Four Shades of Culture
- a study of four teachers’ perception of culture

Fyra nyanser av kultur
- en studie av fyra lärares uppfattning av kultur

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Abstract

This study focuses on four English teachers’ perception of the concept of culture linked to teaching language. Semi structured interviews were carried out in order to investigate how they perceive culture in relation to both their personal views and the steering documents for the educational system. To gain a more in–depth understanding of their perception we asked them about their own perception of their teaching methods and how they in turn perceive the students’ development with regards to intercultural understanding. We applied Eva Gagnestam’s four descriptions of culture to be able to explore the different ways in which the teachers worked with the concept of culture in the English classroom.

Keywords: culture, intercultural understanding, perception, steering documents, teachers
Preface

When deciding to write a thesis paper with another person, one agrees to stand for every written word as if they were your very own. Understanding this, we saw it as being essential that we were both involved in every part of this process. No section, phrase or word has been left for only one person to be responsible for. Rather, we have spent hours on researching, discussing and formulating every sentence together. Choosing to work this way requires a lot of trust, honesty and patience, and may very well result in having your partnership tested by differences of opinions. In our case, however, this has not been an issue. Years of friendship has given us a solid ground to shape this study, truly making it a joint effort.
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1. Introduction

I grew up in Iowa and I knew what to do with butter: you put it on roasin’ ears, pancakes, and popcorn. Then I went to France and saw a Frenchman put butter on radishes. I waited for the Cosmic Revenge – for the Eiffel Tower to topple, the Seine to sizzle, or the grape to wither on the vine. But that Frenchman put butter on his radishes, and the Gallic universe continued unperturbed. I realized then something I hadn’t learned in five years of language study: not only was speaking in French different from speaking in English, but buttering in French was different from buttering in English. And that was the beginning of real cross-cultural understanding. (Morain qtd. in Valdes Merrill, 2001, p. 64)

This quote could, if subjected to an in-depth interpretation, say that merely learning language as a system of form and function is useless without the understanding of the cultures in which the language is used. We would not claim to be quite so harsh in our interpretation but we stand by the conviction that language and culture are intimately connected.

Culture, it seems, is one of those few concepts that often appear self-explanatory. However, when you ask people to define it, they are suddenly facing a task as difficult as counting the nuts and bolts in the Eiffel Tower. The concept of culture is vast in terms of both breadth and depth, spanning across many disciplines – teaching and education included - and going as deep as understanding complex issues such as for example the many dimensions of a civil war. One should, nevertheless, not be disheartened by the sheer magnitude of culture to approach the notion of giving it a place in the classroom.

We, as future teachers of English, want to know how practicing teachers perceive and work with this ambiguous concept in the classroom. Not to identify one way as better or worse - the only bad way of teaching culture is by not teaching it at all - but to gain a nuanced picture of how it can be done. While on our respective teaching practices, we found ourselves working in school environments where a majority of the student body appeared to be ethnically homogenous (i.e. born and raised in Sweden, with little to no foreign ancestry or affiliations).
This brought our attention to the teaching of different cultures in the classroom. We intend to study how four teachers of English perceive the concept of culture and how they implement it in their teaching. Additionally, we will include a student perspective, which will give our research more voices and further depth. Our research is also supported by what is said about culture in the national steering documents and the importance of including it in education. In fact, the option of excluding culture from, for example, English teaching is not only difficult, but goes directly against what is stipulated in the steering documents for the educational system as a whole and for the individual subjects. Students are expected to develop a sense of international solidarity and tolerance towards their fellow global citizens, as well as gain an understanding of the more tangible forms of culture such as art and motion pictures.

It is, as the quote shows, essential that culture is a part of English language teaching in order to prepare students to take part in a more unified world where cultures cross boundaries and where they inch closer to their own home turf with increased migration and the advances of technology. The current Swedish steering documents for English, “Kursplaner 2000,” describe English as a “world language,” meaning that it holds an important position as a dominating language of communication. The development of the modern way of communicating, through whichever forms of technology, would not have been as great of a success had it not been for English being a global language, a lingua franca. The communication that occurs across the world entails an abundance of cultural meetings, which requires a certain level of knowledge of other cultures (as well as your own) in order to understand, for example, the young boy or girl chatting with you from a computer in Montevideo, Uruguay. Knowledge of other cultures has the power to eliminate prejudice and helps us overcome the idea of “us and them.” It is, as both we and the writers of the steering documents for English understand, highly valuable to make use of English as a global language, in order to understand our fellow men and women in all corners of the world.

Our study is mainly inspired and supported by two previous Swedish doctoral theses by Ulla Lundgren and Eva Gagnestam respectively, made within the area of culture and intercultural understanding in English teaching. Additionally, Ulrika Tornberg has contributed in helping us gain further perspectives on the concept of culture in the steering documents.
1.1 Purpose

We will investigate how four teachers perceive the concept of culture as it is described in the steering documents and how, subsequently, they translate it into their own teaching. The teachers are employed at two different schools in the south of Sweden: one compulsory, and one upper secondary school. To enrich our findings, we will add the perspective of the recipients: the students. Our intention is not to critically view our chosen participants or their establishments, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of their perceptions of how culture takes form and is included in English teaching and learning. Our purpose is, first and foremost, to spotlight culture as it is understood by our selected informants, in the hopes of raising the general awareness and individual consciousness of the concept. We believe that culture affects each and every one of us, which gives everyone qualification to take part in an open discussion about it. It is that discussion that we hope to extend an invitation to, with this paper.

1.2 Research Questions

- What are the four selected teachers’ perceptions of culture?
- How do these teachers view their own teaching of culture?
- What are the students’ attitudes to culture and how does that affect the lesson content?
2. Literature Review and Previous Research

In this section we give a summary of two studies within the field of language pedagogy that have been carried out in Swedish educational settings. Both studies are culture oriented and contribute with several important aspects and findings to our study. The concepts of culture that these books treat will be further discussed in the following section (3.1). The steering documents are included as previous research because of their position as documents which have been shaped by years of evaluating the Swedish educational system.

2.1 Kultur i språkundervisning – med fokus på engelska (2003) Eva Gagnestam

Eva Gagnestam’s *Kultur i språkundervisning – med fokus på engelska* (2003) is a doctoral thesis by the author within an area which is very similar to our thesis paper. She has chosen to examine the way in which teachers, student teachers and upper secondary students view the concept of culture, the relationship between language and culture, the significance of that relationship in the concept of intercultural competence/understanding, the role of culture and how it is managed in the teaching of English, among other things. From her interview data, Gagnestam elicits four categories of descriptions of her participants’ interpretations of culture (2003, p. 135). These categories vary, in her opinion, in depth and width. For example, when a teacher has a certain interpretation of culture, as opposed to one within another category, it can – according to Gagnestam – result in similarly deep or shallow, wide or narrow teaching (2005, p. 36).
2.2 Interkulturell förståelse i engelskundervisning – En möjlighet (2002)

Ulla Lundgren

Ulla Lundgren’s doctoral thesis *Interkulturell förståelse i engelskundervisning – en möjlighet* (2002) is a study where she investigates the concept of intercultural understanding. Lundgren examines intercultural understanding within three different discourses; research, authority and teacher discourse. With the three discourses at hand she looks upon the main purpose of her study which is to “examine the prospects of developing *intercultural understanding* through English as a foreign language (EFL) in the Swedish comprehensive school” (our emphasis, Lundgren, 2002, p. 265). Lundgren argues that the subject of English is a fertile and solid ground for developing intercultural understanding, considering its well-established status in Sweden and also due to the wide-spread recognition of English as a *lingua franca* and its dominance in today’s youth popular culture (2002, p. 19-20). Lundgren’s doctoral thesis contributes to our study with her discussions and findings of the aspects of culture and intercultural understanding in the steering documents. Lundgren’s study gives an insightful knowledge of teachers’ understanding of the issues at hand as well as teachers’ methods.

2.3 Steering Documents and Culture Perspectives

Three different steering documents and their cultural perspectives are valuable for the purpose of our study, that is, the national curriculum, the syllabus for English year nine and the syllabus for English A. These documents are regulations issued by the Swedish government set out to ensure fundamental values in school and to provide goals and guidelines for the educational system (Skolverket). Sweden is in agreement with certain international policies such as the UN declaration for human rights and UNESCO and the steering documents for the educational system, are thereby rooted in these documents, most certainly regarding the concept of culture, tolerance and understanding of all people (Lundgren, 2002, p. 72).

Furthermore the syllabi complement the curriculum by providing the goals of learning in each separate subject. The syllabi give us an insight into how a subject or a course can contribute to
ensure students’ development in accordance with the fundamental values and goals expressed in the curriculum. Grading criteria are also present in the syllabi where the level of knowledge a student needs to achieve can be understood. The syllabi are quite open to free interpretation and the teachers can base their lessons and teaching upon the given aims and goals of a subject (Skolverket).

For the purpose of our study we use this following section to show what the steering documents express regarding the concept of culture and intercultural understanding. Since we will relate to these documents in our analysis and discussions we find it important to summarize some of the more relevant aspects for our research.

2.3.1 Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-Time Centre Lpo 94

The curriculum for the compulsory school system stresses the importance of preventing discrimination of any sort in the school environment. Thus, schools should work towards hindering injustice based on ethnicity, gender, religious beliefs, sexual orientation or disabilities. Xenophobia, that is the fear of what is foreign, especially strangers and foreign people, must according to the Lp0 94 be met with knowledge and through open discussions (Lpo94, p. 4). The curriculum also states the issue of identity and that understanding one’s own culture and cultural heritage provides oneself with a secure identity. However, while developing an understanding of one’s own culture, one should also emphasize with and respect the values and culture of others (p. 3-4). A perspective of the expanding globalization is also present and the role that the school environment plays in students’ development in understanding their responsibilities in an international society. The international perspective entails developing international solidarity and an understanding of the fact that our country is becoming more culturally diverse (p. 6).
2.3.2 Curriculum for the Non –Compulsory School System Lpf

The curriculum for the non –compulsory school adds a few different aspects to the concept of culture than the ones stated in the curriculum for compulsory school. The document stresses the fact that the school environment is a social and cultural meeting place which has the opportunity and obligation to strengthen the awareness in these areas for the people that take part of this specific environment (Lpf94, p. 3-4). Furthermore, the curriculum does point out the value of seeing one’s own reality in a global context more so than what the curriculum for compulsory school states (p. 6). An element of large importance that has been added to the curriculum for the non –compulsory school is that of working opportunities. The curriculum emphasizes the opportunity for future studies across borders and the value of understanding the changes and developments taking place in regards to the more and more globalized world. The personal development is important for the students to later be able to take part in their working life (p. 16).

2.3.3 Syllabus English Year Nine

The syllabus for English year nine is based upon values and aspects expressed in the curriculum for compulsory school and that includes the concept of culture. The syllabus begins with expressing the aim of the subject of English and its role in education. The cultural aspects include English as the mother tongue of several countries and it also embodies the different aspects of globalization, such as internationalized labor, rapid development and technology. Furthermore it emphasizes cultures from English speaking countries that are available to students outside of the school environment, most commonly through popular culture. The subject of English should also aim towards developing students’ ability to reflect over their own and others cultural experiences. This aim, among others can be found in the curriculum. The syllabus states that this ability will help students with their intercultural competence (English, Skolverket).
2.3.4 Syllabus English A

The aim of the subject of English and its role in education in the syllabus for English A is in agreement with the syllabus for English year nine; however, the differences regarding culture can be found in the goals that the students should strive for and attain. The goals of English A understandably require more progression of the understanding of culture than the goals to attain by the end of year nine. An example of progression would be the following:

- have knowledge of everyday life, society and cultural traditions in some countries where English occupies a central position, as well as be able to make comparisons with their own cultural experiences. (Syllabus English year nine, Skolverket)

- have knowledge of social conditions, cultural traditions and ways of living in English-speaking areas, and be able to use this knowledge to compare cultures. (Syllabus English A, Skolverket)

The students’ progression in year nine and English A differ regarding the ability to compare cultures. The students in year nine are asked to be able to compare cultural traditions with their own cultural experiences, while the students in English A are required to be able to compare cultures. Students in year nine should be able to make use of internal and personalized knowledge which is derived from their own reality. They should, in other words, be experts in knowing themselves. The progression in English A requires the students to reach the same, or similar, level of understanding of several foreign cultures to be able to compare them and reflect upon their similarities and differences, as if they were their own.

2.3.5 Summary – Steering Documents

The cultural elements as they are expressed in the curriculum for compulsory and non-compulsory school point to the desire schools should strive towards intercultural understanding. To develop the students’ intercultural understanding, schools are required to meet racism and injustice with a willingness to discuss and overcome. These requirements have been incorporated into the subjects and courses, and are in this way accessible for the teachers and students to work with. The cultural aspects of the syllabi are concretized from
the overarching curriculum, intending to further facilitate the application of culture in teaching all subjects.
3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Concepts

In this section we discuss concepts that are relevant to our thesis paper. We wish to point out that our definitions have been chosen to suit our specific research. However, we are aware that other definitions than ours are certainly accurate and may be used within other fields of research. Even within our own field, many more definitions can be relevant and useful, but for the sake of manageability, we have made this selection.

3.1.1 Many Views of Culture

As mentioned in our background section we have, like many researchers before us, concluded that there is no one concise definition of culture. We have therefore gathered a selection of how a few researchers have defined culture. On the one hand, this shows how dynamic the concept is, and on the other hand, the following overview presents definitions which we find appropriate for our study. It is important to note, however that many definitions of culture are left out.

Eva Gagnestam’s doctoral thesis in pedagogy *Kultur i Språkundervisning – med fokus på engelska* (2003) and her book *Kultur i språkundervisningen* (2005) form an important basis for our thesis paper since her area of study is close to ours. In her objective to formulate her own definition of culture, Gagnestam presents a number of preceding researchers’ definitions,
among them Andersson, Persson & Thavenius’ (1999) view of culture as being esthetic or anthropologic.

The **esthetic culture** is, as understood from our readings of Gagnestam and Tornberg, art, architecture, music and literature – in other words, things which we can experience and appreciate by using our senses, is tangible culture. Esthetic culture exists outside of ourselves. It is often called “big C” or “Culture with a capital C” (Lundgren, 2002, p. 30), which contrasts the view of anthropological culture which fittingly is referred to as “little c” or “culture with a small c.”

The **anthropological culture** includes the things that are internalized and make it possible for us to live our everyday lives. That includes work, practices, traditions, manners and behavior. Anthropological culture is, if compared to esthetic culture, considerably harder to detect because it simply cannot be seen, heard or touched. One could almost say that it is often taken for granted (Gagnestam, 2003, p. 14).

Gagnestam also includes the thoughts of the author Gail. L. Robinson. She is the writer of *Crosscultural Understanding* (1988) which Gagnestam uses in her discussion about culture. Robinson has contributed with the view on culture as either a product or a process. Both are presented below along with a third, additional view: culture as a dialectical process (2003, p. 14-16).

**Culture as a product** entails a behaviorist perspective, meaning that culture is internal actions that one is able to notice such behavioral patterns in traditions and customs. According to Gagnestam in a language classroom this would present itself when the teacher and the students work with for example “buying food at the market” (2003, p. 15). A functionalist perspective on the other hand focuses on the underlying factors of behavioral patterns that occur. Functionalists tend to try to understand why a certain social behavior exists in a specific culture for example why people in the Philippines greet their elders by touching the backs of their old aunts and uncles hands to their foreheads.

**Culture as a process** is represented by the cognitive perspective which basically means that culture is an internal process within the individual person. This internal process is set out to interpret the actions performed by someone. This cannot be seen or touched upon, but is
rather a process which contributes to peoples’ understanding of the world. The process is not restricted to the individual but is rather a shared occurrence between people.

**Culture as a dialectical process** includes both the previously mentioned external and internal mechanisms. What is of importance here is the actual result of the process. Culture in this sense is a dynamic process where previously gained knowledge, combined with new knowledge affects the outcome of the meaning of culture in any given situation.

Gagnestam comes to the conclusion that culture unites and separates us, it is constantly changing and it is a dialectical process that we use to make sense of the world. She sees culture as a social construction and if one were to look at history as it has unfolded, we can discover how different cultures were born. Cultures are hybrids which today cannot be restricted to, for example, nations. In our interaction with the world we continuously add more ingredients to our internal mixing bowls of culture. Gagnestam points out the need to try to look at what brings us together, and what we share and move past our differences instead of enhance them (2003, p. 17).

### 3.1.2 Intercultural Understanding

Lundgren (2002) uses the term intercultural understanding rather than intercultural competence in her doctoral thesis, however she recognizes the fact that the term intercultural competence is used in research and steering documents to denominate the same matter. We find her reasoning behind this acceptable. She is however hesitant toward the use of competence in connection with the term intercultural as she finds that it bears connotations to the field of economics. Lundgren connects intercultural understanding with the educational system and the progression in society fuelled by technology, media and multiculturalism. She wants to show that English as a subject does not – or in our opinion, *should* not – need to be restricted to language competence, but could also be a part of intercultural understanding as stated in Lpo94, and the fundamental values of the schools in Sweden.

Intercultural understanding is, according to Lundgren, knowledge gained through interaction with other people and learning the fact that people construct the world differently than
oneself. It is also in one's interest to be able to use the knowledge when further interacting with more people from different cultures. Students develop the ability to understand that their views and perceptions of the world change in the meeting with other people and that culture—especially their own—is constantly changing. In this way Lundgren argues that intercultural understanding becomes the content of language education while the language in itself becomes a tool to reach the goal of cultural understanding (Lundgren, 2002, p. 33-35).

3.2 Gagnestam’s results – four categories of description of culture

In our discussion regarding the difficulties in defining the concept of culture (see 3.1.1.) we mentioned Eva Gagnestam’s report of Robinson’s two views of the word: the esthetic and the anthropological. These views are part of the broad and multifaceted definition that we have chosen to base our use of the concept in this study upon. In Gagnestam’s own study, the collected data from her interviews and surveys lead her to identify four categories of description of the concept of culture, where the first gathers more superficial forms of culture while the last denotes the most complex ones. These categories are different, but certainly not detached from the aforementioned two views. Our understanding is that the first two views (see below) create the base from which more specific categorizations can be made.

The four categories for different descriptions of culture are according to Gagnestam’s findings “Cultural culture,” “ways of living/daily life,” “ways of thinking” and “something that permeates everything.” Cultural culture entails so-called “high culture,” meaning literature, art, the opera, architecture, etcetera (2005, p. 35). In an educational setting this could manifest itself as, for example, putting up posters of Leonardo da Vinci’s work in the science classroom. Gagnestam interprets the second category of ways of living and daily life as encompassing traditions of people within different national boundaries, dress, food and work. One could exemplify this by pointing to the way in which teachers tell a class about the “typical Native American.” In the third category, culture as a way of thinking, values in connection with social structures and the organization of power are covered, as well as ideologies which have had a large impact on shaping the culture in question. Teaching children about Nazi Germany is one example of how this could enter a teaching situation. The
fourth and final category, something that permeates everything, provides a broad and comprehensive description which includes all of the previously mentioned instances.
4 Method Section

4.1 Data Collection

4.1.1 Observation

Observation has not in our study served as a data collection method, but rather led us to formulate our research questions. The observations were entirely informal, being part of our internal thought processes and reflections on our journey towards becoming teachers, while we were active during our teaching practices. Having personal interest in culture, we were naturally drawn to notice when the other teachers at our assigned schools taught culture in more or less engaging ways. In our education we have thus experienced a variety of educational settings and found that the way the concept of culture is perceived and dealt with by teachers in the classroom varies greatly. Through our educational process, we have had the opportunity to both observe and participate in the environments that we have chosen. The teachers and the students have both been there for us to watch and contemplate, but also to interact and work with. Observations have led to inquiries which have led to dialogues and glimpses into the topic which we in this study have chosen to delve deeper into.

4.1.2 Semi Structured Interviews

To investigate the research questions in our study we chose to conduct semi structured interviews with both teachers and students. The four teachers invited to participate in our
study were interviewed separately, using the same interview guide. The selected students were interviewed in groups of four, using the same student interview guide for both educational levels. Having discussed the different types of interview methods mentioned in Heigham & Croker (2009), we found the semi structured interview to be the process which would best facilitate our data collection.

In wanting to know the teachers’ personal perceptions of culture and their motivations when incorporating it into their teaching, we required a method that was open enough to give the informants room to elaborate on their thoughts, but still restricted enough to make the results manageable for us. The semi-structured interview method thus falls between two other types: the open interview and the structured interview. The open interview follows little or no pre-determined questions, leaving the interview mainly in the hands of the person being interviewed, allowing us as interviewers to ask questions that urge the informant to dig deeper into their feelings (Heigham & Croker, 2009, p. 185). Interesting and valuable as these types of answers may be, they would unfortunately leave us with rather unwieldy results, especially as we had certain aspects in the syllabus that we needed to cover. A structured interview, on the other hand, fixates both researcher and informant within a rigid framework of precise questions and pre-existing expectations of the answers to come. This type of data collection is more suited for quantitative research where the answers need to be comparable (2009, p. 184).

When using the semi-structured interview, the researcher has an interview guide which provides a plan with topics and questions that need to be covered. The researcher is still able and willing to add discussion topics if the interview takes another turn based on what the respondent shares during their time together (2009, p. 186).

Nevertheless, this is not to say that interviews do not have their limitations compared to other methods and vice versa. Interviews are time consuming if you take into account the preparations, interviews taking place, follow-up and transcription work. There is a lack of anonymity for the participants, however in our study the participants are well understood with the boundaries of anonymity. Anonymity between interviewer and respondent is not possible in our case and this has been taken into account when analyzing the interviews. Questionnaires could have solved both the issue of time and anonymity, still it would not have provided us with the depth of the respondents’ answers that we needed for the purpose of our
study. We would rather see questionnaires as a possible complement to the interview method (2009, p. 201).

4.2 Selection

4.2.1 Schools and Informants

The two different schools used in this study are familiar to us and we have taken part in their organization, sporadically but actively, over a period of four and half years. The schools are one compulsory school and one upper secondary school, both located roughly within the same geographical region in the south of Sweden. All students in one year nine class and one class taking the English A course had the opportunity to volunteer to take part in this study. Once the consent forms from the legal guardians were handed in, four students from each school were randomly selected.

Two teachers at each school were asked to participate and we were excited to hear that they wanted to be a part of our study. We had one male teacher and three female teachers taking part. Considering the fact that this is not a study in which gender is given a central role, we do not believe that this will have an impact on the results, since all teachers, male or female work in accordance with the same steering documents. Some have been teaching longer than others and are educated in different systems, which might influence their teaching methods and the understanding of the concept of culture; this is a valuable perspective in our study.

4.3 Procedure

The teachers and students were given information about our study and its purpose before the interviews. The students were also asked to have their legal guardians sign a written consent form as they were all not yet of age. We used empty group- or classrooms at the respective
schools for privacy and to offer a familiar setting where the participants would feel comfortable. The interviews were conducted in Swedish, as this was the mother tongue of all participants. Each teacher was interviewed alone, by both of us, while the students were interviewed in groups, also by both of us.

The interviews were recorded on a laptop using the program Audacity. One concern regarding this method was that the laptop, given its size, would draw too much attention to the fact that the participants were in effect being recorded. During each interview, we decided to let only one of us lead the interview while the other retreated to the background to take on a more observing role.

The process of transcribing the interviews was made easier with the help of the program Express Scribe which allowed us to slow down the speed of the dictations. While transcribing, took the liberty to omit filler words and sounds, such as interviewer encouragements or the like. The finished transcriptions were sent to the respective participants for approval and to give us opportunities to ask for clarification, or for them to add or remove parts. No adjustments were requested.

4.4 Ethical Considerations

When inviting the teachers and students to participate in our interviews, we authored letters (one for the teachers and one for the students) informing them of the purpose of our study, emphasizing our intentions of being completely transparent throughout our work, letting them know that they could take part in any material associated to our study. We have been particular about not exploiting our participants by modifying truths or being dishonest about our intentions. The purpose of our study does not entail trying to reveal any misconduct done by the teachers, or in any other way incriminate an organization. Both the teachers’ and the students’ participation was entirely optional, and we gave them the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time. Given our method of audio recorded interviews, we stressed the promise of anonymity for both the participants and their workplaces (names or descriptions of locations or persons which would make it possible to discern true identities or places). We
have instead provided each participant with a fictitious name. Contact information was also provided, along with an encouragement to ask us if questions or comments should arise.

The letter handed out to the students was different from the one aimed for the teachers, in that a form for the legal guardians to sign their consent was added, to be used to permit the use of recording devices. Both letters are presented in the appendix (see Appendix 1 and 2).

Once the interviews had been conducted and subsequently transcribed, the transcriptions were sent to each respective participant for a member check. Thus allowing the participants to review the way their words have been documented and give them an opportunity to submit additional information or point out possible changes to help clarify what they mean.

4.5 Method of Analysis

4.5.1 Focusing on Meaning

Following the transcribing of our recorded interviews, we proceeded to analyze our collected data supported by the work of Steinar Kvale in his book *Interviews – Learning the Craft of Qualitative Research Interviewing* (2009). Given the nature of our study and the research questions that we have sought to find answers to, we found it to be appropriate to do an analysis focused on meaning. Even though Kvale recommends extensive coding and categorizing of the data for easier overview, we made a conscious decision to construct our interview questions so that the end result would not overwhelm us. Already being able to easily overview our results, we decided to not put as much weight on coding but rather focus on meaning condensation (Kvale, 2009, p. 201-207). After condensing the meanings of the participants’ answers, that is, summarizing and thematizing their statements from our understanding, we went on to interpret the meanings. The interpretations often ended up being longer than the statements upon which they were based, which is something that Kvale also has pointed out (2009, p. 207-208). This is because we as researchers need to include what is said “between the lines.”
In the analysis below, we have chosen to translate the participants’ statements from Swedish to English. We are aware of the fact that a slight variation might occur when translating, however we have aspired to maintain most, if not all, of the meaning.
5 Results and Analysis

We will here proceed to give a report of our collected data from our interviews. Under each sub-header, several answers from all participants have been compounded. When reviewing our data we found that several questions gave answers that fit into the same general topic. In gathering them under separate headers, we not only facilitated a more simple overview of our results, but also helps lead us to answering our research questions. The teachers’ answers will prelude this section, followed by the students’. Summarizing paragraphs will precede quotes from our transcripts to highlight the voices of the individuals we have spoken to, in the spirit of qualitative research.

5.1 Teacher interviews

Teachers’ perception of culture in English language education as it is described in the steering documents

All of the interviewed teachers expressed similar interpretations of the description of the concept of culture found in the steering documents. There seemed to be no distinct difference between the teachers who base their teaching on the syllabus for compulsory school, and those who refer to the syllabus for the non-compulsory school. Initially, they all held a very general and fairly superficial view of what the syllabus states about culture as they mentioned food, music, traditions and English speaking countries in general. Their view is considered superficial because they mention the more obvious cultural forms; they are tangible, and more easily recognized by the naked eye.
Caroline: In [the interpretation of the concept of] culture I include how one lives in the [English speaking] country, which traditions that are the most common. There are different, smaller ones, as well. But that I still bring up the big ones … different holidays, food, school. (I1, p. 1)

Caroline’s colleague Eva, during her interview, showed a similar opinion:

Eva: …I feel that it [the concept of culture] is having a knowledge of ways of living. Traditions, food, for example. Even history. It is quite a lot. [It is about] all knowledge, really, I think, that regards the English speaking countries. (I2, p. 1)

Given more time to contemplate the question, two of the teachers went on to emphasize social conditions in different countries, implying an interpretation of deeper nature. That is not to say that the other teachers did not consider the more complex expressions of culture. This became clear as the interviews progressed. One teacher underlined the steering document requirement that the students should be able to compare the circumstances (social, traditional and ways of living) of different cultures:

Ivan: It [the concept of culture] could be music, food and values and social conditions in English speaking countries. One compares these with Swedish conditions so that one not only learns about other countries but also puts it in relation to the students themselves and their lives so that they learn a little about why they are the way that they are, and why it looks the way that it does in India or the USA or England. (I3, p.1)

Teachers’ own perception of culture, related to culture in English language education

Three of the teachers felt that their personal perception of culture was given ample room to fit into the very spacious and general – in their opinion – definition of culture in the steering documents. The fourth teacher, Eva, mentioned a local construal which had been derived from the steering documents in English by the county. The English teachers in the municipality gathered to, together, interpret the steering documents to condense and concretize the goals in order to fit them into an assessment matrix - also called a construal. The construal is then used with the students to ease them into a better understanding of what is expected of them, as well as give them an opportunity for self-assessment by placing themselves within the cells in the matrix. Furthermore, the construal also works as an aid for teachers when the time comes for assessment. This construal, Eva felt, was narrower than her own perception of culture, leading her to express a concern for working by someone else’s interpretation.
Three of the teachers expressed both positive reactions and some concern regarding the generous room for individual interpretation that the steering documents left them. Caroline, who is employed at the same school as Eva, did not take the construal into consideration when giving her answer. She was grateful for the opportunity to interpret the steering documents regarding culture in her own way, but wondered whether that was really desirable in the bigger scope of things. She said that since the concept of culture is so broad – both in the steering documents and otherwise – all teachers make widely different choices when deciding what types of culture to incorporate into their lessons, based on their own personal interests. She expressed a personal dilemma in which she could not decide whether she wanted to maintain the possibility to make her own interpretation and selection, or if it would be more fair to all to be given clearer guidelines on how to teach culture.

Caroline: I do not want to be too governed, but at the same time the school, education, should be the same regardless of which school you have attended. (I1, p. 2)

Caroline also explained that a teacher, like herself, who holds a perception of culture that is expansive in both breadth and depth (rooted in similarly comprehensive personal interests) faces the difficulty of choosing between giving her students varied but superficial teaching, or choosing fewer types of culture but being able to study them in depth, because of the lack of allotted lesson hours. She suggested that a solution to the problem of simply not having enough time to cover all desired aspects of culture, is to more extensively implement cross-curricular collaborations. Gunilla, a teacher at an upper secondary school agrees:

Gunilla: And we looked [at this book, Skellig,] a lot, and at the fact that they attend the science program /…/ and I have asked them to write about the book from a scientific perspective, which makes it kind of like science culture, together. (I4, p. 1)

Although Ivan did not explicitly mention cross-curricular collaboration, it was implied when he explained how one could work with different types of texts:

Ivan: If we were to talk about drug culture or youth and unemployment in the USA or whatever, you could always find texts about that. (I3, p. 1-2)

In this quote we can see how he incorporates science by suggesting the topic of drugs, and social science by mentioning youth and unemployment.
Teachers’ motivations for teaching culture

When asked the question about what primarily motivates them when they choose to teach culture, the teachers were presented with five options: steering documents, textbooks, personal preferences, students’ wishes or another unlisted option. While all teachers are aware of the requirement to teach according to the national curriculum, three of the interviewed teachers did not choose the steering documents as what motivated their teaching of culture the most. Two teachers stated textbooks as being strong motivators, although for different reasons. Eva found textbooks to be particularly useful for students who find English difficult:

Eva: It is important for weaker students to have a [familiar] base. /…/ It feels pretty comforting to be able to be supported by that. (I2, p. 2)

Gunilla found textbooks to be a source of material, especially literature, as excerpts and reading suggestions are often listed therein.

Gunilla: The textbooks are, if we were to talk about literature and movies… literature – poetry, literature – short stories, literature – novels…there’s a lot of that in the textbooks. (I4, p. 2)

Three of the teachers cited their own personal preferences based on personal experiences as being the main motivation. They all had extensive experience of travel which they draw upon in their lesson planning. One teacher explained that sharing her own travel stories gave the students a feeling of authenticity, letting them know that travelling to those destinations is a very real possibility.

All four teachers agree that the students’ wishes heavily influenced how they chose to teach culture. Involving the students in the selection process and planning resulted in a cycle of positive response: the more the students feel that they can participate and affect their own learning, the more motivated they are to learn.

Ivan: We are all individuals, and part of a culture, so to include personal preferences from the students makes them more motivated to read, because they can relate to the situation [that the reading deals with]. And for the sake of motivation – that the students can take part in choosing – students’ wishes are really important. (I3, p. 1)
Teachers’ methods of teaching culture

When asked to tell us about a teaching situation where culture was the focal point, all four teachers were eager to share their experiences. The two teachers employed in the later years of compulsory school had both worked with culture in themes based on countries, because it gave them the opportunity to deal with many different types of culture and still retain a sense of cohesion. Caroline was more oriented towards using English speaking countries, whereas Eva preferred to work with any country with strong ties to English such as former British colonies (this difference between the teachers were rooted in the fact that they had travelled to different parts of the world and had been exposed to different cultures).

Eva: They [the students] then get a wide spectrum of what South Africa is. They are very interested in animals. They also look at food, and they can also look at school and geography, nature as a whole. It is quite a lot. Then also famous people, like Nelson Mandela, his history. (I2, p. 3)

The two teachers in upper secondary school applied two very different ways of working with culture. Gunilla told us of several occasions where her teaching had been centered around literature such as Skellig (1998), Of Mice and Men (1937), Animal Farm (1945), and 1984 (1949).

Gunilla: I showed them different short extracts from books and then they got to choose a novel to read, and then I took 1984. There was something else as well, a short story by Hemingway too, they thought that was pretty difficult, but they probably thought 1984 was really good. (I4, p. 3)

Gunilla implied that she chose the above books because they contained elements of school, politics, and civil rights and values – all different types of cultural aspects. In contrast with Gunilla’s methods, Ivan gravitated more towards using a more all-inclusive idea of text. He told us about using Olivier Toscani’s ads to highlight issues regarding ethnicity and sexuality.

Ivan: [using Toscani’s ads] one can fall into [discussing] what kind of responsibility artists have, then you get into the ethical aspect. You can also look at the imagery, and how people are portrayed and why they are portrayed in that way which takes us into culture, too. (I3, p. 2)
Teachers’ perception of teaching intercultural understanding with regard to student understanding

All of the interviewed teachers expressed a feeling that their use of culture in their teaching was worthwhile. They all shared the understanding that the students somehow embraced the teaching of culture. The two teachers in compulsory school agreed that the students’ own background, to some degree, affect how well they are able to expand their own perception of a different culture. Some children, Eva said, are raised in homes where the parents, for instance, are more openly disposed towards foreign cultures and thus the children adopt a more “global way of thinking.” (I2, p. 3-4)

Eva: And we obviously have all kinds of children here [even those who do not share that attitude], and that makes it hard to meet some of them. That motivates bringing this [culture] forth, and give those children that picture. Not all [families] sit around the kitchen table talking about Africa and so on. (I2, p. 4)

Caroline elaborated on a similar difficulty. She told us about how children of Swedish background who have been brought up in the “Swedish culture” (meaning that they have rarely, if ever, encountered a different culture than their own) do not have any greater difficulties to identify differences between their culture and a foreign one. They do, however, seem to have a harder time adopting a person of a foreign culture’s perspective. These Swedish children have not been subjected to a “culture shock” in the same way as immigrant children. Caroline meant that in having moved to Sweden from another country, the immigrant children have experienced a meeting of cultures, first hand. In that way, the immigrant children might have an easier time understanding the differences (as opposed to just identifying them).

Ivan, one of the teachers in upper secondary school, was hopeful that his teaching of culture at the very least gave the students some insight into the different nuances of the concept (I3, p. 2). He also felt that his students were given the opportunity to reflect upon things that they perhaps otherwise would not have considered on their own, such as values. Gagnestam writes that teaching of intercultural understanding is something to be incorporated throughout the organization of every school, not just restricted to one subject, but something that is everyone’s concern: students and staff alike. Furthermore, Gagnestam points to intercultural understanding’s capacity “to create good conditions for mutual respect and understanding in
the classroom, school and locality” (Gagnestam, 2005, p. 79). Ivan, in his answer, is in clear agreement with Gagnestam’s statements:

Ivan: It [intercultural understanding] is a way of working with fundamental values in school. /…/
We should on one hand teach our subjects, but at the same time teach them to become responsible citizens. They should also have had the opportunity to discuss values and how to treat people in a good way. That is the purpose of it [teaching intercultural understanding] regardless of what you are discussing, really. (I3, p. 3)

The two teachers in upper secondary school did not express the same kind of difficulties in student understanding (based on student backgrounds, for example), as the teachers in compulsory school. While there, in upper secondary school, might very well exist some difficulties in getting students to fully comprehend complex concepts such as culture and intercultural understanding, the teachers we interviewed showed little to no signs of regarding it as a prominent issue. They did, on the other hand, place an emphasis on the possibilities for deeper discussions that are, as we understand it, accomplishable with older students. Gunilla, though it is implied that she agrees – to some degree - with Ivan (and Gagnestam), was not as clear in her answers. However, she did express the importance of the students gaining “a feel” for intercultural understanding, and that she experienced her teaching as having been absorbed well by her students (I4, p. 4).

5.2 Student interviews

Students’ perceptions of culture in general and culture in the English language education

When asked the deceivingly simple question of what they thought that culture is, the four students in the compulsory school immediately agreed that religion was closely related to the concept. Further probing from us led to the mention of food as being another cultural aspect, as well as music and “stuff like that” (I5, p. 1). The students appeared hesitant to giving their answers, seeming quite weary of saying the “wrong” thing, despite our reassurance that there was no right or wrong. We gave their thought processes some scaffolding by showing them six categories of forms of culture: “school/politics/civil rights,” “ways of living/daily life,” “religion/history,” “ways of thinking/values,” “art/literature/theatre/music/film” and “other”
(derived from Gagnestam’s study, 2003). We proceeded by asking them where religion, food and music fit in and they tentatively chose the category of “ways of living/daily life.” When asking the students to then choose a category which they felt has been covered the most in their English lessons, Jacob - after some consideration - answered “ways of thinking/values,” with support from his classmates (I5, p. 1).

Sensing the students’ discomfort we decided to turn off the recording on the laptop once we had gone through all of our planned questions (with additional support from us). The discussions continued then, with the students appearing considerably more relaxed and open to sharing their thoughts and opinions. The discussion was loosely noted by the one of us who was not leading the interview. During the post-recording discussion we brought up the topic of the steering documents, which garnered some very interesting statements from the students. We talked about what is actually stated about culture and English and what the students are expected to learn. Alex asked why culture was so important, seeing as it is written into the steering documents. This led the others to help him come to the conclusion that culture is just as important as knowing the “language English” in order to understand other people (I5, p. 3-4).

Alex: I mean, we’ve seen the [steering] documents. You [the teachers] show them to us all the time.
Jacob: Yeah, like, at the start of every theme we work with.
Emma: But no-one ever reads them.
Jacob: The paper just ends up being thrown into the back of the locker.
Benjamin: It’s really boring stuff.
Alex: We get that we need to know it. That it’s important. But it’s so much and we’re really, you know, impatient. Just get on with the lesson. (I5, p. 4)

It is easy to listen to the students and interpret their words as being bi-products of teenage attitude. Here however, they show that there is an important underlying reason to their negativity. The steering documents are, simply said, too boring for them to care about. We as teachers thus need to approach them with these documents in more engaging ways than just handing out the original papers.

The students in the upper secondary school answered the question of what culture is, by mentioning art, politics, ways of living, religion and music, showing that their immediate answers were very similar to the students’ in compulsory school. The first difference between the two students groups arose when one of the girls in the upper secondary school said “Isn’t everything actually culture?” (I6, p. 1). This seems to indicate that the older students are
more oriented towards daring to elaborate on their thoughts and answers. When Nicole brought up music (as an answer to the first question), a discussion unfolded between the four students. We asked how music is culture.

Sara: I don’t know, but I think about Scotland and bagpipes and kilts.
Julia: Like, if you think of bagpipes, you think of Scotland.
Interviewer: Do you have any other examples of specific things related to a country?
Julia: Veil.
I: Where [in the world] do we end up then?
Julia: Well, Israel or somewhere around there.
I: Any other suggestions?
Sara: That cows are holy in India.
Linn: The painted dot in the forehead has something to do with culture, too, right? (I6, p.1)

Regarding the topic of culture in the English language education – the steering documents, among other things – the opinions of students in upper secondary school were in accordance with those of the students in compulsory school. They expressed the same attitude, saying that being asked to review the steering documents was overwhelming and it did not engage them enough to even get them to listen to the teacher talking about it (I6, p. 5). However, Linn went on to express an understanding for the importance of dealing with the steering documents in the classroom, drawing on an example from a teacher in biology. Every test by this teacher is introduced with a two-page review of the goals stated in the course syllabus. This allows the students to first of all see what the test actually tests and how it relates to what is nationally expected of them. Second of all, the students are also able to exercise self-evaluation using the steering documents by marking the goal which they intend to aim for.

Linn: Like you do in biology where, for each assignment, you state the criteria that you can achieve for G, VG and MVG. It’s actually really good, but in the beginning you thought it was really lame. But you really know what you’re supposed to know. And that’s actually good. (I6, p. 5)

Despite the fact that the quote does not relate to the subject of English, it shows that if the teacher puts some time and energy into adapting the steering documents, making them relevant for individual assignments, simplifying and exemplifying, the students might welcome it more easily.

**Students’ perception of the teaching of culture in the English language classroom**

All students, across both the compulsory school and the upper secondary school, shared the feeling that they could not immediately state any concrete instances when they had been taught culture in the English classroom. Only after some subtle prompting from us were they
able to discern the cultural elements of the English teaching, realizing that it is a much greater part of their English lessons than they were initially aware of. Given the fact that the teachers in the compulsory school had recounted many occasions in their own teaching where they had used countries as a starting point for teaching culture, we felt that it was relevant to encourage questions about countries with the students. The students in the compulsory school spoke of having worked with a theme about North America, giving examples of a variety of methods of teaching.

Alex: We have watched those [movies] as well... what was it? Co... The explorers!
Benjamin: Yeah, yeah.
Jacob: That’s right. It was the one with Columbus.
Benjamin: Columbus, yes. America.
Jacob: We had an entire theme about it.
Alex: It was... pretty good. (I5, p. 2)

They also mentioned that they had worked with the American Revolution, identifying that it had to do with the category (see above) “history/religion.”

When asked how they had been taught culture in the English subject, the students in the compulsory school said that it had mostly been restricted to the textbooks, the teachers own material, as well as using some films. They felt that this was okay, “as long as they [the teachers] know what they are talking about” (Alex, I5, p. 3). Going on to discuss how they would like to be taught, the students clearly showed that they live in the contemporary modern world and would like the input of information in school to emulate the way they are exposed to information outside of school (when engaging in their personal interests).

Jacob: I’d like to see more digital media [used in teaching].
Benjamin: More movies. You remember things easier then.
Jacob: Yes, because you have an entire plot. You remember more easily.
Alex: Maybe travel somewhere, for real. (I5, p. 3)

All four students agreed that they would like to learn about other people’s ways of thinking and values (chosen from the presented categories), by using the methods listed in the quote above.

When the students in the upper secondary school were asked about how they had been taught about culture, they drew parallels to their younger years. They expressed a lack of learning anything useful, one girl went as far as saying that she “didn’t do anything at all” (Julia, I6, p. 3) about culture in the ninth grade. Similar to the students in the compulsory school, they spoke of having learned about culture in relation to countries, for example comparing school
systems in the US and the UK (I6, p. 2-3) when they were younger. This is, interestingly, what Caroline (one of the teachers in the compulsory school) said that she had done with her students. When prompted with the six categories of forms of culture, Sara said that she, in upper secondary school, had learned considerably more within nearly all categories of culture (I6, p. 3). As for their opinions of the actual usefulness of their knowledge of culture, they appeared very positive.

Sara: It’s good to know a little.
Linn: It’s general knowledge to know what is happening and how it is.
Sara: So that you can compare to yourself. (I6, p. 3)

Regarding the question of how the older students would like to be taught culture they too, like the students in the compulsory school, emphasized the fact that they are actively using modern technology and are therefore used to acquiring information through such means. They spoke of field trips, using the internet and even excluding the use of textbooks altogether. They argued that the books were outdated in terms of culture, however useful with regards to grammar (I6, p. 3-4). The students liked for the aforementioned methods to be used in teaching about “ways of living/daily life,” and “ways of thinking.”

**Students’ perceptions of intercultural understanding**

The thoughts and opinions of the students in the compulsory school regarding intercultural understanding were unfortunately not part of the recorded portion of the interview. They did however tell us (after establishing the reasons for culture being so important in their education) that even though one does not need to accept or let oneself be convinced of another’s conviction, that we need to understand each other to be able to communicate. Alex explained that the implied “other” would be people of other cultures, in countries other than his own, who do not have the same values as “us” – meaning the culture that he has grown up in (I5, p. 3).

Linn, in the upper secondary school, emphasized that “culture is everything and that it is always present” (I6, p. 1). It is, because of culture’s great scope and its constant existence in all parts of life, therefore hard to be aware of the many different forms of it (I6, p. 4). Despite the difficulties in dealing with the awareness of culture, the students in the upper secondary school have a common understanding that it should be dealt with. When we asked them if
they could state the purpose of learning culture in the English subject, their answer gave us insight into their intercultural understanding, even if they perhaps were not aware of it themselves.

Interviewer: Do you know the purpose of the subject of English? Why do you believe you need to learn English?
Julia: So that you can talk to the world.
I: What more do you need to be able to talk to the world, how does culture come into play?
Linn: You should know how to behave and how to accept [other people’s] behavior.
Nicole, Sara, Julia: Mmm [in agreement].
6 Discussion and Conclusion

With this study, we set out to examine how four teachers perceived the concept of culture, both personally and as it is described in the steering documents. Three research questions have shaped our study, allowing us to acquire deeper understanding of how culture is employed within the educational system. Following the first question which, as mentioned above, concerns the teachers’ perception of culture (both personally and professionally), the second question led us to explore their thoughts regarding their own teaching of culture, as well as their views of their actual practices. The third and final question added the perspective of the students, asking how they perceive the lesson content concerning culture. This section will discuss our findings from the interviews in connection with previous research.

6.1 Discussion

Our interviewed teachers showed that the vastness and ambiguity of the concept of culture clearly exists both in and outside of the steering documents. In their attempts to define culture as it is described in the steering documents, the order in which they listed the many forms that culture occurs in, reminded us of the order that Gagnestam had sorted her definitions in her four categories. We would deem it misleading to describe Gagnestam’s categories as steps, implying a forward progression from one to the next. As culture is a constant phenomenon, an ever-present occurrence that exists in every part of our lives, we see the categories as levels, perhaps best likened to the layers of a cake, constantly evolving simultaneously. The teachers we interviewed made it clear that even though they all held broad and deep perceptions of culture – all existing within the framework of the steering documents – they are more inclined
towards a certain category because of their personal interests. Gunilla, for example, has an
evident passion for literature, which manifests itself in her teaching of culture in the great
amount of books that she includes in the reading lists. The inclination not only colors their
general perception of the concept of culture, but also affects the way in which they teach
culture in the English classroom.

By reviewing our interviewed teacher’s answers we found a slight variation regarding their
inclinations between the two teachers in the compulsory school and those in the upper
secondary school. The former even felt that their inclinations – their focuses – were also
guided by the students’ needs. They understood that their students, aged 12–15, had such
limited experiences and knowledge of foreign cultures, that shaping their teaching around the
simpler forms of culture such as those found in Gagnestam’s first and second categories
seemed like a logical starting point. However, Gagnestam argues that basing one’s teaching of
culture purely out of the first category leads to the students gaining a shallow and narrow
understanding of culture (2005, p. 36). We, however, say that though it is not impossible to
work with other categories of culture in compulsory school, starting with the simpler, more
evident forms of culture is a natural way to introduce the students to the process of making
sense of the concept. Because students, of any age, are constantly exposed to culture, they
have an existing frame of reference that we believe one should make use of to the best of
one’s abilities. One issue that was raised by one of the teachers in the compulsory school was
the matter of not having enough time to go in-depth, despite her ambitions to do so based on
what the Lpo94 states about working towards intercultural understanding. This concern, we
understand, stems from the lack of knowing, for certain, that whatever she leaves out of her
teaching, will come in the upper secondary school.

If turning our attention then, to the upper secondary school, we found that Ivan and Gunilla
appeared to be more comfortable and confident in teaching culture according to Gagnestam’s
third and fourth categories. We interpreted this confidence as being rooted in the assumption
that the students had already been sufficiently primed in the first two categories in their earlier
school years. This allowed the teachers to put more emphasis on dealing with the more
complex forms of culture, without necessarily completely ignoring the more esthetic
expressions. Culture is, as we mentioned above, a continuous phenomenon that occurs in
parallel levels. Ivan gives an example of this deepened view of culture by underlining that he
has worked a lot with concepts such as values and ways of thinking in foreign cultures – not always restricted to those in English speaking countries.

According to the teachers, the current syllabi for English (2000) offer satisfyingly broad descriptions of the concept of culture. The problem, as described above, lies in the lack of practical direction. The teachers in the respective schools expressed the need for clearer guidelines to let them know which parts of culture they were to cover. That way, the teachers in the younger years could plan their semesters without the pressure of thinking that they needed to include more than necessary. In trying to “do it all” one runs the risk of jeopardizing the quality of the lesson content by inevitably rushing through the parts. This also negatively affects the students’ opportunities to become properly immersed in the subjects and gain substantial, permanent knowledge. Bo Lundahl (2009) writes that the syllabi for English describe English as a subject and its part in the educational system. The syllabi are meant to be understood as guidelines which teachers and students can interpret together to come up with ways of how to translate it into the content of their teaching and learning environment. Lundahl mentions that the proficiencies in writing, reading and speaking are easy to understand and to put into practice for both teachers and students. The tricky part surrounds the content that they are expected to be able to express when writing, speaking and reading. One such content is culture (2009, p. 94 -95). This reflects the opinions of our interviewed teachers. They suggest, however tentatively, that a change should perhaps be done in the syllabi to facilitate more practical teachings of culture. It was a tentative suggestion because all teachers understood that formulating national steering documents is a task not easily done.

Publications such as Språkboken (Skolverket, 2001) and Engelska – en samtalsguide (Myndigheten för skolutveckling, 2008) offer support for teachers to understand and interpret the syllabi and also encourage further discussion about the elements of English in education. Despite the support of such materials, we and the interviewed teachers feel that the diffuse and unwieldy concept of culture needs even further discussion. Gagnestam, mentions how her interviewed teachers requested more in-service training regarding the teaching of culture (2003, p. 218). We agree with this notion and feel that continued discussions about culture – what it means and how to teach it, etcetera – is required in order to gain the most from this broad and deep well of possibilities for learning. Since culture is, as Bo Lundahl states, ever
changing and constantly expanding as a global language for communication, the discussions about culture need to be continuous and frequently attended to throughout the school year (2009, p. 71-73). We claim that, in schools these discussions would be most effective if they were not managed between the same participants every time. Altering the group constellations to range from including only teachers of English at the first meeting and inviting students to participate at the next, would add important perspectives and opinions that would help give the teaching more direction. In addition, it better eases the students into understanding and working with culture.

The students who participated in our study showed a lack of awareness in terms of understanding both culture and the uses of it and also why they should learn it. Once we made it clear which elements in their English lessons were, in fact, culture being taught, they all agreed that this was important content to learn. The students’ thoughts and opinions regarding the awareness of their own learning of culture that came from our interviews have helped give answers to our third research question: how do the teachers perceive the students’ perception regarding culture?

Ulla Lundgren reports that the teachers in her study regarded the ability to gain intercultural understanding to be dependent on four qualities: empathy, maturity, language development, view of knowledge (2002, p. 195). In our study, the teachers we interviewed focused on maturity, citing it as one of the main reasons to why they could or could not include more complex aspects of culture in their teaching, such as the definitions of culture in Gagnestam’s third and fourth categories. Our four teachers expressed similar opinions as those of the interviewed teachers in Lundgren’s study, saying that it is in grade nine, at the earliest, that the students have gained sufficient capacity to adopt another person’s perspective to view their own world. The perspective entails understanding the other person’s cultural background. Lundgren’s informants said that intercultural understanding is better suited to be incorporated into the English lessons only after the age of 15 (2002, p. 193-196). This does not mean that they dismiss the teaching of culture up until the ninth grade. Comprehending and reaching the eventual goal of intercultural understanding is a process that works like eating through the layers of a cake, moving deeper the more they develop their qualities. In our opinion, this could mean, that a teacher starts out by, as we mentioned above, teaching
“simpler” forms of culture (such as those in Gagnestam’s first and second categories), before moving on to the more complex forms (in the third and fourth categories).

6.2 Conclusion

In our study we have examined four teachers’ perceptions of culture and found that they consider the concept to be an important part of not only the subject of English but the educational system as a whole. According to the teachers, the syllabi accurately answer to their own perceptions of culture, but need clearer direction in terms of how culture should be taught. We argue that if the syllabi could not offer this direction, there needs to be support in dealing with the diffuse and ambiguous concept of culture elsewhere. Regarding the teachers’ perception of their own teaching of culture our interviewed teachers mentioned, among other things, cross-curricular collaboration as being a solution to gaining more lesson hours and opportunities to go deeper into understanding and using culture. Discussions between teachers of English, across subjects, or even including students create a forum for constant development of how to practically teach culture in the classroom. This is what we hope will become the future for culture and its place in the English classroom. Using Eva Gagnestam’s categories of describing culture we have identified a slight discrepancy between compulsory school and upper secondary school in terms of what forms of culture to teach and when. The teachers cited maturity as being a heavily influential factor when determining when students were able to develop intercultural understanding, which is the end goal for implementing culture in the subject of English and the educational system as a whole.
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Interviews

Caroline: *November 9, 2010*

Eva: *November 9, 2010*

Gunilla: *November 17, 2010*

Ivan: *November 17, 2010*

Students in the compulsory school: *November 9, 2010*

Students in the upper secondary school: *November 17, 2010*
8. Appendices

Appendix 1: Teacher participant information

Hej,


Vår tanke är att vi ska kunna få möjligheten att ta del av ert lektionsmaterial, lektionsplaneringar och lokala pedagogiska planer. Genom inspelade intervjuer hoppas vi kunna få ta del av erna tankar kring de val ni gör i urvalet av material och utförandet av lektionerna med kulturellt innehåll.

Vi vill betona att er medverkan kommer att vara anonym, samt att ni när som helst under processens gång får avböja fortsatt medverkan. Även övriga namn, som skolors och elevers, kommer att skyddas genom att de antingen utelämnas eller ersätts av fingerade namn. Vi kommer med stor sannolikhet att endast behöva ett intervjutillfälle med er lärare, med reservation för eventuella kompletterande tillfällen.

2010-09-23
Om ni har några frågor angående arbetet får ni gärna kontakta oss:

Johanna Landström
Mobil: 0702 93 05 27
E-mail: johanna.landstrom08@gmail.com

Lecille Persson
Mobil: 0762 71 17 23
E-mail: lecillergn@gmail.com

Med vänliga hälsningar,

Johanna Landström och Lecille Persson
Hej,

Våra namn är Johanna Landström och Lecille Persson. Vi går vår avslutande termin på lärarutbildningen på Malmö Högskola med engelska som huvudämne och önskar utföra en mindre undersökning på er skola i anslutning till vårt examensarbete. Vår tanke är att ta reda på hur eleverna uppfattar den engelskaundervisning som de får ta del av i skolan. Vad tycker de om materialet och metoderna? Hur känner de att undervisningen förhåller sig till kursens mål?

Vi hoppas få er tillåtelse att samtala med er son/dotter i dessa frågor. Deras synpunkter skulle ge oss en mer nyanserad bild att använda i vårt arbete. Frågorna som ställs kommer inte att vara privata och era barns identiteter kommer att skyddas. Undersökningen kommer alltså att vara helt anonym. Däremot kommer samtalen spelas in, främst för att underlätta vår dokumentation. Materialet kommer inte att delas med någon utomstående, utöver högskolans handledare och examinator. Er son/dotter kan när som helst välja att avsluta sin medverkan.

Om ni har några frågor angående arbetet får ni gärna kontakta oss:

Johanna Landström
e-mail: johanna.landstrom08@gmail.com

Lecille Persson
e-mail: lecillergn@gmail.com

Med vänliga hälsningar,

Johanna Landström och Lecille Persson
Lämna talongen till respektive lärare snarast

Jag godkänner att ___________________________ (elevens namn) får medverka i denna undersökning.

_______________________________                ____________________________________
Signatur (målsman)                                               Namnförtydligande (målsman)
Appendix 3: Interviewguide Students

Intervjuguide: Elever

Dessa frågor ska inte besvaras i förväg. Ni får bara ut detta dokument som förberedelse inför intervjun.

- Vad är kultur? (finns flera möjliga svar)
- Hur har ni lärt er om kultur i engelskundervisningen? Välj två av lapparna som ni känner igen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKOLA/POLITIK/ SOCIALA RÄTTIGHETER</th>
<th>KONST/LITTERATUR/ TEATER/MUSIK/FILM</th>
<th>HISTORIA/ RELIGION</th>
<th>VARDAGSLIV/ LEVNADSSÄTT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TANKESÄTT/VÄRDERINGAR</td>
<td>ANNAT</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Berätta gärna om vad ni gjorde. Vad tyckte ni om ämnet?
- Vad känner ni att ni har lärt er i engelskundervisningen om kultur?
- Om ni fick välja hur er lärare ska undervisa er om i kultur, vilken/vilka lappar skulle ni då välja?
- Hur, rent praktiskt, har era engelskalärare undervisat er i kultur? Läroböcker, musik, film?

Tack för er medverkan!

Johanna och Lecille
Appendix 4: Interviewguide Teachers

Intervjuguide: Pedagoger

- Hur tolkar ni begreppet kultur utifrån hur det beskrivs i styrdokumenten?

- På vilket sätt stämmer eller stämmer det ej överens med egen personliga lärarsyn på kultur?

  Kulturbegreppet i styrdokumenten har reviderats under årens gång. I äldre styrdokument har det tidigare stått att elever ska kunna jämföra ”svenska förhållanden” med främmande kulturers. År 2000 står det istället ”egna kulturella erfarenheter”.

- Inför nästa års revidering (GY2011), vad skulle ni personligen vilja tillföra till begreppets beskrivning i kursplanen?

- Vad är det som huvudsakligen motiverar er när ni väljer att undervisa i kultur? Är det styrdokumenten, läroböckerna, personliga preferenser, elevernas önskemål eller annat? (om ni måste välja ett som är starkare än de andra)

- Eva Gagnestam redogör för ett antal sätt att behandla kultur i engelskundervisningen. På lapparna framför er står de olika sättens. Vänligen välj de två som ligger närmast hur ni tar upp kultur i er undervisning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SKOLA/POLITIK/ SOCIALA RÄTTIGHETER</th>
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<tr>
<td>TANKESÄTT/VARDERINGAR</td>
<td>ANNAT</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

- Skulle ni kortfattat kunna berätta om ett undervisningstillfälle/tema då ni har undervisat om kultur?

- Hur känner ni att era elever uppfattar er undervisning i kulturell förståelse (såsom den beskrivs i styrdokumenten)?
• Känner ni att de uppfyller eller kan uppfylla läroplansmålen som berör till exempel tolerans och internationell solidaritet?
  Varför/varför inte?
  Vilka faktorer påverkar ja eller nej svar?

Tack för er medverkan!

Johanna och Lecille