andmine õpilasele ja õpetajale enesele. Selleks aga ei piisa enamasti ühe hindegala hindamisest. Doktoritöös kirjeldatigi seetõttu täpsemalt analüütilise hindamise põhimõtteid ja olemust, et innustada õpetajaid seda mõtestatumalt ning süstemaatilisemalt kasutama. Pean analüütilise hindamise tutvustamist ja katsetamist oma töö üheks oluliseks tulemiks, sest eesti keeles ei ole sellealaseid kirjutisi seni kuigi palju ilmunud. Kindlasti on lähitulevikus vaja õpetajatele kirjutada ka praktilisem kirjatööde hindamise erinevaid võimalusi tutvustav käsiraamat. Doktoritöö formaat seda paraku ei võimaldanud.

Empiirilises osas otsisin vastuseid mõnedele õpetajana ja õppejõuna töötamise aastakümnete jooksul tekkinud küsimustele, liikudes samas sihipäraselt eesmärgini, milleks oli ülevaate koostamine põhikooli I ja II astme õpilaste kirjutamisoskusest, võttes täpsema vaatluse alla sõnavara, lausestusoskuse, sisu ja keelekasutuse õigsuse. Milliseid neist kirjutamisoskuse komponentidest valdavad õpilased paremini, milliseid halvemini? Kas kirjutiste analüütiline hindamine annab piisavat informatsiooni õpilaste kirjutamisoskuse erinevate komponentide kohta? Milline on põhikooli I ja II astme õpilaste kirjutamisoskus? Kas ja kui suured on erinevused klassiti? Need on peamised küsimused, millele sain vastused 740 õpilase kirjatööde uurides.

Tulemused näitasid, et 6. klasside õpilaste kirjutised olid oluliselt sõnarikkamad kui 3. klasside õpilastel, aga kui 6. klasside tüdrukute ja poiste tekstid olid võrdselt sõnarikkad, siis 3. klasside poisid olid veenmiskirjades tüdrukutest tunduvalt kidakeelsemad. Noorema vanuseastme poiste sõnavara tulemused kinnitasid seega hüpoteesi poiste kehvematest oskustest. Õpetajad võiksid sellega arvestada ja poiste mõttejooksu ses osas rohkem ergutada. Ligi poolte (45%) uurimuses osalenud 3. klasside õpilaste tekstid olid vägagi sõnarikkad. Ainult 8% kirjutajatel oli teistega võrreldes sõnavara tunduvalt väiksem. 6. klassides oli väga sõnarikaste õpilaste hulk kahanenud (31%) ja mittesõnarikaste õpilaste hulk kasvanud (15%). Teises astmes tuleb järelikult rohkem tähelepanu pöörata mõtete ergutamisele ja ideede kogumisele enne kirjutama asumist. Eriti teades nüüd, et sõnarohkus on vanematel õpilastel kirjutise õnnestumise määravaks teguriks. Uurimuses osalenud õpilastest ei olnud ükski kasutanud mingit kirjutamiseks häälestumise võtet, sest vastav paber paluti olemasolu korral lisada.

Lausestusoskus kui suhtluspädevuse oluline näitaja sai uurimistöös kõige suurema tähelepanu osaliseks ja sellest sai lugeja ka töös põhjaliku ülevaate. Siinkohal piirdun üldisemate tendentsidega. Mõneti ootamatult selgus, et kui 6. klasside juttude kirjutajate lausestusoskus osutus 3. klasside juttude autorite lausestusoskusest oluliselt paremaks, siis veenmiskirjade kirjutajate lausestusoskuse areng oli justkui seiskunud. 6. klassides veenva teksti kirjutamiseks valinute lausestusoskus oli 3. klassides veenmiskirju kirjutanutega samal tasemel. Vanematele õpilastele tuleks järelikult pakkuda enam võimalusi veenvaks kirjutamiseks. Sedalaadi kirjutamist läheb ka edaspidises elus sageli vaja.

Veel saadi lausete analüüsist olulist infot mõlema astme õpilaste optimaalse keskmise lausepikkuse, keerukamate lausete kasutamise sageduse ja enam esinenud lausestusvigade kohta. Viimaseid tehti küllaltki palju. Kõikidest lausetest oli ebakorrektsed koguni 13% ja seda mõlema vanuseastme õpilastel võrdselt. Vastupidiselt küllaltki levinud tendentsile, et poiste tulemused on omavanuseliste tüdrukute omadest sageli halvemad, selgus, et lausestusoskus oli mõlema soo esindajatel võrdne. Hüpotees, et poiste tulemused on madalamad kui tüdrukutel, ei osutunud lausestuse osas järelikult tõeseks.

Keelekasutuse õigsuse uurimine näitas, et õpilastel on rohkem probleeme kirjavahemärgistuse kui hääliku-ortograafiaga. Viimaste tulemused olid rõõmustavad: 59% 3. klasside ja 54% 6. klasside õpilastest oli ortograafiavigu (häälikuortograafia, suur algustäht, kokku- ja lahkukirjutamine) väga vähe või vähe. Vaid 8% mõlema vanuseastme õpilaste õigekirjaoskust võib nimetada ebarahuldavaks. Siingi ilmses, et 6. klasside veenmiskirjade kirjutajad olid 3. klasside õpilastega võrdsel tasemel, aga juttude kirjutajad tegid 3. klasside õpilastest oluliselt vähem vigu. Mis kinnitab veel kord järeldust, et vanemas astmes tuleks tähelepanelikult jälgida, et õpilastel oleks piisavalt sageli võimalus kirjutada ka muud liiki tekste peale jutustuse, arutluse ja kirjelduse (nt juhend, seletuskiri, reklaamtekst, ostu- või müügikuulutus, leping jt).

Õigekirja kui õpetajate poolt kõrgelt hinnatud kirjutamisoskuse komponendi uurimisest saadi ka ainst sellesisuliste hüpoteeside paikapidavuse väljaselgitamiseks. Mõlemad leidsid kinnitust. Selgus, et sõnarikkas ja sisukas tekstis ei olnud rohkem ortograafiavigu kui vähem sõnarikkas ja sisukas, ning puuduliku õigekirjaoskusega õpilasi oli mõlemas astmes vähem kui 40%. Poiste ja tüdrukute õigekirja-alased oskused osutusid mõlemas vanuseastmes võrdseteks ehk selles osas ei leidnud hüpotees poiste kehvematest oskustest kinnitust.

See, et õigekirjaoskus osutus pigem heaks, ei tähenda muidugi, et sellega ei peaks enam üldse tegelema, vaid annab pigem mänguruumi teiste kirjutamise aspektide arendamiseks.

Sisulisest küljest olid kirjutised kõige ühtlasemad. Üheski kategoorias (sugu, vanuseaste, tekstiliik) ei täheldatud olulist erinevust ja kaugelt üle poolte klasside keskmine sisu hinne oli “väga hea” või “hea”. 6. klassides oli viimaste protsent küll natuke suurem. Samas oli sisu hinne ainus näitaja, mida oli võimalik seostada õpetajate õpetamisharjumustega. Nimelt olid nooremas astmes õpilaste kirjutised sisukamad neil õpetajatel, kes pidasid eriti oluliseks mõtete kogumist enne kirjutama asumist ja oma tekstiga töö tegemist. Seda kinnitasid ka lisatud mustandid, kus olid näha töö käigus tehtud muudatused ja parandused.

Eelpoolöeldust nähtub, et uurimuse tarbeks koostatud hindamise juhend õigustas ennast igati ja andis õpilaste kirjutamisoskuse kohta mitmekülgset informatsiooni. See, et kõikide klasside õpilastel olid omad nõrgemad ja tugevamad küljed, et ükski klass ei olnud ühtemoodi tugev või nõrk kõikide kirjutamise komponentide osas, andis kinnituse kirjutamise kompleksse iseloomu kohta ja tõestas, et kirjutamisoskuse hindamiseks on vaja uurida mitmeid aspekte, mitte otsustada selle üle ühe-kahe aspekti põhjal.

Tuleb kindlasti nentida, et uurimistöö pakkus töö tegijale avastamisrõõmu, uusi teadmisi ja rahuldust ning andis paljudele küsimustele vastused, tekitades samas ka uusi. Miks on kirjutamisoskuse tase klassiti väga erinev? Mis on selle peamisteks põhjusteks? Miks mõne õpetaja õpilased on tunduvalt paremad kirjutajad kui teised? Milline on tõeliselt “hea kirjutis”? Kui ühed ja samad õpilased kirjutaksid erinevaid tekste, millised oleksid siis tulemused? Need on ainult mõned näited sellest, millised olulised küsimused vajaksid veel vastuseid, ja mitte ainult meil. Osalemine rahvusvahelises projektis “TWAKS – Text Awareness, Content and Purpose Focused Writing in a Knowledge Society” annab selleks ka võimaluse.

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