LANGUAGE LEARNING AND MOTIVATION

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In this essay I present the process, learnings and final results of my master project. The project focuses on the education Swedish for immigrants, SFI, and how design can play a role in improving the education to better meet the needs of the learners and become more of a step towards inclusion.

I identify two learner groups; the experienced and the novice learner, with different needs and prerequisites. During the project I develop a focus towards the novice learner and the problem I call the vicious circle. By this term I refer to that too big gaps between the learners former knowledge/experiences and the education results in lost motivation and self-esteem and many learners giving up or getting stuck in the education.

Throughout the project I use an iterative process, in three loops, where I involve the stakeholders in the development of my ideas through interviews, observations and collaborative workshops.

My final proposal is a the learning service “Matprat”, which invites the learners as co-creators of the education and puts their experiences and knowledge in the centre of learning.
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BACKGROUND - I believe that the possibility to communicate, socialize and express oneself in relation to others is an essential base for people to gain mutual understanding and respect for one another and for individuals to find their place, role and meaning in a new society - to become included.

In Sweden immigrants over the age of 16, who have a residence permit, can apply for free to SFI where they get the possibility to learn basic Swedish. The number of immigrants coming to Sweden has never been higher than in the last 5-6 years (migrationsinfo.se) and the numbers are only expected to increase in the coming years.

In an article published on Stockholm city's web page, in June 2012, you can read: “More than every other SFI-student have work or continued studies within a year after their studies!” “Every other” is that a number to be proud of? I ask myself. That also means that close to 50% of the SFI-students do not have work or continued studies within a year.

What leads up to these sad numbers? How can SFI-educations be changed to better meet the needs of the learners and contribute to good conditions for inclusion of everyone in the Swedish society?

PROJECT INTENTION - Through the use of design approaches form ideas/concepts that could lead to better conditions for SFI-participants to utilize the education and learn to use Swedish, as well as better conditions and tools for SFI-teachers to fulfill their challenging task in offering this kind of education.

I intend to investigate how the learning situations work for different learners and teachers today and how the education could be changed or developed to better meet the needs of its users. Ultimately the intention of the project is to contribute to better conditions for inclusion of all citizens in the Swedish society.

LANGUAGE, CULTURE AND IDENTITY - During the project I strive to take into consideration aspects such as; cultural and linguistic values and norms; views on religion, time and gender roles; how one’s self-image relates to language and nationality; individuals’ former experiences, situations and preconditions. Primarily I will consider the influence of these aspects on the learning situation. Further I aim to work with how the SFI-education can allow space for these aspects, as well as ways to make use of the value in cultural differences, similarities and collisions.

My dream scenario would be an education where people meet in respect and curiosity for each others origins, experiences and differences. Where origin and culture is considered a strength in each individual, something to carry with pride. Individuals’ different preconditions would be a starting point for meeting, learning about each other and together search for ways to work with the challenge of learning a new language, form an identity and find your place in a new society.
Who benefits? - A well working Swedish education for immigrants, where every student have maximum potential for learning Swedish, would benefit the students both in their professional and private life. As I believe prejudice often comes from a fear of what one does not know or understand, being able to communicate in a common language could also be an important key in this aspect. I believe the project in the long run could contribute to a society where all citizens feel included and every individual have good opportunities to contribute, based on one's abilities. This would be beneficial to everyone in that society and the society as a whole, both socially and economically.

Constraints - The project is constrained to Sweden, in the way that it aims to be used in the culture, laws and norms of the Swedish society, in meeting with immigrants’ cultural origin, norms and views. I will not look at solutions for other countries, apart from looking at potential existing models in other countries in inspirational purpose.

Interviews, observations, workshops etc. will mainly be conducted in Stockholm and Eskilstuna.

During the process I develop somewhat of a focus towards the lower courses of SFI, 1A and 1B, and the learner group I identify as the novice learners.

Some key concepts - Inclusion - Refers to the process when an individual becomes included in a society. At some points of my work I use the word integration in a similar meaning. This choice is made to better communicate to people who are not informed of the concept inclusion and my meaning of it, but who immediately understands the meaning of integration.

Learner - An individual who is actively engaged in learning. Compare to pupil (sv. elev) which refers to someone who is being taught.

External partners - Mentor: Diana Africano Clark. Interaction designer and researcher at Ergonomidesign, Stockholm, with experience from similar projects such as Språkskap and Language as Participation.

Mentor: Brendon Clark. Senior researcher at the Interactive Institute, Stockholm, Kista. Also with experience from the projects Språkskap and Language as Participation.

Collaboration in terms of interviews, observations, workshops, tests, etc.: SFI stockholm, teachers and learners in SFI-västerort, former SFI-students, current SFI-students and potential SFI-students. Other important stakeholders identified during the project.

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Throughout the project I have used an iterative process. Loop 1: I start with an open scope, to gain a broad understanding of the context and stakeholders (Krippendorff, 2006) connected to the SFI-education. From the insights gained here I identify some key areas and a vision to focus on in Loop 2 and 3.

I have been using design methods such as: contextual interviews, observations, co-creative workshops and contextual tests of mock-ups/prototypes (Schneider & Stickdorn, 2011, Crabtree, 2012). Interviews, observations and workshops have been documented using film, photos and notes.

Through these methods I have aimed to gain understanding of:
- Who the key stakeholders are.
- The different stakeholders’ needs, expectations, desires etc.
- Different learners’ ‘journeys’ through the education, also including before and after the actual course.
- What thresholds, obstacles or communication difficulties that can occur today in relation to the education.
- How my design proposals are perceived, used and experienced by the stakeholders in question.

Complementary activity:
Volunteer work once a week at the Red Cross in Nacka ‘Practice Swedish’ & ‘homework support’ (‘träna svenska’ och ‘läxhjälp’).
Meeting stakeholders - To gain a broad understanding of the SFI system and the stakeholders involved in it I have conducted interviews and observations with stakeholders such as SFI-teachers, SFI-students, officials connected to SFI, non-profit organizations and Swedish speakers. To understand the students’ journey from arriving to Sweden all the way to when they finish or quit the SFI-education, I have complemented the interviews and observations with visits to the websites involved. In addition to this I have made personal visits to SFI-västerort, a SFI-school in Tensta, and to SFI-centre in Stockholm, where the initial application tests and interviews takes place.

During this research I have seen a great deal of issues which, in a negative way, affects the students’ abilities to make use of the education. Out of these issues I have identified more specific problem areas, which are presented in the chapter Loop1: Learnings.

Dialogue with SFI-learners - The key stakeholder in this project is of course the learners. To gain understanding of life situations and how different learners experience the process of learning Swedish, I held open conversations with 10 learners with different backgrounds and preconditions, individually and in groups. During these talks the learners where also asked to identify situations in their everyday life where they practiced Swedish today, where they would like to but didn’t and where they could but didn’t want to. Through this I aimed to find opportunities, thresholds and identify subconscious behaviors connected to language learning.
Early tests - Early in the process I decided to test an idea I had about integrating Swedish learning in the learners’ everyday situations. To my help I had two Konstfack students with the native languages Taiwanese and Dutch, good English skills but no Swedish skills.

The participants where each given a pocket audio recorder and where asked to choose a current everyday situation in which they would like to practice Swedish, they each chose the context of buying groceries. Together we recorded some words and phrases that could come in handy in these situations. They were asked to challenge themselves to use Swedish and record it, in these contexts, until our next meeting.

We met three times to listen to the recordings, discuss and record new words and phrases to use next time.

Loop 1: Learnings

In this chapter I start with my learnings about the general structure of SFI, the ‘stage’ for my project. I then present key learnings to my project, learner groups I have identified and their different journeys through SFI.

The general structure of SFI - SFI courses are today offered by many schools, both private and communal. The schools differs in quality and many learners find it hard to understand the differences between schools. The information varies in quality, is very scattered and for many learners can be to complex to understand. To avoid long waiting the schools are obligated to accept new students continuously throughout the semesters. Though there is a positive ambition behind this rule, in many cases it makes for unstable group dynamic and puts high demands on both teachers and students.

Courses and levels - The SFI-education is parted into three tracks (Studiervägar), which are each parted into two levels. When a person applies to SFI he/she is assigned to one of these “tracks”, based on former experiences of studies and level of Swedish skills. For example “person 1” with no former study experience and no Swedish knowledge is to start at level 1A. While “person 3” with a university degree but no Swedish knowledge might start at level 3C. The students are to advance through the levels, se picture, which means that individuals with totally different needs and preconditions eventually end up in the same course. This makes difficult preconditions for a relevant education for each individual and puts high demands on the teachers and students.
Separation from everyday life - The SFI-education today is very separated from peoples everyday life. Most SFI-students are taught Swedish in the classroom but rarely get to bring their learnings back to their everyday life to practice it in relevant situations. Instead they use their native language or English. As the bridge between education and individuals’ experiences in everyday life is central to a relevant learning (Skuy & Mentis, 1999), this is an issue well worth noticing. For different learners I have noticed different reasons for not practicing Swedish in everyday life.

**SFI-student in Tensta:**
"I feel stupid when I can’t express myself"

Former SFI-student:
"Here people don’t talk to strangers. In Eritrea there’s always something to talk about."

Motivation and aspiration - The common aspiration for the majority of the SFI-students I have met is to be able to get a job, earn a living and provide for your family. This goes well together with the aim of the Swedish municipality, who in 2010 implemented an establishment reform in which Arbetsförmedlingen became responsible for working with establishment of new Swedish citizens. In most cases the plan to get a job starts with learning Swedish at SFI. The pervasive attitude in my interviews, visits and analyzes of webpages is that “before you can work and earn a living in Sweden you need to learn Swedish”. Although this might make sense in theory, I have seen in my research that taking this attitude to literal leads to problematic issues in practice especially for the novice learners. I go deeper into the problematics further on in my findings.
Learner groups - In my initial research I met learners with many different backgrounds, needs and preconditions. Based on these meetings I have formulated two personas which represents the most common learner groups with very diverging backgrounds, preconditions and thus also needs in the education. I call them “the experienced learner” and “the novice learner”.

The experienced learner

“I practice Swedish at my spare time job and in my studies I keep to English”

SFI-student, Liljeholmen

Experienced learners are individuals with god former experience of studies. Most come from stable environments and are in Sweden for a specific education or job. Many speak English and can make use of this in their studies, work or spare time.

The experienced learner is used to theoretical information and abstract concepts. Together with god former study experience this makes good preconditions for taking personal responsibility for the education. SFI’s evening classes or distance courses alongside work or studies works well for the experienced learner.

Novice learner

“I have been in course 1B since four years”

SFI-student, Tensta

Novice learners have little or no previous experience of studies. Many are illiterate when they start SFI and the novices are seldom used to theoretical information or abstract concepts. Many have traumatic experiences in the past, which has negative impact on the learning ability. In this group the meeting with teachers and other students is essential and distance courses are not a good alternative.

Many novice learners live in highly segregated areas and therefor rarely get the opportunity to practice Swedish in everyday life. Without any former study experience the SFI education means a huge challenge. This group grew from 7300 in 2006 to 14000 in 2010 and keeps increasing since then. (Hallberg & Elmi. 2012)
The experienced learner's journey through SFI is not in any way a piece of cake. Learning a new language means a big challenge to anyone. However in comparison to the novice learner the problematics with studies as well as inclusion are nowhere near as complex and critical. Even before managing Swedish the experienced learner often have access to jobs and education through his/her English knowledge and therefor have somewhat of a short-cut into the society and inclusion.
As shown in this illustration all three paths in the Novice's journey often lead to a situation of exclusion, pacification and difficulties to chose the life you want.

In the path highlighted here we see that distance courses are not a good alternative for the Novice who is not able to grasp theoretic information, or abstract concepts. The aim of earning a living is reached, thus the motivation for learning Swedish is not big enough to answer to the huge challenge it means to study SFI in your spare time. Because these jobs often have low status, low salary and bad conditions for advancement, this path often leads to segregation and exclusion. To deal with these problematics I believe that structural solutions such as to offer language coaches at work, or a more practice-based distance education, could be steps towards a more functioning education.
Some get financial support from a spouse, often working in the type of position shown above. They often stay at home without occupation, which can lead to isolation and exclusion from the society.

This is a problematic issue which I believe often is connected to cultural norms and gender roles. Unfortunately, I haven’t been able to look deeper into this issue and therefore choose to focus on the other two paths. But what I do believe is that even if a person is financially supported by a spouse, he/she still socializes with people from the other paths. Therefore, by creating good preconditions for inclusion in the other paths, the positive effects would in the long run also reach this person.
We see that the huge challenge of learning a new language in a theoretic way from being illiterate, often results in people losing motivation. Some give up and move into one of the other paths while others 'get stuck' in the education for years. Either way the loss of motivation and self-esteem often leads to pacification and exclusion.

As Qarin Franker (2004) points out "many SFI-participants can find their background and cultural identity as a shortage and a negative load". She writes that the education for many made them feel as if they were going from competence to incompetence. They felt that their surroundings saw them as incompetent, even though they had always seen themselves as competent and capable. My personal experience was that a kind of resignation for the future permeated the students. After spending years in an education without seeing any clear progress, where every step is a huge challenge and where your former experiences and knowledge has no room, I believe it is easy to lose your feeling of self-worth.

I have chosen to work with the issue of motivation by making room for the learners’ backgrounds and cultural identities within the SFI-education. I find it interesting and I also see a big potential to use my design knowledge to lift more motivational aspects into the SFI-education.
A virtuous circle - What if the practical knowledge learners carry could be used as a driving force for learning Swedish and meeting new people. If the skills of, for example, cooking, handicraft, songs or dances from your native culture could work as a platform for contextual learning. Could this support self-esteem, initiative, motivation and lead to a more positive mindset within the SFI-education?

To be able to reach the learners’ thoughts and experiences, you have to meet them where they are - in their everyday concepts and experiences (Partanen, 2007). I believe this is also one way of lifting language learning into people’s everyday life.

How would the feeling of inferiority, that many learners feel, be affected when the language is used for sharing your own skills and knowledge with others? How could these practical skills be highlighted and utilized when looking for jobs? Could such a service encourage meetings between people with different cultures and languages as well as new places and thus be a step further towards inclusion?

Focus on cooking - I believe food and cooking has great potential for engaging and bringing people together. It is present in everyone’s life, connected to culture, traditions and celebrations. Cooking and eating involves all senses and is great to do together. Groceries as learning material is available virtually anywhere in Sweden. Cooking can be done at various levels and adjusted to different conditions. Further, I see that cooking has good commercial potential. Being able to show cooking skills and learn from others could thus be a step towards future employment or starting new businesses.

Throughout the project, I will try out my vision, and develop proposals on how design can be used to support it. The picture shows contexts and activities I envision the final proposal to support, such as dialogue, creating new material, cooking, meeting new people and places. I am aware that some people might find other activities more interesting and motivating and although I focus on cooking, I will still keep in mind other activities and the possibilities to apply the final proposal on these as well.
As a part of my project I planned a cooking session together with three volunteering SFI-learners from SFI in Tensta. I wanted to test my vision with the positive circle, see how it could look like, reactions and effects from the participants. What positive situations and outcomes that might occur as well as obstacles and negative things. I realize that really achieving a positive circle demands iteration during a longer time and any long term effects unfortunately won’t be noticeable at this time scale.


With the help of a translator, in three languages, I very briefly explained my project - that it was about cooking and learning Swedish - and that I was looking for three volunteers to come and cook and practise Swedish at my school. Seven learners signed up out of which three were able to come on the day I proposed. One week before the cooking day I met the three participants at their school in Tensta, during one hour. I wanted them to choose what food to cook, one dish each. As a support in the dialogue I had prepared a pile of cards containing pictures of different groceries. The participants seemed excited about cooking the food of their own choice, yet I also got a feeling they were trying to understand and please any expectations I might have. In response to this I tried to explain that I wanted them to be in charge, take initiative and that I wanted them to teach me about their ways of cooking. My main aim of the meeting, except for informing the participants about time, place etc., was to ensure we would be able to find the ingredients and the tools we needed on the day of the cooking. The cards were a big help in this process. They became a help for the participants to communicate to the rest of the group what they needed for the cooking and also supported a feeling of mutual agreement.

An example on how the cards supported mutual agreement is when the participants tried to explain ingredients they didn’t know the name of, at one point for example baking yeast (Sv: jäst). After some minutes of description of what it looked like (using hand gestures and references to objects available nearby), what the package looked like (pointing to the color of a cup in front of us) and the effect of it (body gestures of a dough swelling), I understood they were probably talking about baking yeast. However when I suggested that they didn’t recognize the word and thought it wasn’t correct. When I instead showed a picture of baking yeast they could see we were talking about the same thing and they accepted the foreign word. In this example the cards played an important role in creating mutual agreement around an object and the Swedish word for it.

On the first of February we all met in T-centralen and together went to Liljeholmen to buy ingredients. Kadidja unfortunately couldn't make it due to personal issues. The participants where encouraged to take responsibility for the ingredients in their own dish and took on the responsibility without problems. It quickly became clear that the role of ‘experts’ I wanted to assign them was well deserved. Already in this situation we all struggled allot with the language to reach a common understanding about different things, such as the amount of oil we would need, where to find baking yeast and from what animal the meat came from.

From the grocery store in Liljeholmen we went on to Telefonplan and Konstfack. After a small tour around the school we arrived in the kitchen and started the cooking. The kitchen was located in between the workshop and the students’ individual workspaces, partly with glass walls out to these spaces. I had chosen this space with the purpose of creating a natural meeting between the SFI-learners and Konstfack students without too much disturbances in the cooking.

The cooking took about two and a half hours during which we conversed about everything from the cooking, techniques, amounts, tools and other dishes to our different life situations and cultures.

When the food was ready we invited the students working in their workspace to join in and eat with us. Alganesh and Hibo told them about the different dishes and invited them to eat. This small presentation and invitation was answered with warm applause and excitement from the students. During the eating the conversation continued, though Hibo and Alganesh was a bit more reserved than during the cooking.
Presenting to the SFI-class - To follow up the cooking session I planned a presentation and slide show for the rest of the SFI-class, with the photos and videos taken during the cooking. My purpose was to create a situation where the participants would need to tell others about what they had been doing. Thus I wanted to further support language learning by encourage them to repeat concepts they had learnt and met, as well as reflect on and formulate their experiences and achievements.

This refers to Vygotskij’s theory about internalisation, which in short means the process when the deeper meaning of a word or concept becomes rooted in your understanding. When you are able to handle and understand a concept without having the actual object at hand. (Vygotskij, 1999).

My original thought was for the learners to present together and thus support each other in the process. But unfortunately a second participant from the original group had dropped out since she moved to a different city the day after the cooking. To support the remaining learner I therefor stood up together with her in front of the class. I believe this had both positive and negative effects, the positive effects that Alganesh felt more secure in front of the others and the negative that she didn’t have to challenge her language as much as she would have had if she had been standing together with a learner with similar level of Swedish skills.

Alganesh telling her class about Niklas’ meet-cutting-skills. They were approved.
"It’s a good way to learn Swedish"

“I was not at all nervous, I knew we were going to cook and looked forward to it”

Language learning and motivation - So how did the cooking session support language learning? According to Partanen it is first when we get to put words in their true contexts - in a conversation where we mean and communicate something to someone else - that we reach true learning (Partanen, 2007). When language learning takes place in the context of practical activities connected to the learners’ everyday life experiences, you put the words in a meaningful context where the word-meaning and relevance becomes clear to the learners (Vygotskij, 1999), you also create an important bridge between the education and individuals’ everyday life which, according to Skuy and Mentis, is central to a relevant learning (Skuy & Mentis, 1999).

These aspects all points to the relevance in this kind of activities and I would argue that activities like this would be a highly relevant addition to most SFI-educations today.

In addition to these aspects the main aim of my cooking test was to create a situation where the learners knowledge and skills would be at the centre of the language learning and through this to build and support the learners’ self-esteem and motivation. As mentioned earlier I realize that achieving this would demand iteration during a longer time and any long term effects won’t be noticeable at this scale. What I can point to though is the enthusiasm with which the participants took part in and led the cooking, the fact that both of the participants brought not only the equipment we had decided on together but also, on their own initiative, spices and injera-bread especially prepared for the occasion. Furthermore I can point to the pride they showed when presenting and serving the food to the “guests”. Compared to the motivation and active participation they have shown in their usual learning situation the increase was clear.
Tools to support communication and learning - To be able to conduct this type of activities, and really put the learners knowledge at the center of it, it showed very helpful with tools that support the communication and learning. In a SFI-class with one teacher and 15-25 learners it can even be essential.

As a test I had prepared a digital tool with photos of ingredients and tools connected to cooking. This was of big help especially during the planning of the cooking, but also when discussing ingredients used in other dishes during the actual cooking. The photos and videos taken during the cooking also played an important role when telling the others in the SFI-class about the cooking, which in turn supported iteration, internalisation of the words and concepts needed - a more rooted understanding of the words learned during the practical activity.

Common understanding - Taking the time to reach common understanding I believe is important in many aspects. By doing this I wanted to show It’s important to me that we understood each other, that their opinion and knowledge was important to me. I believe this in turn had a positive effect on them being comfortable in taking control and showing initiative. Reaching common understanding also shows that it is possible to communicate, I believe this has positive effects on the confidence in the learners language skills and can encourage them also the next time to try and explain what they want to say instead of giving up. Taking the time to explain what you mean also means to challenge your language learning and develop your language, which is the main purpose of the project.
“They met me with joy and warmth!”

A meeting between cultures - Another aim with my idea was to support inclusion by creating situations in which people with different cultures, backgrounds and experiences could meet and learn about each other. From this test I learned that food is a great subject to meet around. Both during cooking and eating the food served as a positive subject for learning about each other in a relaxed and neutral manner.

However I also realized during the planning that food can be a quite sensitive subject as well and not at all only fun and neutral. Some people only eat halal meat, some only vegetarian. For some people alcohol is out of the question while some see it as essential in order to enjoy a certain kind of food. You have to find common grounds to meet in, dishes and ingredients that everyone can accept. In this way cooking in these context becomes a clear, but relatively manageable, reflection of the culture chocks we have to deal with in the bigger picture.

“Enjoying the food together”

“Alganesh explaining how to organize the food on the plate.”

“Owning your city”

Owning your city - As I bring up in my findings from loop 1 many novice learners, especially in Swedens bigger cities, live and spend most of their time in very segregated areas. This has negative effects both on the language learning and inclusion. My own experience is that when visiting and experiencing a new place, that place suddenly becomes known to you. You get ‘access’ to it when you know how to get there, what it looks like and how you find your way around. You get a sense of being a co-owner of the place, which is an important part of inclusion. If you are a novice learner and not able to read signs, or use maps, for example of the subway system, going to and experiencing a place in reality is even more important. This was the first time the participants visited these areas and was thus an important step in broadening their geographical knowledge and support a feeling within the participants of having access to their own city as a whole, to be included.

“WAY OF WORKING - LOOP 2”
HOW CAN I USE MY DESIGN SKILLS TO ENABLE AND SUPPORT ACTIVITIES LIKE THIS, WITHIN THE SFI-EDUCATION, AT A BIGGER SCALE?

**WAY OF WORKING - LOOP 2**

Ideating - By mapping up all stakeholders involved and other who could potentially contribute to my vision such as companies, and communes, I could ideate on different approaches to enable and motivate these activities. As well as how the service could afford all stakeholders to find value in and benefit from taking part in the system.

To formulate the overall service I simultaneously worked with the content and structure of each part of it. I found this to be a natural way of working since the connection of them all creates the whole of the system.

I took into consideration the stakeholders’ different levels of language skills, experience of handling computers and symbols and who where to interact with each part. My aim was that the parts of the service meant to be used by the novice learners should be easy enough for them to use on their own and demand minimal support from the teacher. So the teachers should be able to focus on supporting the language learning.
This is an illustration of the SFI-system today based on my findings. Many SFI-teachers save the little time they have by using ready made teaching material available on the market. This material today is not based on the learners’ knowledge, situation or personal experiences and the teachers have limited possibilities to meet every individual’s needs or invite the learners as co-creators of the education.

The different schools and classes are separated from each other and have small abilities to inspire or motivate each other in new ways of learning. As the illustration shows, the SFI-system is basically separated from external stakeholders, who could potentially contribute to a more motivating education as well as gain value from the knowledge carried by SFI-learners.
My vision is a service that enables teachers to invite the learners as co-creators of the education. A tool designed for the very limited computer skills of novice learners, which they can use to put their practical skills in the center of the learning.

The service would also support communication between SFI-classes, an easy accessible way to share inspiration and ideas on different ways to work with the tool.

As a third step the service would initiate and enable meetings between SFI-participants and external stakeholders such as Swedish speakers, companies, organizations or communes. Meetings where the SFI-learners’ practical skills would be in focus for an inspiring and social gathering, with contextual Swedish practice as the main aim and inclusion as a positive side-effect.
Mock ups - I created two digital mock-ups simulating the interface of parts of the service I wanted to test within the learning context.

One represented a tool for documenting cooking processes. This had shown useful for supporting further language learning by telling others about the process, reflecting and repeating words and concepts used in the cooking. I wanted to create a tool for this which the learners themselves could handle.

The other mock-up was based on the cards with photos of ingredients, which had shown useful during the planning of the previous cooking session. I wanted to test how these could be used in a digital tool without losing the essential benefits from the physical cards. As well as what other benefits and opportunities a digital format could offer, opposed to a physical.

In both of the tools I strived to strip away as much ‘half-necessary’ functions as possible and focus on a few highly relevant functions in order to formulate a ‘novice learner proof’ tool, easy enough to feel comfortable in and not ‘getting lost’ in. From my meetings with the stakeholders I considered these aspects to be more important than to offer a bigger range of functions and instead ending up with a too complex tool. Instead my aim was to enable variation by making these few functions suitable for an endless number of contexts and situations and making the users, in charge of creating these contexts.

Due to the time frame I wasn’t able to create digital mock-ups with the interactive affordances I wanted to test, such as to be able to move objects around freely, etc. I therefore complemented the digital mock-ups with a paper one, affording the test participants to more freely explore ways of interacting with the tool.
Why computer tablets? - I see several benefits with computer tablets as a platform for these tools. For one thing the size is easy to handle and affords mobility, yet in the same time enables users to collaborate and use it together. The touch function is experienced by many as more intuitive than using a mouse and thus easier for beginners to understand and to learn, (just look at many two year olds today). I would also argue from my own experience that tablets involve the user’s body and senses to a greater extent than ordinary computers, for the reasons already mentioned. Which I believe has positive impact on engaging and motivating the users.

Most tablets combines the affordances of a handheld computer, a camera and audio recorder as well as enables users to connect to the internet, projectors and other tablets. This enables for me as designer to create one holistic tool, and for the users to handle one single object.

In SFI these benefits are just beginning to be recognized. A few teachers are at the forefront by using tablets in their courses. Yet there are currently no applications developed for adult Swedish learning, or the needs of novice learners. The ones used are either designed for children - making them at points quite irrelevant for adults in terms of contents and aesthetics - or they are designed for other purposes, such as information about train departures (Tågtavlan), or they are designed for many languages at a time, making them messy and hard to use. When looking at how they meet the needs of novice learners none of today’s applications are sufficient since they demand reading skills to navigate, are irrelevant for adults, or are easy for beginners to ‘get lost’ in.

Today’s applications are very limited in terms of uses, the tasks are pre-decided, the content is pre-programmed and offers no possibilities to create new material. They are also designed for activities focused within the tablet, rather than to support collaboration and activities in the physical context.
To try out my mock-ups I visited an SFI-class in Eskilstuna in which they have been working with the Ipad as a tool. The teacher, Ivana Eklund, says the benefits of working with Ipads are that they involve all senses, evoke playfulness and could support further individualisation (Bråten, 1996) of the education. And a tool especially designed for the needs of adult novice learners in SFI could support a more relevant language learning.

Aim - See how the learners and teachers would handle the given task. Pay attention to how they made use of the given material in a context close to the intended. Be open to changes and improvements that can be made in the design to further meet the users needs.

Participants - 13 SFI learners in level 1A, 9 women and 4 men, in the ages between 18-70. Originally from Syria, Iraq, Iran, Vietnam and Somalia. Ivana Eklund - teacher, originally from Czech republic. Mustafa - supporting teacher, speaks Swedish, Arabic and Persian.

Material - My mock-ups. Two Ipads for the learners themselves to document their work and then use the documentation as a support for reflection and further language learning. Ingredients for two types of finger food, together with pictures of the intended result.

Process - Step 1. Dialogue about food and dishes using the paper sketches. Talking about the ingredients given for the task and pointing them out in the paper sketch.

Step 2. Cooking the finger food in two groups, using the little Swedish skills they had together with body language and mixed with some native language. One in each group where asked to document the process and actions using an Ipad.

Step 3. Looking at the documented material, reflecting, putting actions and objects in Swedish words with the help of the teacher.

Step 4. Tasting the food and mingling!
“I believe you learn language by doing”

Co-creation - When the learners are able to join as co-creators of the learning material I believe it evokes emotional involvement and a feeling of shared ownership. The learning can also be made relevant for each individual and thus evoke greater motivation to learn.

Encourage assortment - Too much documentation material becomes tiresome to reflect on. The tool should therefore have a simple way to delete files in order to only save the important ones. Long video clips showed to be more distracting than helpful when reflecting, the tool could therefore for example have a time limitation for videos.

Embodied learning - When involving your body in the learning by actually doing the activities yourself, tasting, feeling or smelling, in connection with practicing the words of the activities or objects, I argue that in a sense the words become embodied. The meaning of the word and the bodily experience becomes connected in a natural way and thus supports internalisation of the words.

Activities - I learnt that a function within the tool to point out different actions would be useful for practicing words such as cut, press, sprinkle and roll. Especially in videos where things happen quickly and it can be hard to point out which action you are talking about.

Way of Working - Loop 3

Everyone are involved in the cooking

Repeating words using the documentation

Applauding and taking photos of the result

Activities from the cooking
“The tool has to be really easy to understand”

Aesthetics and visuals - From dialogue with the teacher, Ivana, seeing the difficulties with existing applications and testing my sketches with the learners I was even more convinced about the importance of simplicity in the visuals. Keep the impressions to a minimum in order to have a clear focus at each point. To avoid that the users 'get lost' while navigating between pages I also need to structure all functions so you have constant access to the different functions and know where to find them.

This was one of the reasons why I had structured the documentation tool sketch in the shape of a book, thinking that the users would recognize how you change pages back and forth in a book and in that way not get lost. However the cultural differences became clear when the learners where confused by which direction to change pages in, most of them being used to books you read from right to left. This attempt to make the tool easy to use instead made it more confusing.
“MatPrat” is a free learning service for SFI. The first part of it, the tool, can be used by any SFI-school to enable and support food related activities in the education, based on the learners’ skills.

The second part is a social network where SFI-schools all over the country can inspire and support each other in ways of working with the tool.

The third part is the initiation of an event where SFI-learners, teachers and external stakeholders, such as Swedish speakers, companies and organizations, can meet, cook together, share experiences and knowledge and support inclusion.

Due to the time limitations of the project I have not been able to go in to details in all three parts. I have therfor focused on the design of the tool and will merely give an idea of how the other two parts could look and be connected.
The tool - The tool can be used on different SFI-levels and in many situations. For example to support dialogue, planning of cooking activities, documentation of cooking, reflection and repetition of words and concepts related to the process. It supports language learning in speaking, reading and writing. Photos, text and sound enables learners to communicate without knowing all the words and to learn simultaneously. It invites learners as co-creators of their own education. By doing this the education can be made relevant for each individual.

In my design work I have strived to create a tool that is flexible in its applications, so that teachers and learners can find their own ways of using it, that fits to their specific needs and preconditions. I have let the tool in itself be quite simple in its aesthetics and functions, since I want the real interactions and activities to be in focus and provide unexpected and refreshing elements to the experience.
On the main page you can create a new project and get an overview of all former projects created. When creating a new project a new page is opened on top of the main page, now you can document your process with video or photos and then add text or sound as you wish. When clicking on one of the existing projects on the main page, this page is opened on top of the main page where you can view and work further with all material created in that project.

The interface is easy to navigate through since the four different pages are always available in screen and the users can feel comfortable that they won’t get lost. The tool is based on realistic photos, videos, and a minimum of text which is easy for the novice learners to understand. The content is structured in a main page and three tabs called: “We need”, “We do” and “For teachers”.

The tab “We need” shows a selected range of pre-programmed ingredients, with names in text and sound. You can add your own content to this tab by clicking new and add photo, text and sound. You can also drag ingredients to your cooking projects to create a list of ingredients.
The tab “We do” shows photos of a selected range of activities connected to cooking, such as cut, stir, peel, etc., here you can also add your own content using video, photos, text, and sound. You can also cut out selections showing specific activities from your own video clips and drag them to this tab to create new content.

The tab “For teachers” allows teachers to share selected documentations with others via Matprats social network. They can also add text telling about the process, pedagogic backgrounds, etc., interesting for other teachers and learners to share.
The social network - Through Matprat’s social network teachers and learners using the tool can inspire and encourage each other by sharing their documentations and discuss ways of working. Teachers can get support on how to work with the tool, share ideas and experiences with other teachers and inspire others to try new ways of teaching.

From this webpage new SFI-teachers and learners interested in the tool can get information on how it can be used and see what other users thinks about it.

Here you also find a link to the webpage of the event “Eat for integration” and more information on how to sign up.
The event - Each semester Matprat initiates the event “Eat for integration”, where Swedish learners and Swedish speakers all over the country can meet, share knowledge and experiences, practice Swedish and learn more about each other. For SFI-participants the main values would be to practice Swedish with Swedish speakers, in a positive and relaxed situation, to show and share the skills they carry and get to know new people and places. For Swedish speakers the values would be to meet new people, taste new food, learn new skills and contribute to inclusion.

The event would be based on voluntary initiative from the involved stakeholders as well as sponsorship from companies who wants to support inclusion. The website would serve as an activator and hub for these initiatives. It would give information and tips relevant to the different stakeholders. For example how a company can show their support for the cause and what they get in return. Or in what different ways a Swedish speaking individual can choose to support the event. As a Swedish speak-
DISCUSSION

My proposal in reality? From a technical point of view I see no difficulties for the service to be realized. The challenge lies rather in the stakeholders’ attitude towards trying new things and individuals’ motivation to put effort into the activities. The different parts of the service can be realized separately, (except for the social network which directly builds on the tool), which I see as a benefit since it makes the service more flexible towards peoples reactions and needs. For example an SFI class can work with the tool for some months then be introduced to the social network and even a year later sign up for the event, without loosing benefits during the way. Or the other way around, a Swedish speaking individual can take the initiative to join “Eat for integration”, then contact a SFI-class and encourage them to join. From here this class can perhaps be introduced to the tool which they can now use in their courses.

The tool - I see that the tool could easily be used in reality, since it only demands one SFI-class to take the step and try it within the already existing education. I see it as a complement to other ways of learning, something that is used perhaps once or twice a week in the course.
The social network - would demand several SFI-classes for the sharing of inspiration, and ideas to work. Still it might be enough with a few to get it started. I see that visionary people such as Ivana Eklund, the Ipad using teacher from Eskilstuna, and others like her can play an important role in trying out and initiating the tool and network for other colleagues.

The event - The part where I see the biggest challenge in reality is the event. This is an activity that does not exist today, as opposed to the SFI-courses which already have an existing structure laid out. I’m totally convinced of the positive outcomes it would bring if it was to be realized. However for the event to work it demands personal initiative and creativity from several actors. I do see several obstacles for all stakeholders, such as teachers being apprehensive towards opening up to the outside and afraid they would be accused for the weaknesses of the education, Novice learners feeling uncomfortable or not being allowed by spouses to participate in the activities. For Swedish speaking individuals I believe the biggest obstacle is taking the time and effort to join the event. For companies to be willing to support you would first need to be able to show some positive examples. However similar initiatives such as Individuella bekantskaper, språkcafer, restaurantiday etc. shows that many people are willing to join these types of events and if people are able to see the benefits they are more likely to join. From my cooking session at Konstfack I showed that it can be done and the positive reactions and effects were worth the effort! I see that ‘eat for integration’ can be conducted in a small scale, having positive effects for the people involved, but my vision is of course that it eventually should happen all over the country and become a natural part of the SFI-education. In this way it would benefit the people involved but also support a general pervasive attitude of inclusion and openness towards everyone in the Swedish society.
Methods and communication difficulties - During the process I struggled with several challenges concerning the communication with stakeholders. Differences in language, culture and ability to theorize and analyze posed as layers of obstacles when trying to reach common understanding. I believe these aspects are always present at some level in all communication, however in this project it has been a recurrent and central challenge throughout the process and I have searched for different ways to overcome these obstacles.

Language gaps - In order to bridge big language gaps I have used interpreters. In some cases this has shown quite sufficient while in others it has resulted in confusion, misunderstandings and simplifications. In some cases communication in Swedish has worked well on a basic level but not always to reach a deeper understanding. Bringing in an interpreter in these cases has caused confusion, put high demands on everyone involved and even made it harder to reach common understanding.

Cultural differences - are another layer affecting the communication, and interpretations of reactions. I believe at nearly every point of my process I have experienced behaviors, reactions and comments from participants I still haven’t been able to fully understand or interpret. Some might have had to do with politeness, prejudices or other cultural structures I am not aware of. My approach towards this has been to try and be as clear and honest as possible when it comes to questions, instructions etc, hope to get the same behavior back and be responsive towards reactions from the participants.

Ability to theorize and analyze - The third layer I have struggled with has had to do with the participants former experience of theorizing, reflecting and analyzing. One situation that has shown difficult over and over again is for example when I have held open dialogues with SFI-participants about their experiences or reflections on situations such as the workshops. At one point for example I asked one of the participants the question: “How did you experience the cooking session?” Even though we had an interpreter she didn’t know how to answer my question. “What do you mean experience?” I tried to repeat the question using other words. She replied smiling “I cooked injera, ziggy...”

This and other similar experiences made me realize that in Sweden and similar cultures we are challenged from a young age to reflect on experiences, share personal opinions and later to theorize, analyze and reflect critically on our surroundings. This way of thinking is the norm here and something we often take for granted. While many of the participants I met have not been challenged in this way and therefore are not used to this type of questions, don’t know how to answer or maybe even why this could be useful. To deal with these difficulties I have based my process to a greater extent on co-creational workshops and on trying out ideas in the intended context.

I realize that many of our traditional design methods for gaining understanding are dependent on the participants’ ability to reflect, conceptualize and theorize. In order to move in to new areas of design we have to be aware of this and to challenge our methods.
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