A Case Study at a Waldorf School

Assessment of Productive Language Skills

En fallstudie på en Waldorfskola
Bedömning av de produktiva språkkunskaperna

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Abstract

The purpose of this case study is to investigate Waldorf pedagogy. In particular, it investigates how assessment of productive language skills, speaking and writing, is carried out at a Waldorf School. To this end, semi-structured interviews were conducted at a compulsory school. One in-depth teacher interview was held and one group interview with four students. Participants were observed in their natural classroom setting on a few occasions. The results indicate that how assessment is carried out depends on the class, situation and the task performed by students. There is a tendency to assess speaking on an individual level or in smaller groups. Findings indicate that personal texts written by students are somewhat more assessed and that communicative ability in general is more valued than accuracy. This study demonstrates that decisions are made when assessing different skills, where the teacher decides on what as well as how to assess. Focus on form/grammar has a role in assessment since distinctions are made between mistakes. Students have an informal yet clear understanding of how they are being assessed.

In this Waldorf School we see that different educational techniques were employed by the teacher. For instance, different types of assessment were used. Discrimination of minor errors and those that interfere with communication were part of assessment sometimes. This study also shows that different parts of language were assessed and that the process of learning was given priority and therefore part of assessment.

Keywords: assessment, case study, speaking, Waldorf pedagogy, writing
Preface

This dissertation has been conducted at a Waldorf school by Camilla Corcoran Rönnerling and Emina Busuladzic. Both of us are responsible for the text presented in this dissertation given that it has been written collaboratively. In addition both of us have conducted the observations, interviews and transcriptions of the interviews together.

We would firstly like to thank the Waldorf School which embraced us with open arms. We are very thankful to the teacher as well as to the students participating in this study. Additionally, we are also thanking our supervisor, Jean Hudson, and examiner, Bo Lundahl, for their help.
# Table of Contents

1. Introduction................................................................................................................................. 7
   1.1 Purpose statement and research questions ........................................................................... 8
2. Background ..................................................................................................................................... 9
   2.1. Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf pedagogy .............................................................................. 9
   2.2. Assessment ............................................................................................................................... 11
   2.3. The steering documents.......................................................................................................... 12
   2.3.1 Lpo94 ................................................................................................................................. 13
   2.3.2 The syllabus for English ..................................................................................................... 13
   2.3.3 Assessment in the syllabus for English for productive skills ............................................. 14
   2.3.4 The Waldorf curriculum for upper grades ......................................................................... 15
   2.3.5 Relationship between independent and national schools .................................................. 15
3. Previous research .......................................................................................................................... 16
   3.1 National Agency of Education and CEFR ............................................................................ 17
   3.1.2 Surveys done by the National Agency of Education ......................................................... 17
   3.1.3 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) ....................... 18
   3.2 Research done on assessment ............................................................................................ 20
   3.2.1 Principles of assessment ................................................................................................... 20
   3.2.2 Assessing speaking ........................................................................................................... 21
   3.2.3 Assessing writing ............................................................................................................. 21
4. Method .......................................................................................................................................... 22
   4.1 Case study .............................................................................................................................. 23
   4.2. Qualitative research ............................................................................................................ 23
   4.3. Interviews ............................................................................................................................. 24
   4.4 Classroom observations........................................................................................................ 25
   4.5 Selection .................................................................................................................................. 25
5. Results .......................................................................................................................................... 26
   5.1 The teacher ............................................................................................................................ 27
   5.1.2 Teacher’s assessment of speaking .................................................................................... 27
   5.1.3 Teacher’s assessment of writing ....................................................................................... 29
   5.1.4 The national test and writing evaluations ....................................................................... 31
5.2 The students........................................................................................................................................31
  5.2.1 Assessing speaking – students’ views.......................................................................................31
  5.2.2 Assessing writing – students’ views........................................................................................32
  5.2.3 Students’ general attitudes towards being assessed ............................................................33
6. Discussion.............................................................................................................................................35
  6.1 Assessing speaking.........................................................................................................................35
  6.2 Assessing writing ...........................................................................................................................38
  6.3. The national test and writing evaluations..................................................................................40
7. Conclusions...........................................................................................................................................41
Sources......................................................................................................................................................46
Appendices..............................................................................................................................................50
  Appendix 1 ........................................................................................................................................50
  Appendix 2 ........................................................................................................................................51
1. Introduction

In order to ensure that students throughout the country receive essentially the same fundamental in their education, the National Agency of Education\(^1\) attempts to bring about conformity and rigor through stipulating guidelines to be followed at Swedish schools. The ambition is to achieve the greatest possible equivalence among all students and learning in Sweden. On the other hand, a fixed curriculum may also prove to be limiting to teachers who wish to exert their own creativity on format and content. Teachers may also need to adapt their curriculum to the very diverse needs of a student population whose needs and abilities are far from uniform.

Nevertheless, language teachers in the classrooms of Sweden today are mandated to implement the goals stipulated in the steering documents and when doing this they need to take into consideration several key points, namely, what should be learned, how language is learned as well as how to engage and motivate students. Equally important, teachers need to respond to the subsequent language learning by collecting information on phases and development of language proficiency.

This monitoring process is done through assessment which itself is carried out in several ways. According to the National Agency of Education teachers should strive to find a balance between assessing the learning progress and the final product. Teachers should simultaneously endeavour to emphasize assessment for learning as well as assessment of learning. With this in mind, we ask ourselves how a balance might be achieved with regards to these two types of assessment: formative and summative (Skolverket, 2008).

The issues of assessing have caught our attention since we feel that we need to improve and enrich our understanding in this area. This is relevant for us since we need to develop our knowledge of assessment styles and abilities. We have therefore chosen to investigate how a Waldorf teacher proceeds in the area of assessment.

\(^1\)Skolverket
What first attracted our attention to Waldorf teaching and assessment was a report in which Waldorf students were compared to municipal schools, done by Institutionen för utbildningsvetenskap (Dahlin, 2005). We observed in this report that Waldorf students tended to receive lower grades in English on national tests in comparison to ordinary students. However, the report also pointed out that these differences might be due to the fact that Waldorf students were not exposed to the training occurring in municipal schools (Ibid). After reading this report several ideas presented themselves to us for further consideration, for example we ask ourselves what could be the reason for the tendency shown in the report.

Freda Easton argues in *Educating the Whole Child, “Head, Heart and Hands”* that Waldorf pedagogy aims to provide an education striving to develop the spiritual, interpersonal and aesthetic awareness of the child. This is done in order to reinforce intellectual development. In Waldorf teaching, the emphasis is put on the whole child in the sense that the pedagogue works on weaving together abstract concepts, art, music and practical skills including handicraft (Easton, 1997). Given that we find these aspects of Waldorf Education interesting this study has investigated the views of one teacher and four students on assessment at one Waldorf school.

### 1.1 Purpose statement and research questions

Our aim for this dissertation is to investigate how one Waldorf teacher goes about assessing production skills: speaking and writing. We are interested in this subject to learn what aspects of Waldorf educational practice could be found when assessing these skills. In order for us to ensure the reliability and validity of this study we interviewed one teacher and four students. These participants were also observed in their natural classroom environment in order for us to strengthen conclusions found in the results section. The research questions for this investigation are:

- How does an English teacher, at a Waldorf school, assess students’ spoken and written language?
- How do students know what is expected of them with regard to assessment?

We also have one subordinate question to the two above, which is:

- To what extent does the assessment accord with Waldorf pedagogy?
2. **Background**

This section touches upon key points of Waldorf pedagogy and assessment. Additionally, it discusses assessment in relation to the steering documents.

2.1. **Rudolf Steiner and Waldorf pedagogy**

The founder of Waldorf education, namely Rudolf Steiner, was born 1861 in Austria. Steiner developed a new way of thinking which he later applied to aspects connected to humanity. His life philosophy, which he called *anthroposophy*, had to do the wisdom of human beings since “anthropos” derives from man and “sophia” from wisdom (P. Bruce Uhrmacher, 1995, p. 7). Steiner established the first Waldorf School in 1919 in Stuttgart. Basic principles of this new educational reform were that education should not only strive to challenge students on an intellectual level, but also encourage development of artistic and social abilities. Additionally, the first school was co-educational (an unusual departure from traditions in Germany at the time) reinforcing the idea of inclusion and comprehensiveness. Today Waldorf Schools are spread throughout the world with more than 900 schools in 83 countries (Rudolf Steiner 1999 & Henry Barnes, 1991).

Waldorf pedagogy is based on the curriculum developed by Steiner and influenced by *anthroposophy*, Steiner’s philosophy. In this section, we will present a few key elements of Waldorf education. Steiner developed a curriculum in which one key element taken into consideration is the process of the *child’s developmental phases*. These developmental stages unfold into periods of approximately seven years each, from birth to seven, from seven to 14 and from 14 to 21 years. Of importance in all subject acquisition according to Steiner, is that teacher should teach age-appropriate content. Acquisition takes place when teachers comprehend these developmental phases and adapt teaching to each phase (To Trostli, 1999). In this developmental approach to teaching the theory is essentially based on another key concept from anthroposophy, the threefold nature of the human being in which body, soul and spirit are taken into consideration. During the first stage (up to age 7) learning takes place through the will to play and imitate, while the emphasis for the second seven years is
primarily put on experiences that feed the imagination and feelings. This is done through incorporating a variety of visual, musical and tactile artistic activities. In the last phase, the high school years, children further develop abstract thinking in which they learn to refine the process of reflecting, drawing conclusions and making comparisons between ideas presented in different subjects (Easton, 1997 & To Trostli, 1999).

In the *Waldorf Curriculum* Steiner outlines throughout all ages and subjects the essence of integrating the visual, musical, theatre, dance and tactile arts. Thus, if comparing Waldorf curriculum to both the National curriculum and the syllabus of English, the Waldorf curriculum is more detailed in the means of ways of how to teach as Easton (1997) points out. In teaching language the Waldorf curriculum specifies for example that song, poems, fairy tales, pictures, drama, music, grammar and news articles could be used in order to stimulate artistry and fantasy in adequate ways (*En Väg till Frihet*, 1998). Achieving and integrating this in all subjects, Waldorf method advocates *teaching as an art*, which means that practice and environmental settings are of importance. This is of course in distinction to a pure grammatical or conversational approach. In Waldorf education, the idea is to engage the feelings of the child through art, music and rhythm. Education is transformed into art by educating the whole child through synchronizing heart, hands and head into learning process (Trostli, 1999).

Steiner utilizes the developmental stages to create an age-appropriate curriculum. These stages are meant to follow what we are cognitively and emotionally able to learn at different stages in life. In his book, *Language Teaching in Steiner Waldorf Schools*, Johannes Kiersch outlines that in anthroposophy the child is educated via the path of will and feeling. In Steiner’s profound understanding of psychology and development, he gives the image of the newborn only gradually awakening to the external world and coming into consciousness. Rather than approaching the child solely from an intellectual standpoint, he indicates the need to approach the child through its will. In this way, those forces that are most active in the young child (imitation and will) are utilized in helping toward any type of learning. Thus it is the will that wakes the head through the first words and so it is the will that through language learning wakes the sleeping head. The introduction of language does not begin with abstract concepts – one experiences a language through the genius of the folk soul, so to speak. The child is surrounded with the music, tales, rhymes and experience of the language. Only later is the language decontextualized and focus placed on the more abstract rules and structures. It
is also important to turn to writing as late as possible as it draws on more abstract and conceptual understanding. Instead a greater emphasis on singing and recitation both play a natural part in language teaching, as one sees the connection between language and music as effective in an educational matter (Kiersh, 1992).

Bearing these principles in mind, Steiner lays out a specific method of instruction. He proclaims that words and concepts should be linked through activities and not translations. Through combining word and activity, one builds up to drama as a learning method. Dramatic dialogues and role plays should therefore be used in language classes. According to Steiner, conversation should be encouraged as early as possible, where the teacher should guide the children to partake in foreign language. It should be joyful for children to speak to each other in the foreign language as the teacher makes minor corrections, but for the most part steer the discussion to keep it alive and interesting. Steiner gives the image of the teacher as conducting a choir, taking their feelings into account as well. Reading and conversation are two key activities important for language learning.

Steiner was not in favor of learning vocabulary in isolation or translation in general. He argues that it might be convenient for the teacher, but it is truly a waste of time. Instead, the teacher should rather focus on re-tellings of stories and using language in its natural context. Furthermore, students who cling to their mother tongue should be supported but encouraged to use the foreign language. Steiner’s view of grammar and its use when teaching children language, focuses on the child’s ability to express himself or herself properly, rather than on knowing grammatical rules correctly. However, Steiner speaks of grammar as a natural thing to bring to children’s consciousness when mature. He explains that grammar instruction should be used to make children aware of grammatical rules that have already been learned by heart during the early ages (Ibid).

2.2. Assessment

According to Geoff Brindley, assessment refers to different ways in which a teacher can collect information on a learner’s proficiency (2007). Teachers must then select appropriate measures or assessments. According to Brindley, there are different purposes for carrying out
assessment. For example, teachers can use assessment to identify the learner’s strengths and weaknesses through diagnosis or can decide what material to present next or revise. Another purpose outlined by Brindley is that assessment could be used in order to encourage students to study harder. Here the purpose could be used to build motivation (Ibid).

R.F. Sommer (1989) highlights the need of student centered assessment forms. In assessing level of language proficiency, teachers ought to work from the needs of students, often conferencing with the students. While Brindley touches upon different aspects of assessment and purposes of its use in teaching, Sommer takes it a bit further and highlights the connection between assessment and students. Therefore Sommer defines assessment as a process in the gathering of information about students’ abilities, knowledge, personality or attitudes (Ibid).

How assessment is conducted, e.g. how it is carried out and what has been emphasized in language teaching classrooms, is closely related to trends in language assessment. Jack. C Richards and Willy A. Renanday argue that there has been a paradigm change in education in the sense that one can differentiate between traditional and non-traditional forms of assessment in the classroom. Of importance in non-traditional forms of assessment are for example communicative competences, the learning process, the learners and integrated skills. This stands in bold contrast to the old ideals of language teaching which emphasized a focus on language, teachers, products and isolated skills (Rickards & Renanday, 2002).

The European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) states that one of many ways of assessing in a traditional way is through tests. In defense of plurality, however, CEFR points out that it is a mistake to assume that one form of assessment is superior to the other. In addition, it emphasizes the relevance of using a range of sample relevant types of discourse. In other words there should be a variety of ways in which students will have opportunities to show their understanding of the language (Council of Europe, 2001).

In this way teachers can explore new directions and new pedagogical perspectives and move away from less productive traditional ideals (Andrea H. Penaflorida, 2006). Hence, by working with alternative assessment forms this could be achieved. Alternative assessment types could for example be portfolio assessment, protocol analysis, learning logs, journal entries and dialogue journals (Ibid).
2.3. The steering documents

This section touches upon what the steering documents say about assessment. It outlines not only what could be found in the curriculum but also what the syllabus highlights with regard to productive skills as well as what the Waldorf curriculum emphasizes. We would like to clarify that our aim is not to make comparisons between the municipal school and the specific Waldorf school in this study, or other Waldorf schools. The steering documents are outlined given that municipal schools as well as independent schools are to follow these.

2.3.1 Lpo94
Teachers are to follow the guidelines of assessment that are stipulated in Lpo94. Lpo94 is the curriculum for the compulsory school years. The curriculum states guidelines for teachers to follow. The Lpo94 curriculum outlines that teachers should on the basis of the obligations stated in the syllabi assess each pupil comprehensively, to be continuously informed about pupils’ proficiency and progress. Comprehensive assessment is achieved through collecting all available information on the pupils’ knowledge (Skolverket, 1994). Guidelines for teachers stated in the curriculum of 94 are vaguely formulated with regard to assessment. Basically the curriculum does not specify what to emphasize when assessing, rather this is open for interpretation.

The curriculum has stated goals to strive toward under the heading assessment and grades. Goals to strive towards are formulated for students to achieve. Firstly, the curriculum states that students should develop responsibility for their own learning and secondly, the emphasis is put on the development of “the ability to assess their results themselves and to place their own and others’ assessment in relation to own achievements and circumstances” (Skolverket, 1994).

2.3.2 The syllabus for English
The function of the syllabus is to serve as a foundation in order for teachers to be able to plan their teaching. Expressed in the syllabus is the aim of the subject or discipline, its educational role and what students should achieve. Goals to aim for are expressed in the syllabus as well as Goals to attain. Students are intended to develop their knowledge by striving to reach Goals to aim for, while Goals to attain are the basic goals which students
need to achieve in order to pass. According to Goals to aim for, schools should in their teaching of English aim to develop the students’ abilities to:

- . . . communicate in speech and writing,
- . . . actively take part in discussions and written communication, express their own thoughts in English. . .
- . . . use English orally in different contexts in order to relate, describe and explain, as well as give reasons for their views,
- . . . express themselves with variety and confidence in writing in order to relate, describe and explain, as well as given reasons for their views (Skolverket, 2000).

By the ninth year in school pupils should have attained the following goals when it comes to productive skills:

- Be able to actively take part in discussion. . .
- Be able to orally relate and describe something which they have seen, heard, experienced or read
- Be able to ask for and provide information in writing, as well as relate and describe something (Skolverket, 2000).²

The syllabus for English is more concrete when it comes to assessment in the sense that it is more student-oriented. For example, communicative ability is stressed in the syllabus where students are encouraged to describe, relate, explain, give reasons and provide information. The syllabus does not emphasize grammatical competence rather the importance rests on communicative ability (Ibid). It is important to highlight that all independents schools are to follow the goals that have been set both in the curriculum and the syllabus. Therefore, all language teaching at the Waldorf School must correspond to goals that have been set at the national level.

2.3.3 Assessment in the syllabus for English for productive skills

This study investigates the productive skills of speaking and writing. In the syllabus the major emphasis is placed upon the multifaceted nature of communication, where mastering not only productive skills but also interactive and receptive skills are indicated. According to the syllabus, assessment of the productive skills should focus on:

… hur klart och sammanhängande samt med vilken ledighet, variation och språklig säkerhet eleven kan uttrycka och förmedla ett budskap. Bedömningen av talad engelska inriktas vidare bl.a. på om eleven artikulerar så tydligt att det som sägs är lätt att förstå och att betoning och intonation utvecklas mot ett för språkområdet inhemskt mönster. När det gäller elevens

² The English translations are taken from The National Agency of Education.
förmåga att skriva engelska inriktas bedömningen också på framställningens klarhet och tydlighet samt på elevens förmåga att binda samman satser och meningar (Skolverket, 2000).

2.3.4 The Waldorf Curriculum for upper grades

*En Väg till Frihet*, published by Waldorfskolefederation och Riksföreningen Waldorfföreskolans samråd, has interpreted the goals set at the national level into the Waldorf curriculum. The curriculum includes *Goals to strive for* and *Goals to achieve* by year five and nine. These goals are set for foreign languages such as English, German, French, Spanish and Russian. In the section *Goals to strive for*, the curriculum emphasizes that students are to:

Recognize how their own language learning takes place, and from this knowledge enhance their ability to work independently and take responsibility for their own language learning (*En Väg till Frihet*, 1998, p. 30-31).(Our translation).

Furthermore, this particular goal to strive for can be connected to assessment in the sense that students may be asked to verbalize what they understand about their own language acquisition as well as take responsibility for it. Communicative language proficiency is also highlighted in which students are to take into account their own ability to communicate thoughts, feelings as well as listening and communicating with others. This level of assessment encourages students to reflect their own language development and ability (Ibid).

2.3.5 Relationship between independent and national schools

At this point it important to touch upon the relationship between the ideals outlined at the national level and those in Waldorf pedagogy. The steering documents set by the National Agency of Education are set at the national level as guidelines for all schools to follow. This basically means that what is set at the national level should be implemented at the local level. According to the course information provided by the National Agency of Education for compulsory schools, teaching at the independent schools should have the same goals as in the municipal schools. However, independents schools may have an orientation that differs from the municipal schools. The difference can be that the independent schools can develop their own identity by choosing for example an own profile. Independent schools can for example develop a more religious profile. It is common that independent schools have a different
focus in the sense that they follow specific pedagogical views such as the Montessori pedagogy or Waldorf pedagogy (Skolverket, 2009).

Waldorf schools have to follow Lpo94 and the syllabus for English since they are set at a national level. Even though Waldorf schools have developed their own identity where Waldorf pedagogy is primary, the Waldorf curriculum still reflects what has been set at national level. For example, the Waldorf curriculum does have goals to strive for and goals to achieve and also emphasizes communicative ability as the syllabus for English does. The Waldorf curriculum can be seen in relation to the ideals expressed in the English syllabus. Coexisting ideals are for instance the emphasis of communicative ability and the importance of self assessment as both the Waldorf curriculum and the syllabus for English outline (En väg till frihet, 1998). One difference is that the goals in the Waldorf curriculum are set for several foreign languages, while the national has a separate syllabus for English where the goals are set for English alone.

As mentioned above, our aim has not been to compare municipal schools to independent schools. We cannot compare municipal schools to independent schools in view of the fact that these nowadays are more similar to each other than different. The National Agency of Education has done a survey on the emergence of the independent schools. Karin Wahlström, who has been responsible for this study, means that it is not relevant to discuss independent schools as special categories of schools. The reason is that different profiles or orientations have increased in the municipal schools. Another very important aspect here is that schools, independent as well as municipal, can develop their own profiles and choose how to orient themselves on a local level. Since the curriculum and syllabus are open for interpretation teachers can choose how to teach English at municipal schools. This means that as long as teachers do stipulate the steering documents they can choose bits and pieces from different pedagogies and can indeed choose to be influenced by Waldorf pedagogy (Skolverket, 2005).
3. Previous research

This section discusses research done on assessment with regard to speaking and writing. It has been divided into research from the National Agency of Education and studies done by other educators/researchers.

3.1 National Agency of Education and CEFR

In this first part a survey done by the National Agency of Education will be discussed and also what the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) recommends about writing and speaking.

3.1.2 Surveys done by The National Agency of Education

The ability to communicate in writing has been stressed in surveys done by The National Agency of Education 1992 and 2003. These surveys, NU 92 and NU 03, show that the emphasis is put on communication when assessing, where all around communicative ability is prioritized rather than emphasizing for example form (Skolverket, 2008). These surveys have been briefly presented in Engelska: En Samtalsguide om kunskap, arbetsätt och bedömning.

According to Samtalsguide assessment should be formative as well as summative. Geoff Brindley defines formative assessment as continuous assessment during the learning process with the intention of using student results as a tool to improve acquisition of language. The overall aim of summative assessment is to provide a comprehensive view of outcomes at the end of a course, term or school year (Brindley 2007). Assessment of learning is summative, which means that assessment is for example carried out at the end of a course or term. This could be carried out through providing the students with grades or written reports which give them information regarding their achieved outcomes. Formative assessments can be done by observations, logbooks and tests (Skolverket, 2008). However, NU 03 surveys show that the majority of students estimated that teachers based their assessment mostly on homework assignments and tests. It is clearly stated that formative assessment is preferable if used in the right way as it can guide instruction (Council of Europe, 2001). The National Agency of
Education also emphasizes that formative and summative assessment should not work to the exclusion of one another, rather they should be used interactively (Skolverket, 2008).

Results from NU 03 show also that students feel they do not get the opportunity to show what they know when being assessed, that too much emphasis is being put on abstract levels of English rather than on everyday spoken English (Ibid). This is revealing since earlier curricula emphasized form and language accuracy, while ever since the Lgr80, the emphasis lies on what learners can do with the language or the ability to use the language in different contexts (Ibid). These results may indicate that assessment has not kept up with changes in instructional focus or that many teachers still place a lot of emphasis on formal aspects.

3.1.3 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)
CEFR was developed to function as a common European framework for educators to discuss language syllabi, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks etc (Council of Europe, 2001). It promotes an action-oriented approach to language use and learning. Language users and learners are seen as “social agents” since they act according to events and factors and therefore develop a range of competences (Ibid).

The action-oriented approach describes what learners have to do in order to use a language for communication. According to CEFR learners need to perform communicative acts, these then include language activity. Language activity involves for example production, which entails producing speech or writing. Of importance here is communicative language competence. In order to be able to communicate, that is to understand and produce language, learners need to have linguistic knowledge (words, sounds, and syntactic rules). Even though learners ought to have competences about different aspects of language, the framework emphasizes that these objectives can be differentiated when assessing (Ibid). In this particular context it is of importance to stress the communicative language competence and language activities being discussed in the framework, since they relate to speaking and writing. Communicative competences involve linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic components, which Grabe and Kaplan (1996) highlight as crucial when assessing writing and speaking. What has been stressed in CEFR will also be highlighted here since it will be used when analyzing the results of this study.
In terms of productive skills at the independent, B1, level, the framework provides a scale for overall written production and overall oral interaction. B1 is somewhat equivalent to the Swedish level of year 9. According to the scale for overall oral production students at B1 level are to:

... reasonably fluently sustain a straightforward description of one of a variety of subjects within his/her field of interest, presenting it as a linear sequence of points (Ibid, 2001, p. 60).

When it comes to speaking, learners should for example be able to carry out actions such as:

- To plan and organize a message (cognitive skills)
- Formulate a linguistic utterance (linguistic skills)
- Articulate the utterance (phonetic skills) (Ibid, p. 90).

Therefore teachers can assess these qualitative aspects of spoken language provided in the framework: accuracy, fluency, interaction, coherence (Ibid). For writing, the learner at the B1 level needs to be able to “write straightforward connected texts on a range of subjects within his field of interest by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence” (Ibid, p. 61). Here teachers can assess learners’ ability to: organize and formulate the message (cognitive and linguistic skills) (Ibid).

As a support to assessing language proficiency, the framework divides the use of the scales into user-oriented and assessor-oriented ones. User-oriented scales emphasize competences a learner can do (Ibid). The significance of highlighting strengths and not only weaknesses when assessing is one underlying principle of assessment (Lundahl, 2009). Assessor-oriented scales express how well performance is done by for example focusing on aspects such as accuracy, fluency and pronunciation. Here CEFR provides criteria for degrees of skills (Council of Europe, 2001).

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3 We have conducted interviews with students in year 9 and therefore chosen only to present what the scales say about this level.
3. 2 Research done on assessment

3.2.1 Principles of assessment

In non-traditional, or alternative, forms of assessment there are some issues to consider. Roger Farr argues that there is a philosophical issue, in which teachers have to consider the role assessment plays, what they want assessment to do and how traditional assessment can be challenged. Secondly, public issues take into consideration whether the public is ready for alternative assessment forms rather than the customary test scores (Farr, 1991).

Bo Lundahl (2009) outlines some principles which have been stressed by researchers. One principle of assessment is that students are supposed to be given the opportunity to show what they know, highlighting their strengths and not merely their weaknesses. Additionally Lundahl outlines ten principles to consider for assessment, however only the four most relevant to our study will be outlined here:

1. Bedömningens främsta syfte är att stödja elevens lärande
2. Bedömningen ska fungera som en integrerad del av elevernas lärande och lärarens undervisning.
3. Bedömning förutsätter att man beaktar både resultat och processer

These principles will be used to see whether or not they are evident in our findings. In addition, these principles correspond to the principles of assessment outlined for the national test. Gudrun Erickson and Lena Börjesson (2001) outline principles that concentrate on language acquisition in general. One principle interesting to consider in this study is if:

Vid bedömningen fokuseras kommunikativ förmåga, förtjänster analyseras före brister, distinktioner görs mellan olika typer av språkliga fel (Erickson & Börjesson, 2001).

These distinctions are between errors that merely disturb and those that interfere with communication.
3.2.2 Assessing speaking

Susan M. Brookhart touches upon ways in which teachers can give effective oral feedback in her book *How to Give Effective Feedback to Your Students* (2008). Brookhart argues that:

> Content issues are the same for oral feedback as for written feedback. The suggestions made for focus, comparison, function, valance, clarity, specificity, and tone apply to oral feedback as well as to written feedback (Brookhart, 2008, p. 47).

Grant Wiggins distinguishes between effective and ineffective feedback. The best and most effective feedback according to Wiggins (1998) is specific, direct, clear and descriptive (Wiggins, 1998, p. 46). Ineffective feedback is when teachers provide non-specific, infrequent guidance where students are not provided with information about why they were assessed in that particular way (Ibid). This means that teachers need to choose between different feedback strategies. Brookhart provides these four feedback choices:

- Timing: Talk frequently with the students about the work
- Amount: Allow plenty of time for interaction and student talk
- Mode: Oral – Have a conversation with the student about the work
  Mode: Modelling of English – Provide feedback on a student’s English usage or pronunciation errors by modelling correct English (not by “correcting” the students), and do this in feedback for all content areas
- Audience: Give feedback to the individual student (as opposed to public feedback)
  Audience: Have a conversation: listen as well as talk (Brookhart, 2008, p. 104).

3.2.3 Assessing writing

In their book, *Theory and practice of writing* (1996), Grabe and Kaplan outline a model, the Grabe and Kaplan model, for second language writing assessment. The model provides a detailed list of components in language knowledge relevant to writing and divides this view of language knowledge into three types:

- Linguistic knowledge
  - Ability to master the basic structural elements of the language’s form
- Discourse knowledge
  - Ability to form linguistically coherent utterances
- Sociolinguistic knowledge
Grabe and Kaplan’s model can be useful in assessment since it touches upon different competences involved in an all-around communicative ability (Ibid). In addition, this model shows what aspects teachers could emphasize in language writing assessment. However these aspects can also be considered in the assessment of speaking.

Appropriate and effective responses to written work can enhance student motivation as well as learning (Penaflorida 2006). There are several response types that an English teacher can utilize in second language classrooms. Teachers can e.g. provide students with feedback by:

- Teacher whole-class discussions of major points for revision
- Teacher mini conferences in class
- One-on-one conference away from class
- Written comments on essay drafts (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 388).

In their book *Feedback in Second Language Writing* Ken Hyland and Fiona Hyland (2006) outline the key issues of teacher feedback to second language writers. According to them teachers can adopt different methods or approaches when responding to students’ written work. In addition, they discuss the effectiveness of feedback that focuses on error correction or feedback that is more of a “correction-free approach”. Process theories argue that feedback on error is discouraging and unhelpful while some educators suggest that error correction can be positive for language development. Thus, it is argued that since grammar errors can be more common in second language classrooms, teachers cannot ignore these completely. Also Hyland and Hyland (2006) argue that teachers should not focus merely on meaning when assessing, rather they ought to take both form and content into consideration and not assess them separately (Hyland & Hyland, 2006). This approach could be juxtaposed to that of Grabe and Kaplan who argue that when responding to writing comments should not emphasize the following: spelling, punctuation, paragraphing or comments that overwhelm the students with a sense of failure (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Additionally, they argue that when giving feedback to students’ written text, teachers should always incorporate something positive about the text, make suggestions for changing content and organisation as well as mechanical aspects (Ibid).
4. Method

This dissertation uses the case study as a research strategy in order to investigate research questions in depth. To increase the validity of this study we have conducted one in-depth interview with one teacher at a Waldorf School and also one group interview with four students. This study has further been strengthened through observing the participants in their classroom environment.

4.1 Case study

In the case study approach, data is usually collected by using different methods (Bartlett & Burton, 2007). Typically the researcher observes the characteristics of one unique case where the emphasis tends to be on examining a particular setting (Bryman, Alan, 2004 & Nunan, David, 1999). Thus, a case study could be a local education authority, a school, a class or a particular pupil. In this particular case our aim was to gather information about assessment of the productive skills. Case studies can be quantitative as well as qualitative. Since our case study is qualitative some principles of qualitative method will be outlined below.

4.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative researchers try to understand the perspectives of their participants. We will achieve this through using the techniques of participant observation and in depth interviews. The data collected in qualitative research has often been looked upon as vague and inexact since the data is rich in description of people, place and conversation and not easy to analyze statistically (Dörnyei, 2007 & Charles Stangor, 2007). As qualitative research studies tend to be small in scale (micro), the data collected is descriptive and cannot be statistically representative. As a result it is not possible to generalize from such data since it is limited in scope (Bartlett & Burton 2007). Still the advantage of the qualitative method is the fact that one studies “what is in someone else’s mind” (Hatch, 2002) and one can gain insights not easily captured in a standardized questionnaire.
Qualitative researchers work with naturalistic environments, in which the natural educational context and setting is of importance (Robert C. Bogdan & Sari Knopp Biklen, 2007). The data we will present will be descriptive, which is another characteristic of qualitative research. In order to collect descriptive data one needs to approach the classroom environment and the interviews with an open mind and not assume that actions will occur in a specific way. Instead, one should think of everything as a clue by not being judgmental. Furthermore, qualitative researchers are more concerned with the process rather than the end product. Of importance here is how meaning is negotiated and what attitudes are portrayed (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Moreover, how participants act and respond in their natural setting is seen as crucial in this process (Bartlett & Burton, 2007). This method also strives to analyze the data inductively, which means that hypotheses are generated only after the facts have been brought together. The most essential concern in qualitative research is the concern of meaning, in which researchers stress participants’ perspectives. In relation to our own study this means that we are interested in the teacher’s perspective as well as some students’ and that we need to reflect about these meanings or perspectives in relation to the context we study our participants (Bartlett & Burton, 2007 & Bogdan & Knopp, 2007).

4.3 Interviews

Interviews typically may be formed in one of two ways: structured or unstructured (Dörnyei 2007). This study has used semi-structured interviews which Dörnyei categorizes as being a combination of the two forms mentioned above. Dörnyei (2007), Hatch (2002) and Bo Johansson & Per Olov Svedner (2006) state that these interviews are based on prepared questions and prompts. The questions used are open-ended in order for the interviewee to elaborate freely. An interview guide was prepared before the interviews were conducted since we wanted to make certain that the same topics were covered with both the teacher and the students.

Two types of recording interviews exist: tape-recording or note-taking (McKay, 2006). Both the interviews conducted were recorded, as we had been given permission from the students’ parents. All the participants were interviewed in their first language as McKay recommends this procedure to avoid problems that can arise due to English deficiency (McKay, 2006).

4 Interviews translated by us.
While the interview with the teacher was a one-on-one interview, the interview with the students was a group interview. The aim of group interviews is to gather fundamental data around the topic set by the interviewer (Hatch, 2002 & McKay, 2006).

### 4.4 Classroom observations

Observing classroom environments is complex but satisfying since its major strength is that it gives us direct access to the natural classroom environment (Simpson Mary & Tuson Jennifer, 1995). Observations aim at understanding the setting as well as the perspective of the participants. It is crucial that the observer does not take any underlying heuristics into account (Hatch, 2002). Observing assessment in classroom environment is also difficult since there are many elements to consider. According to Dörnyei one should, when conducting qualitative research, first observe the whole context and then decide on significant aspects (Dörneyei, 2007). We have therefore observed the whole context and then decided on what aspects we would use. Given that the aim of this case study was to investigate how assessment of the productive skills were carried out by the teacher and if students knew what was expected of them, one could say that our emphasis when observing was to look at how assessment of speaking/writing was carried out. For example, we looked at how the teacher responded to speaking and writing and in what situations this occurred.

### 4.5 Selection

This case study was conducted at a Waldorf School in southern Sweden. The school consists of approximately 180 students and 25 teachers, one of whom was a language teacher of English. We conducted an interview with the teacher and a group interview with four students from class 9. We also sat in on some classes before these interviews to complement our findings from the interviews. After the English teacher found volunteers for us, we sent permission letters home to their parents. In line with Johansson & Svedner (2006) these letters clearly expressed students’ anonymity, the right to refrain from interviewing at any time, as well as maintaining non-judgmental responses to ensure students feeling free to respond to the open-ended questions without pressure of performance.
We observed classes 7–9 for one week. Respective classes were observed on average two hours per day. The interview with the teacher took approximately 60 minutes while the interview with the students lasted for approximately 40 minutes.
5. Results

This chapter presents the results from the interview with the teacher and the group interview with four students from Class 9. We present the results of the interviews separately since Johansson & Svedner (2006) recommend this when participants have the same experiences. This is done since their social settings, namely the Waldorf School and classroom environment, are the same for the participants. In order to strengthen this study classroom observations were conducted. These are not presented separately, but rather they are incorporated throughout the result sections. In section 5.1 the findings of our interview with the teacher is presented, while 5.2 presents the results from the interview with the students.

Many of our findings touch upon teaching or can be connected to general teaching activities. These are presented in view of the fact that they do not only relate to Waldorf pedagogy but also to the teaching ideals set at a national level.

All the participants have been given fictitious names and are briefly presented in the sections below.

5.1 The teacher

Elin has been teaching English and Swedish at the Waldorf School for seven years. During our first meeting with her, Elin made it clear that she was not a Waldorf-trained teacher. Despite this dilemma we decided to carry on this case study due to the time limitation of the project and the fact that the teacher is constantly surrounded by Waldorf atmosphere.

More importantly, the students involved in this study have other teachers implementing Waldorf methodology, which naturally affects them and their perspectives of teaching and learning.

5.1.2 Teacher’s assessment of speaking

The assessment of speaking occurs mostly individually or in smaller groups, according to
Elin. When giving feedback to students in smaller groups she highlights the importance of firstly addressing things that they did well and then highlighting aspects they could improve. Elin says that she does not give feedback on speaking to students in whole class, even if what students say is not accurate, since “I believe that I cannot assess on the individual level in the whole class and say “Pelle, you did not pronounce this correctly and you should keep in mind that you cannot say it like that”. When Elin assesses on an individual level she means that she “never tells students this is wrong and ... I usually say what is right and then I say you have to keep in mind this and this, but I do not say this is wrong”. The results of our observation indicate this as well. The most common feedback provided by Elin was firstly made on an individual level or in smaller groups. Feedback on speaking in these situations was mostly provided by saying what is correct and never by repeating their mistakes.

Elin believes that students can develop their speaking skills by speaking as much as possible. Students practice speaking English first two and two, in smaller groups and then in whole class. According to Elin, this process makes students feel more comfortable. She says that “they could practice something such as a musical text and then when they know it by heart, they could speak in whole class”. Here Elin makes it clear that it is important to improve their level of English through bringing in what they already know. Elin has done this by for example taking the songs students are interested in and then singing them together.

Only serious errors are corrected when it comes to assessing speaking. Elin’s assessment never focuses on for example melody, intonation and pronunciation since she believes that speaking is personal. It is important that students dare to speak English regardless of grammatical errors that may interfere, Elin says:

A good speaker may have all these grammatical errors that interfere but can still speak freely and untroubled which is more important, like when a student says “It was very sheep”, I can still understand. When giving feedback to students, I do not think that I need to correct all their errors. That students should say everything correctly is not the most important thing. I believe that it is more important that they are able to speak fluently despite their errors.

How assessment is carried out and what features of language Elin assesses depends on the student and class. For instance she sometimes comments on grammatical errors, Elin says “I comment on ‘I comes’ or ‘he come’ and then the thing with –s, –sh and –ch, those typical
Swedish errors students make when speaking”. What Elin looks at in 7th and 8th grades is the ability to communicate as well as being interested in learning English. She also assesses:

In Class 7 I believe that they should show willingness ... and show that they are aware of their own learning. In Class 8 they need to show that they can use the language. If I ask them a question they need to be able to answer without any problems.

Furthermore, there is a difference between a good student and a weak student with regard to assessment of speaking, according to Elin. She explains:

When it comes to speaking, I tend to correct more when it comes to a good student and less when it comes to a weak student, because I know that if I correct the weak student too much, it can make them unmotivated and also because speaking is so personal. I correct the stronger student more because I know that that they can manage it.

Written feedback to speaking is seldom provided, according to Elin. Feedback is mostly given orally in relation to a speaking activity. However, Elin explains that this depends on the context and situation. The results from our observation show this as well. However there was one exception with the 9th graders who presented their projects. They were given positive feedback on the content of their projects after their presentation. Elin explains that in such situations she writes comments on their presentation and then gives feedback orally to each group. Elin says “in this case, I assess joyfulness, engagement, how much effort they put into their project. I really do not look at linguistic errors”.

Elin monitors if students have understood what they read and listened to by asking follow up questions. This occurred for example when the Class 7 students listened to a text from their textbook called Famous Dogs, where Elin afterwards asked the whole class if they remembered any interesting facts about the dogs. Both in class and on an individual level Elin’s assessment was connected to students understanding of the text. Elin also encouraged students to retell the story.

5.1.3 Teacher’s assessment of writing
There is a difference between assessing speaking and writing, according to Elin. The difference is that one can see the mistakes students make when they write. Here Elin distinguishes between mistakes that interfere with understanding and those that do not. Her judgment is based on “how disturbing the mistakes are. If I have to read the text a few times
and still not understand the message, then it is not good, but if I can read and understand their message although it contains mistakes, then it is okay”.

She gives comments on abbreviations such as “gonna and wanna”, even though these do not interfere with understanding. Elin says however that she will comment on these because she wants to raise the students’ awareness. She does not comment on these if they are used as a linguistic finesse or if the student otherwise writes going to and want to. However, if a student is not aware of this then she always writes going to/want to.

How assessment to written texts is carried out depends on the task. If the task itself is about content then she assesses function and not form. Additionally, if a student has written a text about his or her dog then Elin’s comments focus first on content where she for example will write comments such as, “Interesting that you have written about your dog”. However, she states that she sometimes also writes, “I do not understand this sentence, can you explain what you mean?” Comments on clarification of the texts are common, according to Elin. If students have been asked to write a text and at the same time think about grammar, then Elin says that she cannot ignore commenting on repeated errors.

Elin make it clear that even though she comments on content, she cannot ignore mistakes that occur frequently in a text. Thus she comments on these mistakes as well by explaining and writing “you need to think about this and this “. During observation Elin, while reviewing a text with a student from Class 8, sat next to the boy and together read his text and afterwards explained how he could improve it as well as what he should think about. If Elin notices that the whole class constantly make the same mistakes when writing then she has a follow up session where “I explain these to the whole class. It could be for example mistakes such as word order”. Most importantly, when assessing written texts, according to Elin is that one does not assess everything since “one cannot just browbeat the text; if a student gets back a text with red checkmarks all over the text ... it is not so fun”.

Written comments are provided when students write longer texts and write about a topic My favourite pet, for example. Elin provides mostly feedback on personal texts that students have written. She finds that more important than giving feedback on a task from the workbook because students give most of themselves in this type of task. Therefore she thinks that students appreciate written comments here as that they have shared something personal. Elin
explains that class 9 recently had to write a book review and said that when providing comments on their personal texts, she commented on the content and wrote for example to a student who had read a Twilight book “interesting that you see Edward in this way ...”. Sometimes Elin describes that she complements written comments with figures, such as angels or other symbols. Results of our observation reinforce this, where we found that Elin often uses figures such as smileys.

5.1.4 The national test and writing evaluations
Elin explains the importance of the national tests that students in 9th grade take. She sees the tests as an opportunity for students to show what they can do. This is essential due to the fact that the students can show qualities that she may not have seen previously. Elin also stresses the importance of these tests since she writes evaluations or judgements of students’ progress every term. These evaluations show students where they can improve as well as provide suggestions on how to improve. These tests never change her evaluation of a student’s progress negatively, but instead she highlights the significance of the national tests since students show what they know and also since they can help her to assess aspects of the students competences that she may forget. According to Elin her assessment when writing these evaluations is not based on a grading system as she believes that Waldorf schools are not goal oriented. Instead, she looks at the long term goals and the students’ progress at reaching these.

5.2 The students

The students, Anna, Björn, Calle and Diana are all 15 years old. They know each other quite well. Most of them have known each other since kindergarten. They have developed a close relationship to their teacher Elin who has been their English teacher for four years. However, Anna attended her first years in a municipal school and is therefore new to this class.

5.2.1 Assessing speaking – students’ views
The four students interviewed, all expressed the importance of being able to communicate in English. Anna says that “it is more important to be able to speak ... one would not have learned as much if one just read a lot of books”. In addition she believes that when speaking
it is vital to be understood despite the fact that one’s vocabulary is not that rich. While Diana stresses the importance of “having a feeling for (English), like to know that if you say something wrong, then it almost feels as if you know ... what is incorrect, then one does not need someone that corrects one when speaking”. According to Anna they have been working with different speaking activities and practiced discussing. She argues that the speaking activities probably have been practiced due to the teacher finding this essential. Furthermore, she believes that the teacher assesses, in such speaking activities, their ability to be able to express utterances in their own words. Diana pointed out Elin’s encouragement to the students that “it does not really matter what you talk about ... as long as you speak English”.

In our discussion Björn explained the importance of being understood when speaking. However, he also clarified that “it is important to be understood when speaking in a grammatical way”. Calle, however, stated that minor mistakes do not matter since one still will understand the overall message but emphasized the importance of a varied vocabulary “so that you can explain exactly in an understandable manner what you are talking about”. Anna said that intonation and pronunciation are important to the degree of making oneself understood. She means thus that perfect pronunciation is not the most important point if one can get the message across, and therefore should not be assessed. The results of our observation also indicate that Elin never assesses their intonation and pronunciation. However, when one group presented their project about India, Elin positively commented on the students’ use of their Indian accent.

In terms of assessment of speaking during discussion activities, Anna brought up her experience, where she pointed out that Elin joins the discussion rather than assesses their actual speaking performance. This is also in line with Diana’s answer to if their teacher corrects errors during speech, where she argues that Elin only corrects them during lessons “If you ask, if you kind of get uncertain then she usually corrects”. Anna believes her teacher thinks it is more important to be able to speak fluently and therefore believes that Elin does not interrupt or correct them when speaking. Calle agreed that “I have never experienced her coming up to me during a lesson saying that something I said was wrong”.

**5.2.2 Assessing writing – students’ views**

The students mentioned that they had worked a lot with writing in year 7 and 8. For instance, they worked with various writing assignments in their workbooks, summarizing texts and
lately a book review in year 9. According to their discussion, a good text written by a student was defined as the ability to construct sentences and plot in a good way and without greater focus on spelling or advanced vocabulary. Moreover Anna said when asked about what they believe the teacher looks at in their texts “it seems like she thinks that it is more important that we write a good text, than trying to write as complex as possible”. Diana discussed that Elin explained that she would look at their descriptions of the plot and the characters. Anna added that it had to contain “meaning and purpose ... and she also said that it was quite important that we wrote about our own opinions, not only what the book was about, but what thoughts we had about it”.

5.2.3 Students’ general attitudes towards being assessed

Our observations indicate that most students seem to have a very close and relaxed relationship with Elin. Throughout all classes we observed there was a relaxed atmosphere where easygoing communication happened not only at the teacher-student level, but also at the student-student level, where they took the use of each other as resources.

We asked the students during the discussion what they found most important to focus on in regards of showing their language ability, the national test or their overall work during the year. Diana told us that their evaluation letters are based on the overall performance during the whole year. This means that even if they get bad results on the national test, their evaluation letters can be quite satisfying, or the contrary if they have made little progress during the year but received good results on the test. Her classmates agreed with her that the National test is not very significant or important. Diana continued explaining that “you make it bigger than what it is, right, but just because we do not have tests really (in general)”.

However, the students mentioned that they had prepared for the test through practicing on old tests. Björn expressed some nervousness “I have never received a grade before, so it is a bit nervous”.

Our discussion also touched on to what extent the students were aware of what was expected of them and what they believed they were being assessed on. “It feels like she looks at a bit of everything” Björn said. Anna stated that since they work with different things at this school they therefore look at different things in the students as well. When asked whether they felt that they received enough feedback despite not having a grading system and despite the fact that Calle said that they had very little homework assignments, they all agreed that they did.
This occurred through minor hearings, diagnostic tests, points system, “developmental meetings” and end term ratings in form of evaluative overall testimonial ratings. The diagnostic tests are positive according to Calle, who told us that they show what “one can study more, and if you know everything you are fine”.

The students mentioned that during the “developmental meetings” the conversations concern their learning, what stage they are at and what they need to improve. Anna said that she was offered a follow up paper in order to train extra and improve herself. Their term letters are formulated in a similar encouraging way, for instance Björn shared that Elin wrote “you work well during the lessons, ambitious” in his previous letter. In Diana’s letter she learned that she should “take more space”.
6. Discussion

A dilemma in this case study has been the fact that the teacher interviewed has not received a Waldorf-specific teacher education. On the other hand she has a teacher degree. She is also very familiar with Waldorf pedagogy due to the fact that she has herself attended this Waldorf school as a child and has been working at this school for seven years. Our goal is not to judge Elin as a teacher, but to determine the extent to which Waldorf principles in this class setting are evident as well as discussing assessment in connection to learning English in a second language classroom. In section 6.1 the assessment of speaking is discussed, while 6.2 discusses assessment of writing.

6.1 Assessing speaking

A significant finding from our study indicates that assessing speaking is never carried out in whole class, but rather individually or in smaller groups. In addition, results indicate that when assessment of speaking is carried out, what students did well is first highlighted and secondarily what they could improve. As Anna, Diana and Calle pointed out, Elin never points out that they have said something wrong. This is only discussed if requested by the students. This can for example be seen in light of Steiner’s view of teaching. One fundamental idea is that teachers need to consider the feelings of their students. Also, one can take the purposes of assessment that Brindley (2007) outlines and discuss them in relation to the purposes of assessment in these cases. One important purpose of assessment according to Brindley (2007) is that one shall keep in mind to motivate the students. By assessing the individual in whole class, the individual might be inhibited by awkward feelings which could diminish his or her motivation. In interacting with students by expressing what they did well and also what they can improve upon may be something connected to Steiner’s views. One principle of assessment in these cases is that strengths are highlighted. However, even though our aim is not to compare this independent school to municipal schools and draw conclusions, we still find it important to express that these ideals can probably be found at municipal schools as well.
This case study indicates that feedback and comments have been given in whole class when students in Class 9 presented their projects. In this case, students were given oral feedback on the content. However, later on we learned that Elin would write comments first and then provide the students with follow up feedback. In these cases willingness, joyfulness and engagement are part of the assessment. Steiner repeatedly pointed out that engagement of the will is essential for language learning and posited that language acquisition cannot be effectively achieved if will and feelings are not incorporated. Therefore it is natural that this is incorporated in Waldorf settings (Kiersch, 1992). Also, linguistic errors were not assessed in this project, which can be seen as something connected to Steiner’s view of grammar. In the group interview the students touched upon during several occasions the vitality of communication, getting the message across, fluidity as superior to accuracy. Waldorf pedagogy stresses the importance of speaking naturally and fluently rather than knowing all grammatical rules (Ibid). This can also be connected to the syllabus of English where the all around communicative ability is of importance.

Steiner’s anthroposophical philosophy of human nature emphasizes the importance of incorporating will and feeling in education. By doing this one is working toward the goal of ‘awakening’ the ‘sleeping’ head (Ibid). This has been touched upon several times in our study. Will is part of assessment in all classes. In Class 7 for example students are encouraged to be willing to learn as well as to reflect upon their own language progress. Moreover, the students convey their perspective of “the feeling” being a fundamental component in the language learner. This study indicates that will and feelings are being part of assessment as well.

Assessment can be carried out by collecting information on whether or not students have understood the task they have been working with (Brindley, 2007). In our study, this is done by asking follow up questions after having listened to Famous Dogs. According to Waldorf pedagogy re-telling stories is an alternative method to use instead of translation and vocabulary exercises, which our study illustrates. Additionally, this maybe can seen in light of the fact that students are to develop their ability to describe, explain, retell as well as give reason for their views, which is something expressed in the syllabus for English (Skolverket, 2000).
One natural part of language teaching, according to Steiner, is singing and recitation. In our study we glimpse that the students utilize their musical experiences into the upper years by practicing communication through familiar songs and pieces of music. Through incorporating music familiar to students, learning it by heart and singing the songs assessment can be related to the principle that students are supposed to show what they already know, which is one very crucial principle of assessment according to Lundahl (2009).

This study indicates that linguistic aspects of language are not always being assessed, since getting the message across is more valued. When assessing, one should distinguish between simple errors and those that interfere with communication according to a study published by the National Agency of Education (Ericksson & Börjesson, 2001). This appears in our study when Elin discusses grammatical errors, such as “it was very sheep”, which do not interfere with the students getting the message across. Assessment of some linguistic aspects can be connected to selection. Steiner said that one should only make minor corrections and instead that conversation should be encouraged (Kiersch, 1992). Instead of assessing everything, Elin makes some minor corrections and emphasizes the importance of being comfortable to communicate. This is also touched upon by the students who believe that their teacher sees speaking as an essential component of learning the language. Here they mean that most important is getting the message across, despite any vocabulary flaws. Hence, the students do believe they are first and foremost assessed on their ability to express themselves with their own words. This can not only be interpreted in light of what the Waldorf curriculum says about communicative ability and self assessment, but also in light of what Lpo94 and the syllabus of English stress.

Steiner suggests that enjoyment should flourish when children speak to each other in the foreign language and the teacher should take the part of steering the discussion to keep it alive and interesting (Ibid). In our study we found this so. We learned through the students’ perspectives that they experienced their teacher joining discussions rather than assessing their use of language. In these situations we argue that Elin helps her students with the learning process by acting as a resource or guide, when students request help, but she also proceeds to steer the discussion which corresponds to Steiner’s view of the teacher’s role in the classroom. Also we saw through our observations a close collaboration between teacher and students and amongst students themselves.
The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages describes what learners have to do to use the foreign language by promoting an action-oriented approach (Council of Europe, 2001). Since learners should perform communicative acts, these different competences also ought to be part of assessment. Although content in this particular Waldorf setting is considered as more important than form, this does not mean that form is totally ignored. This came clear when Björn articulated the essence of speaking in a grammatical way in terms of being understood. However, what aspects of form that are assessed depends on the context and class. In general, the teacher assesses grammatical errors such as word order or subject verb agreement. One could interpret this as one part of the all around communicative ability the syllabus of English emphasizes in which form also has its role. Since this is emphasized, one could argue that this school follows these specific guidelines which are stipulated in the syllabus for English.

In student-centered assessment forms there is a connection between assessment and students (Sommer, 1989). According to Sommer teachers do not only gather information about students’ abilities and knowledge. Gathering information about their attitudes or personality is also included in this process. This is an aspect that has been manifested in our study as well. In this Waldorf setting, the teacher explained that there is a difference between a good student and a weak with regard to assessment of speaking. The difference itself is based on the teacher’s gathered information about the student who is being assessed. One underlying principle of assessment is that its prime purpose is to support learning (Lundahl, 2009), which can be connected to the choices the teacher makes in this setting. Additionally, when assessing the students’ process, teachers can through selection or making choices motivate their students. The teacher explained that she makes a selection of what to assess when it comes to weaker students, since she does not want to impede their language learning or make them unmotivated. Her assessment corresponds to the gathered information about students’ personalities and attitudes. Also, by making choices in assessment the process can be related to formative assessment, in which the teacher assesses for language learning (Brindley, 2007).

### 6.2 Assessing writing

In general we noticed through observations and during the interviews that there was a great deal of focus on writing in 7th and 8th grade. This can be somewhat linked to Steiner’s
encouragement of turning to writing as late as possible (Kiersch, 1992). In contrast to the students’ focus on poems, retelling stories and recitation during the earlier years, writing during these upper grades is urged for or seen as a natural part in the Waldorf process (Ibid). One prominent finding in this case study was the correlation between assessment and personal texts. We found that students were asked to respond to texts and writing on a regular basis and often given a wide choice of what format/genre they chose to respond with. In this way, it became obvious that personal texts employed to a far greater degree than we expected and were used to create highly motivated writing experiences that in our observations were highly engaging. This relationship became particularly evident since it was mentioned by all the participants in the classroom environment. Elin expressed the importance of assessment when students give most of themselves, while students spoke of guidelines encouraging them to express their own opinions and illustrating their own thoughts. This corresponds to the Grabe and Kaplan’s (1996) model on how feedback can be given to written texts. However, in this particular case, the teacher went beyond providing written comments to essay drafts, as Grabe and Kaplan (1996) suggest and instead provided positive feedback through complementing written comments with different kinds of figures such as smileys.

Another finding is that the teacher expressed that form is also assessed due to the fact that frequent mistakes done by students cannot be ignored. Here the teacher writes explanatory comments. Incorporating form into assessment would be a natural part of language learning according to Steiner, given that grammar is seen as natural aspect brought to mind when students are mature (Kiersch, 1992). Also, our study shows that assessment in these cases has to do with selection. The purpose of assessment can here be connected to motivation (Brindley, 2007), due to the fact that Elin expressed the importance of not returning a text “with red checkmarks all over” since it could be cavilling and therefore impair their learning process by making them feel unmotivated. This can be analyzed as a form of student-centred assessment given that the teacher writes comments to aspects that students can comprehend. Sommer (1989) highlights the importance of this form of assessment. Also, this student-centred assessment is prominent because of follow-up lectures after written texts. Here there is a relationship between students’ current knowledge status and the learning process, since assessment serves as an integral role in students’ learning and teacher’s teaching (Lundahl, 2009).

Teachers can provide feedback to written texts by teacher whole-class discussions of what needs to be improved or by mini-conferences (Grabe & Kaplan, 1996). Our study shows that
the follow-up sessions are similar to whole-class discussions or conferences, since Elin provides feedback on what the whole class need to improve.

The ability to construct coherent sentences and plot, rather than focusing on spelling and advanced vocabulary, were the students’ perspective on what aspects their teacher assesses in a text. Erickson & Börjesson (2001) signify that assessment firstly should focus on communicative ability. However, in this study distinctions were made between simple mistakes and those that interfere with communication (Ibid). Our study does not only indicate that there is a distinction between assessing speaking and writing, but also shows that distinctions are made between different types of linguistic errors. Elin talked about the issue of severity of mistakes and believes that when students get their message across that her assessment does not touch upon all these minor grammatical mistakes. An interesting feature is that this study shows that there is a relationship between students’ awareness and the teacher’s assessment. One can say that assessment is about selection where the teacher has to decide which linguistic errors may be successfully ignored and which will need to be brought to the students’ attention.

The discussion above indicates how complex assessment is since teachers need to make decisions about what as well as how to assess constantly. Secondly, it point towards the importance of using different methods when assessing. These issues have been discussed by Hyland & Hyland (2006), who point out that teachers cannot adopt a “correction-free approach” and only assess meaning and content. It is argued that teachers cannot ignore grammatical mistakes given that these are common in second language classrooms. This study shows that the teacher must make decisions about what to provide feedback on and that there should be a balance between assessments of content and form.

6.3 The national test and writing evaluations

One key element of Waldorf education is that Waldorf curriculum considers the developmental phases of the students. Therefore, one might expect that Waldorf pedagogy would favor formative assessment rather than summative. This was in fact the case and seems to be due to the fact that teachers focus much time on developmental phases in their training and subsequently adapt how teaching is carried out in each phase (To Trostli, 1999).
Our study shows that assessment of the productive skills, at least according to our observations, does not tend to be summative since the teacher does not evaluate by giving grades at the end of the school year. Assessment in general is carried out continuously throughout the year, and reflected in the annual and term evaluations that the teacher writes every term about the progress of the student and the gathered information she has collected on their progress. It is important to point out here once again that this study is limited in scope and that we really cannot make any claims about the extent of and relationship between summative and formative assessment. We can only report on this setting where the teacher talked about formative assessment and not summative.

For students in the Waldorf system, one dilemma though, and particularly affecting students in Class 9 who are required to take the Swedish national tests, is the supposed lack of practice of summative assessments. Nevertheless, students did express to us that they do in fact prepare for the national test. Finally, it became clear to us that the Swedish national test did not determine how foreign language in Waldorf schools is taught or assessed. It is important to highlight that the Waldorf curriculum is goal oriented. However, there is a difference between the steering documents at a national level and the Waldorf curriculum. For example the syllabus of English is both goal and grade oriented; hence guidelines for grades/goals are given. The Waldorf curriculum only provides goals to follow.

The students’ expressed what they believe they are assessed on. It is the progress and development made during the whole year that counts and not the national test results. However, some nervousness was expressed concerning receiving a grade for the first time as result of taking the national test. But it is also expressed that they find tests as helpful tools for understanding their own proficiency, such as the diagnostic test they randomly have. This method is indeed according to Brindley (2007) a way of collecting information on students’ proficiency in terms of strengths and weaknesses, which also can be a definition for summative assessment. Therefore, it could also be argued that some summative assessment is carried out even if it seems like it does not have a prominent role in Waldorf pedagogy.

Overall, the interviewees expressed satisfaction and calmness over the amount of response they receive despite not being ranked by numbers or letters. We found that response is provided through both summative and formative assessment.
7. Conclusions

The purpose of this case study was to gain insight into how the assessment of speaking and writing is carried out by one teacher at a Waldorf school. The reason for choosing a Waldorf school was due to the fact that we find Waldorf pedagogy interesting since it emphasizes the process of learning through considering the developmental phases of the child.

During the course of this study several questions were looked at. To what extent does the Waldorf teacher assess spoken and written language in the foreign language classroom? In this case study we found that the assessment of speaking did not occur in the whole group. Instead, assessment of speaking occurred on an individual level or in smaller groups as an attempt made by the teacher not to provide public feedback. We found that communicative ability was prioritized over accuracy given that both the teacher and the students highlighted the importance of being able to speak English despite grammatical flaws. Even though communicative ability was more valued by the participants interviewed, this study indicates that grammar was also assessed. The feedback received in these areas was variable, and according to the teacher, dependent upon the particular class and students.

The assessment of written texts produced one prominent finding of this case study. For example, personal texts were prioritized and more commented on. This emphasis seemed to be connected to motivation given that the teacher expressed the importance of students’ own personal views. Form and grammar was not excluded when assessing written texts. However it became clear that a distinction was made between simple mistakes and those that interfere with communication: minor errors were not commented while those that interfered with the message received correction or comment.

Another question we wanted to answer was: How do students know what is expected of them with regard to assessment of speaking and writing? This research question has been answered through the group interview conducted with four students. We found that the four students participating in this case study were familiar with what they were being assessed upon. We also found that these students recognized how the teacher went about assessing their language productive skills. Awareness of assessment procedures may be understood in light of having
the same English teacher for several years. In addition, the students mentioned for example that communicative ability was most important and that they felt that their teacher assessed their ability to speak/write English. The students’ said that fluidity was superior to accuracy both when it came to speaking and writing. With regard to assessment of speaking and writing, the students in this study mentioned that they are assessed on their ability to express themselves with own words. Given that the Waldorf curriculum is not grade-oriented in the sense that grades are excluded, this study shows that some students felt nervous about taking the national test and receiving letter grades for the first time in school. We speculate that this might be due to little practice and that they might not be used to these types of summative assessment.

Our subordinate question, concerning the other two research questions in 1.1, is: to what extent does the assessment accord with Waldorf pedagogy? We found that the students’ emotions and willingness were considered when assessing students. Emotions and willingness were taken into consideration when providing feedback and seen as essential parts of acquiring a language. The students’ feelings are fundamental when learning. Avoiding inhibition and reinforcing through encouragement are therefore prominent factors in our findings.

As for language instruction we saw that only minor corrections to speech were given in order to reinforce communicative ability. This might correspond to Steiner’s thoughts of language learning. The teacher joins discussions by taking on the role to steer and keep the discussion alive. Additionally, our findings show that the teacher in this study does not assess language ability and usage. We also found that grammar is assessed in students’ written texts. Here too, we interpret this in line with Steiner’s words that grammar is part of the natural process. However, it is important to stress that this may not only correspond to Waldorf ideals but also to the ideals expressed in the syllabus for English where function as well as form is included in all around communicative ability (Skolverket, 2000).

Our findings show also that there are a number of aspects of Waldorf pedagogy taken into account when assessing students, such as the developmental phases of the child for example. However, it also became apparent that other educational models are used at the school (e.g. the use of formative/summative assessment, distinguishing between errors that interfere with communication, etc.) that have been adopted for use at this Waldorf school though not
originally deriving from Waldorf pedagogy. This may be due to the fact that Waldorf schools also have to follow the steering documents existing at a national level.

As touched upon previously the developmental phases of children are a crucial key element in the Waldorf curriculum and therefore the development is taken into high consideration. Here one can see that the Waldorf curriculum speaks in favour of formative assessment where the process is in focus and where for example the end grade is not of paramount importance as with summative assessment. In our study we found that it is the overall process and gathered characteristics which are evaluated in a letter for the students at the end of the term. Through ongoing assessment throughout the year students are gradually familiarized with what they are being assessed upon.

In our study we also found that the students in Class 9 prepared and trained for the national test. We saw a conflicting controversy between this fact and the fact that Waldorf pedagogy claims that it is not grade oriented, given that the curriculum only has goals to achieve and not grades. Even though it was clearly stated that the tests are not of pre-eminence in the term evaluation letter, we argue that the students are indeed working towards a grade through their preparation for the national test. We found that this school aims to work in line with the Waldorf curriculum. However, the relationship existing between the national and the local level obliges the school to bring such tests as the national ones into the classroom e.g. we found that summative assessment was used to some extent.

According to the report done by Institutionen för utbildningsvetenskap (Dahlin, 2005), Waldorf students tend to lack in English. This may partly be explained by the fact that Waldorf students are not used to tests of that kind. Also, one might connect this to the fact that Waldorf students might be nervous which may affect their performance. This speculation is based upon that some students expressed being nervous about taking the national test. Even though this is speculation and not signifying data, it is still interesting to reflect about the numbers showing that Waldorf students tended to have lower results on their English national tests.

Our aim has not been to compare this Waldorf school to municipal schools. Given that teachers are free to use different methods and educational techniques it would not be fair to discuss and compare these two types of schools. Both Lpo94 as well as the syllabus for
English are open for interpretation which means that teachers can use many different methods to follow these guidelines. Another crucial part is that these school types do not differ that much nowadays as for example when independent schools began to emerge in Sweden. What is fairer though, is to emphasize some ideals of Waldorf pedagogy that do correspond with those of the syllabus for English. In the syllabus of English the students’ ability to communicate is prominent. Students are for example supposed to, when it comes to both speaking and writing, be able to express their own thoughts in English and use English in different contexts in order to relate, describe and explain (Skolverket, 2000). In Waldorf pedagogy, the all around communicative ability also seems to be of importance. Students are encouraged to use English as much as possible and take part of discussions.

The data presented in this study is not representative for Waldorf schools given that the study is of qualitative nature and limited in scope. Further researchers could collect more statistically representative data by studying several Waldorf schools instead. In such cases, there would not only be a greater possibility to generalize data collected but also it would be fairer to discuss Waldorf pedagogy. Additionally, we realize that we also could have investigated the relationship between teaching at a Waldorf school and being influenced by Waldorf ideals while at the same time having to teach according to the ideals of Lpo94.
Sources

Primary sources:

Interview Elin 2009-12-01
Group interview Anna, Björn, Calle & Diana 2009-12-01

Secondary sources:


Appendices

Appendix 1.

Interview guide
Guiding questions

Teacher

Bakgrund:
1. Berätta om din bakgrund.

Tala:
1. Hur har du arbetat med tala i klassrummet?
2. Hur går du till väga när du väljer övningar?
3. Hur går du till väga när du ger respons i

   A) helklass b) små grupper c) individuellt

4. Hur tycker du att man kan utveckla elevernas tal förmåga?
5. Hur gör du när du bedömer vad en elev kan respektive hur bra en elev kan något?
6. Vilka faktorer tänker du på när du bedömer?
7. Hur går du till väga när du ger respons på tala?

Skriva:
1. Hur går du till väga när du ger respons på elev texter?
2. Vad är det viktigaste att ge respons på och vad är mindre viktigt?
3. Vad brukar du kommentera respektive inte kommentera?
4. Vad kännetecknar en bra text respektive en svag text?
5. Hur följer du upp det eleverna skrivit?
6. Hur tycker du att man kan förbättra elevers skrivkunskap?
7. Vilka kompetenser är viktiga för eleven att behärska för att nå målen för skriva?
8. Hur bedömer du elevernas förmåga att framföra ett budskap skriftligt?
9. I vilken mån brukar dina kommentarer fokusera på form respektive funktion?:
10. Hur bedömer du skriva när det gäller
   a) det nationella provet?
   b) Vanliga texter som de skrivit. Uppsatser etc.
11. Hur samlar du underlag till att bedöma vad eleverna kan och hur bra det kan det?

Students:

1. Hur länge har ni haft Engelska?
2. Hur tycker ni att man kan lära sig språk?
3. Vilka delar av ämnet har ni arbetat med mest? (tala, skriva, lyssna, läsa?)
4. På vilka sätt har ni fått möjligheten att visa er lärare vad ni kan och hur bra ni kan det?
5. Vilka sorters övningar har ni arbetat med i att skriva?
7. Hur tror ni att er lärare bedömer er när det gäller skriva?
8. Vilka sorters övningar har ni arbetat med när det gäller tala?
9. Vad är viktigt att kunna när det gäller tala?
10. Hur tror ni att er lärare bedömer er när det gäller tala?
11. Hur brukar ni få respons på tala/skriva?
12. Vet du vad som förväntas av dig när det gäller att tala och skriva?
13. Hur känner ni er inför det nationella provet som ni ska göra?

Appendix 2:

Kära elever och föräldrar i klass 9

Vi är två studenter som läser sista terminen på lärarutbildningen vid Malmö Högskola och just nu skriver vi vårt examensarbete inom ämnet engelska. Under några tillfällen har vi fått möjligheten att följa ert barn under engelska lektionerna där vi har fått en inblick i hur man undervisar engelska på en Waldorfskola. Det skulle vara väldigt givande för oss att få ta del av några elevers perspektiv för att följa upp och berika vår förståelse och för att få en helhetsbild av undervisningen.

Därför behöver vi fyra till sex elever som är intresserade av att delta i en intervju i form av gruppsamtal med oss. I samråd med deras lärare X kommer detta samtal ske på skoltid. Vi kommer givetvis att följa forskningsetiska principer och till exempel inte ange namn eller skola i vår examensuppsats. Detta innebär att eleverna kommer att hållas helt anonyma. Vi behöver enligt lag målsmans tillåtelse för att få intervjua era barn och är tacksamma om ni fyller i nedanstående lapp.

Tack på förhand!

Camilla Corcoran Rönnerling och Emina Busuladzic

☐ Ja, mitt barn får delta i intervju.

☐ Nej, jag vill inte att mitt barn ska delta.

Eleven namn: ____________________________________________
Målsmans underskrift: ____________________________________