



**Linnæus University**

Sweden

Bachelor Thesis in English

# Communicative Language Teaching in Practice

*Function versus form in teacher trainees' lesson plans*



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## Abstract

This paper sets out to explore to what extent teacher trainees at a university in southern Sweden are influenced by communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches that the Swedish national syllabus for English, LGR 11, advocates. In addition, reliabilities regarding the level of institution (Junior High versus High School) will also be explored. The material consists of 20 lesson plans, two from each student equally split between Junior High and High School. These plans were submitted by the author's classmates as part of an assignment during their teaching practice. The method for rating the lesson plans in terms of function versus form is based on a chart created by Thornbury (1999), although his chart has been adapted to better suit the methodology of this paper. The results showed that most of the lesson plans favored, to varying degrees, a communicative approach; the most popular one being a mixture of deep-end and shallow-end CLT approaches. Furthermore, the lessons in High school proved to lean slightly more towards deep-end CLT than their counterparts at Junior high.

## Keywords

communicative language teaching, teacher trainee, lesson planning



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## 1. Introduction

For decades communicative approaches to language teaching have been part of English language teaching syllabi in Sweden. However, it is far from clear to what extent Communicative Language Teaching (henceforth CLT), as defined in Richards and Rodgers (2001: 154) as an approach that seeks to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching, is a guiding force in lesson planning. The national teaching program<sup>1</sup> stresses the importance of working in a communicative way, with a focus on function. However, Sweden is at the same time a country where fragments of the old grammar-translation method are still a common occurrence in the form of word translation exercises and glossary lists, as was quite clear to the author when he went through the English course books for Junior High at his work practice placement.

### 1.1 Aim and scope

Taking into account the curriculum's emphasis on function and the Swedish custom of implementing glossaries and translation exercises, a study on how teachers in training cope with these contradictory attitudes when they are out on their teaching practice can serve to shed light on the impact of training on professional practice in schools. The teaching programme for the training of teachers at a High School level also permits you to teach in Junior High. Therefore, the work practice placements are split between these two institutions. This study could be something to take into consideration for subsequent teacher students. A comparative study between these two in regards to CLT is interesting, since barely any earlier research can be found on the subject. Do the teaching trainees seem to lean more towards function (communicative focus) or form (grammar focus)? The research questions are formulated as to best address these concerns.

The paper's principal research question is therefore:

[1] Given the syllabuses encouragement of a functional approach, to what extent are the teacher trainees' lesson plans inspired by / based on communicative language teaching, CLT?

Additionally, one secondary question is also to be investigated.

[2] To what extent do the lesson plans from High School and Junior High differentiate in terms of CLT focus?

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<sup>1</sup> Swedish National Agency for Education, [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se), LGY/LGR 11 syllabus document



These two questions will be answered by analyzing the lesson plans submitted by the teacher trainees during their work practice. A rating system has been constructed to more easily categorize the different lessons and their sections after their respective influences regarding form and function.

## 2. Theoretical background

The intended purpose of this section is to give the reader a clear and overarching perspective on the history of English language teaching (ELT) as well as its curriculum and that of communicative language teaching (CLT) in particular. Furthermore, the section will bring up definitions of curricula and syllabi and illustrations of how they have been regarded.

### 2.1 The curriculum & the syllabus as a basis for planning teaching

The literature review will give the reader a summary of planning and approaches to syllabus design in modern language subjects and English mainly throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The foundation needed for teaching any subject is having a documented basis of planning, a manual of sorts, to build upon. These documents are called curricula and syllabi. According to White (1988: 4) the difference between a *syllabus* and a *curriculum* is that the term *syllabus* tends to refer to the content of a specific subject, whilst *curriculum* refers to the totality of the content to be taught in a school. He also mentions that this description is in compliance with the definition of *syllabus* as used in the British educational system. The American tradition is slightly different. The British (and Swedish) interpretations of the two in terms of hierarchy rank the curriculum to be above the syllabus. Opinions differ on how to best describe the curriculum. Hirst (1971: 234) saw it as a programme of activities while Kerr (1968: 16) valued the activities themselves. In other words, one side sees it as a plan and the other as a list of activities.

White (1988: 4) also states that even though the curriculum is deemed to be above the syllabus in hierarchy one should not regard the former as a “super” syllabus and on that basis dismiss the latter. The two definitions differ in terms of quality, with the syllabus being tailor-made for specific subjects and courses. Brumfit (1984) quoted in White (1988: 3) defined and summarized it as:

A syllabus is the specification of the work of a particular department in a school or college, organized in subsections defining the work of a particular group or class. It is often linked to time, and will specify a starting point and ultimate goal.



## 2.2 English language teaching and modern language syllabi traditions

In a review of the history of language teaching, Kelly (1969) states three different ways of looking at languages that seem to have dominated over the centuries. There is the *social* view which regards language as a form of social behavior. There is also the *artistic* perspective that sees language as a vessel for creativity. Lastly there is the *scholarly* view that studies the components of the language itself. Each of these three has left their mark in terms of organization and content on the syllabus design. According to White (1988: 7) there are two traditions when it comes to language teaching. One originates from the distinction between modern language teaching (MLT) and English language teaching (ELT). The other distinction is based, geographically, on the division between North America and Europe.

Furthermore, White (1988: 7) states the MLT/ELT divide originates from the 19th century. Widespread access to education did not exist before then and the majority of the population had been illiterate. Those who had learned a foreign language were few and they had done so either by hiring a tutor or simply by being exposed to the target language. Needless to say, the first method was only available for the rich. The 19<sup>th</sup> century saw the opening of extensive educational opportunities. Modern languages, such as German, Spanish and French became implemented in school curricula across Europe. However, the teaching of modern languages was not held in high regard. In an attempt to be taken seriously, the MLT advocates looked to the model of Latin teaching, in which the grammar-translation method of learning dominated. Grammar-translation is defined by an extensive focus on grammatical rules and form of sentences and translations; it is the written language that is taught and therefore there are no oral exercises. The ability to be able to use the language in everyday situations is not prioritized. This rather academic view of language as something to be rigorously repeated and studied until one had mastered its rules was approved by universities, echoing ideas found within the classical-humanist ideology of the time.

According to White (1988: 8) this conservative fixation with grammar and the refusal to give language teaching any serious backing in form of research and teacher training probably obstructed it for generations. Major changes in terms of content and methodology in MLT were not made until the 1970s when in the UK comprehensive education was introduced alongside selective schooling. The number of pupils taking a modern language rose to 85% of the children in Britain in the late 1970s. The teachers were unprepared for this development,



as they were still trying to adapt to the proclamation in the 1960s that educators should study new approaches, techniques and methods and review the aims of their teaching as a whole amidst huge changes in the comprehensive school system.

ELT on the other hand, had taken a different path. English grew to be a world language with the emergence of Britain as the world's foremost empire in the 19th century. For the local inhabitants in the British colonies, learning English was compulsory if they were to advance to higher positions, regardless of profession. ELT also spread outside the empire itself, until it had reached a truly global scale. This development made it something prestigious and as such EFL teacher training programmes in London received funding in the 1940s. However, since ELT developed in the colonies of the British Empire and abroad the teaching of English at home in Britain became isolated and stagnated. Today, both traditions acknowledge the importance of being able to communicate orally in the target language and both have (to different degrees) scrapped their previous grammar teaching influences. In other words, both of them value the social components (ie covering pragmatic and sociolinguistic areas) of language and view it as social behavior (White, 1988: 9-10).

White (1988: 13) states that the second tradition illuminated the differences between American and British ELT. The Second World War saw the emergence of a new method of language teaching. American soldiers heading off to the war in Europe and the Pacific needed to be able to communicate in languages other than English. Consequently American scholars developed the audiolingualism method based on behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics. At its earliest stage it looked like this: the teachers, native speakers of the targeted language and the military instructors, presented the material to the learners who were supposed to learn it by mimicking and repetition. According to White (1988: 14-15) the method was later on improved by Charles Fries who prioritized what he called the principles of contrastive analysis and more focus on the oral proficiency. White (1988: 15) describes the difference between American and British takes on ELT with the Americans focusing heavily on the audiolingualism method on form instead of the use of the language. In contrast, British linguists tended to emphasize the relationship between the context of certain situations and the appropriate use of language. Whilst the British favored the situational approaches the Americans favored the training of speech habits.



### 2.3 Approaches to English language teaching syllabi

White (1988: 44) categorizes language syllabuses into two types. They are opposites of each other. He refers to them as *Type A* and *Type B*. Type A is very straightforward and is based on the question of what is to be learnt in the form of content. The objectives are defined at the start of the course and the content is decided by the teacher alone. In this perspective *content* equals what the teacher deems it to be and one can regard it as a gift from the expert (teacher) to the learner.

Type B highlights the question of how something is to be learnt. It is deemed as internal to the learner. The teacher co-operates with the learners in planning the content. Contrary to the “content-is-a-gift” perspective of Type A, this approach prioritizes what kind of content the learner finds interesting. Objectives can be explained after the assignment has been completed. Assessment is relative to the learners’ criteria of success (White, 1988: 44).

To summarize, one can say that the former emphasizes the subject whilst the latter emphasizes the process of learning. White (1988: 45) states that both of them have advantages as well as disadvantages. Type A is an interventionist approach which provides the learners with skills in the pre-selected content but it does not teach or encourage them to become independent learners. Type B is a non-interventionist approach that makes every effort to immerse the learners in communicative scenarios with approved attitudes but can struggle with implementing culturally valuable content.

### 2.4 Communicative language teaching - Origins in communicative competence

Communicative language teaching, CLT, originated in the 1970s and is based on the concept of communicative competence. According to linguists Canale and Swain (1980: 1) one must master four different subordinate competences in order to be able to communicate with confidence and as such achieve a state of communicative competence. These four are the following:

- *Grammatical competence*; the ability to produce grammatically correct statements.
- *Sociolinguistic competence*; the ability to create sociolinguistically correct utterances, which means that you take into account and are aware of the social dynamics of a given situation. An example of this is when a speaker expresses gratitude in the form of thanking someone; there is a difference between doing this in a formal professional context and in thanking a friend over dinner for passing you the salt.



- *Discourse competence*; the speaker's ability to produce cohesive and coherent statements.
- *Strategic competence*; the ability to adapt to and to solve communicative problems that arise, whether it is about not understanding a lone word in a text or the context as a whole.

Furthermore, Canale and Swain (1980: 34) stated that the evaluation of second language learners' communicative skills should not only look at their competence as a set of internalized grammatical rules but also at their performance when demonstrating their communicative skills in realistic settings.

## 2.5 Descriptions of Communicative language teaching and The Council of Europe's Common European framework of reference for languages

Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. (Richards, 2006: 2).

Savignon (1997: 4) states that with a focus on qualitative evaluations of the learner, CLT is an approach to teaching that puts the learner in focus. It represents a substantial movement away from the grammar-translation method of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The most important aspect for the teacher to bear in mind when using a CLT approach is to keep the learners active and to vary the teaching process and learning the activities. Moreover, Savignon (1997: 22) cautions against neglecting group work and reading and writing activities. Even though they may not seem so at first glance, these can also be communicative when including interactions, negotiation of meaning and expressions. Michael Byram (2004: 128) summarizes the principles of CLT to apply equally to reading and writing activities as long as they engage the learner in expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning. The goals themselves depend on the learner and his or her needs in a specific context. CLT does not require pair work, larger group tasks have actually been found to provide motivation and realism to different tasks. CLT does also incorporate a certain amount of knowledge and awareness of rules of discourse, syntax and what is socially appropriate. In short, CLT seeks to provide opportunities for the learners to develop their communicative competence.

The British Linguist Wilkins (1976: 18) states that the emergence of CLT can be traced to the impact increased immigration and the language learning needs of guest workers had on Europe mixed with British linguistic ideas of focusing on social as well as linguistic contexts

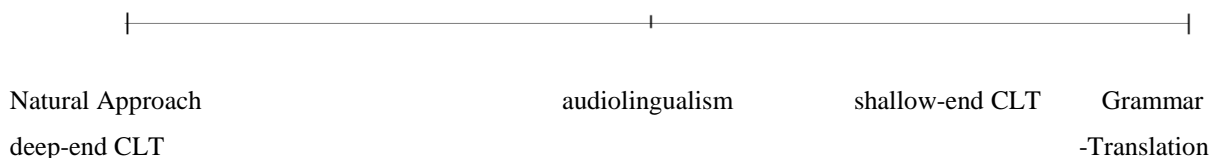
in the use of a language. He defined two separate categories of meaning. One was categories with a communicative function (*offers, requests, complaints, denials* etc.) and the other was categories of a notional sort (*quantity, sequence, frequency, location* and concepts such as time). The Council of Europe incorporated and expanded on Wilkins' work in the creation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, CEFR in short. The Council of Europe [www.coe.int] describes it as a framework of reference, it was designed to provide a complete and clear foundation for the elaboration of language syllabi as well as curriculum guidelines and assessment of foreign language proficiency. The CEFR has different knowledge requirements for every major European language in which it is stated what level of skill is expected of the learner.

## 2.6 Communicative language teaching in the classroom - deep and shallow end

### Communicative language teaching

Scott Thornbury (1999: 22) states that there are two types of CLT: *deep end* and *shallow end* CLT. They differ in terms of how strictly they regard a focus on form (grammar, translation etc.) within the classroom. Shallow end CLT usually implements quite a substantial amount of form focus, but tends to dress it up in a functional way. Shallow-end CLT originated from around the same time as Chomsky's claim that language is rule-governed. This could explain the acceptance for grammar that runs within shallow-end CLT. However, deep-end CLT, in its most pure convention, completely disregards and excludes both a grammar based syllabus and any practices of grammar instructions during lessons.

Thornbury (1999: 23) created a chart to show different teaching methods' and approaches' relationship to grammar. At the right end of the chart there is a heavy emphasis on grammar.



**Figure 1. Thornbury's CLT dimensions**

Research (Thornbury, 1999: 24) has shown that it is not advantageous to completely omit a focus on form in favor of function. Thornbury also mentions that this could cause the learner's interlanguage to become fossilized, meaning it could cease to develop. However, he



also states that this does not mean that one should return to the drill-and-repeat styled teaching approaches of audiolingualism. One could implement minor form traits, such as correcting mistakes, without ruining a deep-end CLT lesson. To summarize the distinction between form and function: form is typically associated with grammar teaching, both historically and in its approach. The teaching of grammatical rules for sentences and translation tend to dominate. Function, on the other hand, has the practical use of the language as its goal.

## 2.7 Communicative language teaching activities

At the core of CLT lays the focus on function. Activities can range from having the students pretending to be news anchors and reading the news to their classmates to having them reenact a talk-show. More basic activities can also be to ask for directions, describing the plot of a movie, or talking about their future plans, much depends on the class in question; their level of proficiency and their willingness to co-operate. Byram (2004: 128) brings up the Task-based learning, (henceforth TBL), method as something that is often associated with CLT. In this method the lesson is based around the accomplishment of a particular task. Depending on the students' completion of it, the language studied is determined, not beforehand but afterwards. However, TBL follows certain stages; J. Willis (1996: 1) describes them as follows. Firstly there is the *pre-task* stage; the teacher introduces the topic to the students and gives them clear instructions on how to proceed with the task. After this they move on to the stage of the task itself and complete it while the teacher takes on the role of a monitor, offering encouragement. The next stage is the planning stage. Now the students prepare and practice to tell their classmates how they fared with the task. The third stage is the report itself. The students make their brief (preferably) oral reports to the class. Following this the teacher highlights the most relevant parts of reports made, often by going through the language used. Lastly, the teacher selects language areas, based on the parts highlighted from their reports that the students can practice. For instance, one could show them the difference between standard English and what they themselves have written.

## 2.8 Critiques of Communicative language teaching

Although it has many uses and advantages, the CLT approach is not without its weaknesses and has received some criticism over the decades. Canale & Swain (1980: 11) stated that adults trying to learn a second language would not be satisfied with exclusively getting their meaning across. They would perhaps want to know how the grammatical rules worked. A decade earlier Savignon (1972: 11) had found something similar in her research while trying



out an early stages CLT approach in a college class. The focus was on function instead of form. Their desire to successfully integrate themselves into the target language (French) as a native speaker plummeted compared with other classes that did not have this new focus on function. When Savignon later evaluated this experience she narrowed down the causes to two. First of all it was the initial shock of being asked to perform like a native speaker; the students had probably never even heard of such a thing happening in a classroom environment. Furthermore, for many it was simply too difficult a task. While several of the learners probably knew how to translate the words they had no experience putting together every day phrases and sentences at a moment's notice. In her later work (Savignon, 1997: 5) she acknowledges additional criticism of CLT from the teacher community, the foremost of these being the challenges that come with assessing communicative skills. These are frequently associated with specific contexts and as such not subordinated to a universal assessment scale.

## 2.9 The Swedish syllabus LGY11 take on Communicative language teaching

Even though it is rather brief on the topic, the Swedish National Agency for Education syllabus for English, LGR/Y11, emphasizes the importance of communicative language teaching. The National Agency for Education<sup>2</sup> states that the students should develop their communicative skills by learning the language in a functional way. Furthermore, they ought to be given the chance to improve their ability to express themselves with complexity and variation.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.skolverket.se](http://www.skolverket.se)



### 3. Material and method

#### 3.1 Material

The teacher trainees in focus were studying a minimum of 90 ECTS credits in English as part of the double-degree programme that will grant them a qualified teacher status at Junior High and High School level in the Swedish state sector. The English course consists of language and literature didactics as well as a core of general educational subjects. The teaching practice (VFU) is made up of five weeks and takes place during the third semester. During this time the trainees were tasked by the course coordinator to submit two lesson plans each as part of the grading process. The material that this essay sets out to analyze consists of those plans. Twenty lesson plans, two from each student; from both Junior High and High schools in a municipality in southern Sweden. Since only 5 of the students had their work practice in Junior High whilst the other 9 worked in High Schools this could give rise to skewed quantitative results. Therefore it was decided to analyze only 5 of the original 9 trainees from High School lesson plans. These 5 were chosen by using a random number generator, so as to keep it as professional as possible.

The table below shows the selected trainees' pseudonyms, age and at which school level they had their teaching practice. Every lesson plan will be treated anonymously, as was guaranteed to the student teachers when they agreed to have their submitted material used in this study (see Appendix). Therefore, fictitious names will be used when referring to specific lesson plans.

**Table 1. Overview of the trainees**

Name	Age	Level of school
Alicia	23 years old	Junior High
Amanda	23 years old	Junior High
Alexander	21 years old	High School
Caroline	25 years old	High School
Denise	21 years old	Junior High
Gustav	21 years old	High School
Jimmy	25 years old	Junior High
Martin	27 years old	High School
Sarah	24 years old	Junior High



Vanja	41 years old	High School
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The introduction and the concluding stages will be omitted from the analysis of every lesson plan. This is because of the inconsistencies that arise with them; some trainees have chosen to have an introduction stage of up to 15 minutes while others have none at all. The concluding stage faces the same problem. In addition, stand-alone lesson stages between 1-5 minutes that serve to fill in a potential surplus of time will also be omitted.

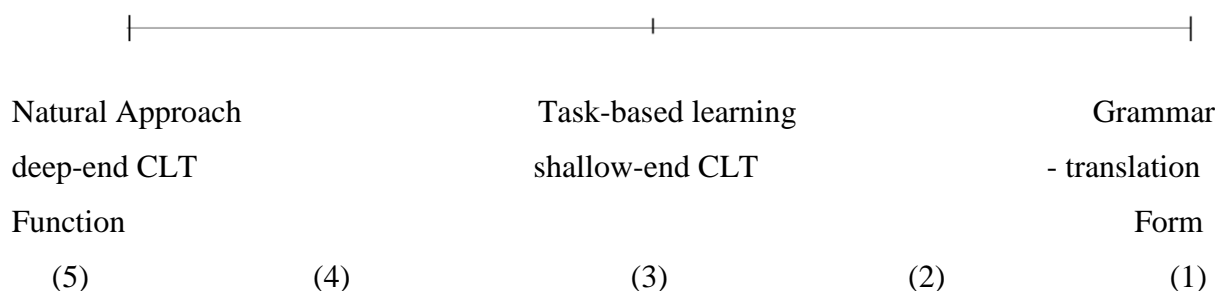
The lesson plans that make up the source material of this essay are based on the CELTA (Certificate in English Language Teaching to Adults) lesson plan template used as part of the Cambridge TESOL (Cambridge, 2016) certificate in English teaching as a tool for assessing English teachers. The template covers lesson procedures, material and language analysis. The version used at the author's university is more or less identical to the original.

### 3.2 Method

The overarching question that this project sets out to explore is whether teacher trainees' lesson plans are more influenced by traditional grammar teaching or by the communicative classroom philosophy that the English syllabus and the teacher trainers at the university advocate. The paper will explore at lesson component level to what extent the lesson plans are influenced by CLT. In order to successfully accomplish this, Scott Thornbury's (1999: 23) grammar teaching-chart (mentioned in section 2.6) has been adopted, although with some changes, the major ones being the removal of audiolingualism and placing shallow-end CLT in the middle of the chart instead of next to grammar-translation. The reasoning behind this was that the author and his supervisor both thought that it would be more appropriate, since shallow-end CLT borrows from both a Natural approach and approaches with a focus on linguistic form; thus it is better suited to be placed in the middle of the scale. Furthermore, audiolingualism was removed since it could as well have been categorized under the grammar-translation part of the scale. It should also be noted that Thornbury's framework does not mention vocabulary learning. Developments in systemic functional linguistics and corpus linguistics emphasize the fact that grammar and vocabulary are closely linked, e.g. in the concept of lexicogrammar (Halliday, 1994). The vocabulary listed in the lesson plans were therefore regarded as part of a form focus. To more easily evaluate and keep track of the source material's rankings on the scale, numbers have been added to it with grammar-translation being 1 and deep-end CLT being 5. Deep-end CLT (procedural knowledge)



activities are functional and highly communicative. Shallow-end CLT, in the middle of the scale, is essentially functional and communicative but does also have a form-focus, TBL lessons are a sound example of a shallow-end CLT task. On the opposite side of deep-end CLT is grammar-translation (declarative knowledge); this method favors linguistic form and accuracy instead of functional aspects. Numbers are used to represent the intermediate stages between these three approaches and this paper will analyze individual lesson plan stages to make an overall assessment of where each of them belongs on the spectrum that the Thornbury scale makes out. To cover for the possibility that one lesson stage might take up the majority of the lesson's time or an amount equal to that of every other stage but focuses on another aspect of language teaching (a heavy form focus while the rest of the brief stages are functional for instance) then that stage's ranking will influence the overall ranking with one extra "point", be it towards a natural approach or grammar translation. While such a strategy can be interpreted as ambiguous, the author thought that it was needed to include the extra point system in order to do potential lesson plans, which meet the requirements, justice. They will be highlighted in bold in table 7. To be clear, the only time that an extra point can be added or deducted is if one lesson has a contrary component focus (declarative/procedural) that is equal to or surpasses the other components in regards to time spent.



**Figure 2. Thornbury's scale adapted**

The table below serves to give the reader an understanding of how the ranking system works in detail. Under each number, from 5 to 1, are examples of common tasks and exercises and how they respectively categorize on the scale.

**Table 2. Example of activities rankings on the scale**

5	4	3	2	1
Procedural				Declarative



Knowledge				Knowledge
Natural approach, 100% focus on: - Role play - Interviews - Group work - Information gap - Opinion sharing - Scavenger hunt - Communicative games	Dominantly communicative, limited focus on form-based activities.	Communicative lesson with Willis. TBL framework: - Pre task - Task cycle - Evaluation of the pupils' language. - Some stand-alone grammar sessions. L2 to be used mainly in the classroom	Heavy contrastive grammar focus: - Some communicative skills but very limited. - L1 intended to be used mainly in the classroom.	Grammar-translation. - Focus on translation from L2 to L1. - L1 used throughout. - Focus on form, gap-filling activities, verb morphology and syntactic manipulation.

The paper has both quantitative and qualitative aspects, which makes it a mixed method project. In regards to the ranking system itself, there is unfortunately no template to adapt for every lesson stage, since this paper explores new territory. Therefore, the rankings were created by the author of this paper with the help of his supervisor and as such they are based on their understanding of what qualifies as CLT lessons and what does not. However, while the judgement of the author is subjective, his analysis and understanding of CLT is based on research made by Byram (2004), Savignon (1997), Thornbury (1999), White (1988), Canale and Swain (1980) as well as course components in language teaching methodology at the author's university, courses that the authors of the lessons plans also participated in.

A common misunderstanding of CLT is to think of it in terms of black and white, without any shades of gray. For instance, if a lesson is exclusively made up of verbal group exercises without even mentioning form (grammar), one could be tempted to view it as a perfect CLT lesson. However, that may not be the case. First of all, CLT does not have to consist of completely orally communicative lesson stages. Writing and reading activities that involve the learners taking part in interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning can be equally communicative. An example of such an activity could be having the students working



together and communicating with each other with the goal of creating a group profile on a social media page. While it could be helpful since it usually allows the students to participate more, one does not have to work in groups or pairs to have a CLT lesson. Working alone with a writing assignment where the learner is supposed to make a case for or against a topic is an example of a CLT task that does not require a group or pair work to accomplish. Lastly, form does not have to be excluded from a lesson (Savignon, 2002: 22). As mentioned earlier, shallow-end CLT can make use of some sort of grammatical focus, often incorporated in a TBL lesson. A stage where the students get to listen to a tape with the aim of answering questions that are imbedded in the recording is a CLT exercise. Admittedly, the students do not get to talk, but as previously mentioned this is not a criterion for CLT. In this exercise they are trying to interpret the recording, what is said and where the answers to their questions are. They get to work with the targeted language in a meaningful, natural and practical way, therefore the activity is considered to be primarily functional. Role-playing tasks are also functional and communicative activities where a student can act as a salesman and a classmate as a potential buyer. In conclusion, listening to content and reading activities where the meaning is emphasized is just as good of an example of a functional task as a verbal role-playing exercise. At the other end of the spectrum the form focused assignments reside. These are typical fill-in-the-right-verb-tense exercises often found in regular English course books.

The material that this paper analyses is fixed, which means that the lesson plans that make out the material cannot be altered in any way. However, the reliability of the method is another matter. The method rests upon three pillars: Thornbury's (1999) reworked scale, the author's and his supervisor's ranking system and the author's understanding of what qualifies as CLT. Another researcher could use the same scale and rankings as this paper does, but his or her understanding and belief of what should qualify as CLT could still differ to varying degrees to those of the author of this paper. Nevertheless, as the definitions of CLT in this paper are based upon research made by Byram (2004), Savignon (1997), Thornbury (1999), White (1988), Canale and Swain (1980) research that another potential researcher would also be aware of then perhaps it stands to reason to consider that another individual's result would not differ all too much from that of the author of this paper. Ideally, a second assessor would have been brought in to look over the rankings in order to counter the subjectivity that comes from only having one person doing the assessment. If our assessment would have had a high inter-rater reliability, say about 90%, the raters would be interchangeable. This means that the ratings would be independent of any specific rater. If interchangeability can be guaranteed,



the ratings can be used with confidence and without worrying about potential subjectivity from the rater himself (Gwet, 2014: 4). Unfortunately, since this is an independent project at bachelor level and not a funded research project, bringing in another assessor for the ratings was simply not possible.

In regards to the validity of this paper, one should not see the result of this study as something to be applied to all English teacher trainees in the country. Such a generalization would be grossly at fault. Nonetheless, this paper serves to give the reader a sample from which further discussions and studies about CLT, or the lack of it, in teaching trainees classroom can evolve.

### 3.3 Problems and limitations

Since the study is quite limited in terms of the number of lesson plans analyzed the results should not be considered representative for all teacher trainees in the entire country. The primary limitation with the material is that even though most stages of the lessons are thoroughly described one cannot know how the lesson progressed in practice since the author of this paper was not there. There is no analysis of what was well received and what could have benefitted from further planning, nor to what extent the teacher followed through with, for instance, the use of the targeted language. Another limitation, or risk, with the material is that it could be regarded as biased since the author of the paper and the authors of the material were classmates.



## 4. Results and discussion

In order to carry out the study in a viable way, two randomly selected lesson plans are presented and analyzed in a very detailed fashion in this section. While the rest certainly were analyzed, they are not presented with the same detail as the two first plans. Instead, a table will be used to give the reader a clear and overarching look of the lesson plans' scoring. This scoring will be based on the analyses as the two first received, but without the argumentation part. To begin with, a brief summary will be given regarding the class and purpose of the lesson, the author of this paper is privy to those because they are mentioned in every lesson plan before the lesson stages themselves.

### 4.1 Lesson plan 1

This lesson plan is based on a 60 minute long lesson in an 8<sup>th</sup> grade class consisting of 24 pupils, split evenly between male and female. The teacher trainee that came up with and executed this plan is a 25-year-old male, henceforth referred to as Jimmy. This particular lesson consists of four stages, excluding introduction and recapitulation. The main aim of the lesson is to introduce the pupils to the culture of the US as an English speaking country and prepare them for upcoming lessons focused on discussions. Subsidiary aims are stated as improving pupils' listening comprehension and vocabulary.

**Table 3. Jimmy's lesson plan**

Stage	Stage aim	Procedure	Interaction	Time
Listening comprehension + speaking	Discuss knowledge of the topic.	Students discuss between themselves and later present their ideas. Teacher writes on whiteboard.	S-S T-S	10-15
Listening comprehension + speaking	Improve student understanding of the topic.  (English speaking cultures)	Teacher shows three short video clips; afterwards the clips are discussed in the class. Teacher writes on whiteboard	T-S	10
Listening comprehension + speaking	Improve student understanding of the topic	Teacher explains part of a topic for discussion	T-S	5-10



Listening comprehension + speaking	Improve student understanding of the topic.  Improve student verbal skills.	Students discuss the topic in groups and write down their thoughts in their notebooks	S-S	10-15
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The first stage (10-15 minutes) consists of the students discussing the topic among themselves. They then present their ideas to the teacher who writes them down on the board, they go through the written down statements and words together. Most of the time spent during this stage is focused on aspects of communication, between the students themselves and between the students and the teacher. The task is not only for them to think of certain traits that they associate with the topic; they are also supposed to talk to each other about the topics. In addition, the teacher requests that they tell him what they came up with. While the teacher does not explicitly state this in the lesson plan stage, there is a brief focus on form when they go through the vocabulary the students came up with, one can assume that is what the teacher refers to as “teacher writes on whiteboard”. According to the beforehand mentioned aims of the lesson, increase the vocabulary and teach them if the words are adjectives, verbs or nouns is a subsidiary aim of the lesson. This stage’s score on the chart is a 4 on the grounds of it being dominantly communicative, with a limited focus on form-based activities.

The second stage (10 minutes) involves the students watching three short video clips; afterwards the video excerpts are discussed in the class and the teacher writes down keywords on the board. As mentioned in the methodology section, watching a video clip or listening to a tape can be just as communicative in its own way as talking. While the students do not seem to have a questionnaire to answer during the video they are supposed to discuss it in the class afterwards. The aim of the stage is also to improve the students understanding of a topic, this is done with a functional approach, watching, interpreting and discussing. Once again, while the teacher does not explicitly state this in the lesson plan stage, there is a brief focus on form when they go through the vocabulary; one can assume that this is what the teacher refers to as “teacher writes on whiteboard”. According to the beforehand mentioned aims of the lesson, increasing the vocabulary of the students is a subsidiary aim of the lesson. This stage’s score on the chart is therefore a 4. It is dominantly communicative, with a limited focus on form-based activities.



The third stage (5-10 minutes) is omitted since it serves as an introduction to the forthcoming stage.

The fourth and the last stage (10-15 minutes) see the students discussing the topic they were briefed on in the previous stage. They have the discussion in groups and take notes in their notebooks of what conclusions they arrive at. Once again the students get to practice their verbal skills in a discussion themed exercise. Furthermore, this time they write down new thoughts that they and their classmates come up with. No focus on form is mentioned. This stage's score on the chart is rated as a 5 on the scale. A discussion themed group work task that encourages negotiation of meaning in order to accomplish in the targeted language.

To summarize the lesson, it can be qualified as a type middle ground between a deep-end and a shallow-end CLT lesson. Jimmy continuously focuses on oral aspects, such as discussions and dialogues. The students also get to watch video clips, this is an exercise in reception and understanding; afterwards they discuss the content of the clips. While it could be tempting to call this lesson a deep-end CLT / natural approach lesson, that is most likely not the case. It is very important to remember that a deep-end CLT / *natural approach* lesson is not defined by having the students talk nonstop about a topic, as beneficial to their verbal skills as that may be. What really distinguishes such an approach in its purest form is its disregard for any grammatical focus (Thornbury, 1999: 22) where attention is given to correct grammatical form and / or metalanguage. This lesson plan consisted of three assessable stages; it scored 4 in two of them and 5 in the third, which gives it an overall rating of 4. The two first stages did include a focus on form-based aspects of language teaching and by doing so they distanced themselves from a natural approach. Overall, the lesson strives for the students to use the target language as much as possible, as this was the main aim of the lesson. It could also be mentioned that while the exercises are orally focused, with multiple discussions they are not trying to mimic an authentic setting, something that role playing exercises would have done.

**Table 4. Jimmy's average score**

Stage	Score
1	4
2	4
3	5
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>4</b>



## 4.2 Lesson plan 2

The class is a 7th grade consisting of 22 students. The lesson length is set to 40 minutes. The main focus is to acquaint the students with Halloween, its history and how it is celebrated in the US with a focus on vocabulary. A subsidiary aim is to have the students practice constructing sentences. The lesson consisted of four stages. The teacher trainee behind this lesson plan is a 24-year-old female, from here on referred to as Sarah.

**Table 5. Sarah's lesson plan**

Stage	Stage aim	Procedure	Interaction	Time
Show/work with the words related to Halloween.	Practice pronunciation and meaning of the words.	I said the words out loud and the pupils said after me. After that, they checked what words they already knew and looked up the Swedish translation of the rest. We went through the translations together.	Teacher-pupil and individually	10-20 minutes
Show the YouTube video.	For the pupils to get to know a little more about Halloween and how it is celebrated, especially in the US.	Watch a video.	YouTube-pupil	6-8 minutes
Talk about the video and about Halloween.	To make sure that the pupils understood the video.	Talk about what the video was about by using a PPT.	Teacher-pupil	5-7 minutes
Introduce sentence writing-assignment and have the pupils write their own	To have the pupils practice their English writing.	They will choose some of the words that we have been working with and create around 3-5 sentences.	Individually	10-15 minutes



sentences.				
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The first stage (10-20 minutes) consisted of the teacher bringing up vocabulary associated with Halloween, the class repeated after her. Unfamiliar words were looked up in dictionaries, the students wrote down their translations. Lastly they and the teacher talked about them. When working with vocabulary, particularly translation, the focus on form tends to dominate. This activity was for the most part no exception. This stage therefore receives a score of 2, heavy grammar focus but with some attention to communicative skills; it is the author's interpretation that the teacher used the L2 throughout the stage apart from when they worked with the translation of the words.

The second step of the lesson (6-8 minutes) was to watch an informative *YouTube* clip on how they celebrate Halloween in the US. The students watch and listen to the information the video offers about the topic. This is best regarded as a reception / understanding exercise that is quite communicative in its own way. It is also stated that it serves as a pre-task to the next stage. A score of 5 is appropriate. While the students themselves do not talk, they listen intently and are subjected to English spoken in quite a natural manner.

The third stage (5-7 minutes) was spent talking about the video with the help of a *PowerPoint* presentation. The aim was to ensure that the students understood the video. The teacher and the students talk together about a topic and the students get to participate verbally, no focus on form is mentioned. Its aim is to increase the students' oral proficiency and knowledge of Halloween; this is done by negotiation of meaning, making sure the students understood the previously watched video. It receives a score of 5, while it lacks the immersion that a scavenger hunt or a role playing exercise would bring to the table it is nonetheless an episode where a focus on form is entirely omitted.

The fourth and last stage (10-15 minutes) of the lesson plan consists of an individual writing activity. Working with words that have been brought up during the lesson, the students are tasked with writing three to five sentences each. This is both a functional and a form focused assignment. The students learn to use words in a functional setting as well as writing sentences with correct grammatical structures. The last stage of the lesson therefore receives a score of 3, in the middle of the chart. It is very much shallow-end CLT exercise that borrows from the opposite sides of Thornbury's adapted chart.



In conclusion, Sarah's lesson was more influenced by a shallow-end CLT approach than Jimmy's deep-end leaning lesson. The first stage of her lesson may have been made up of learning vocabulary, but the students got to practice their pronunciation and how to put the correct pronunciations into context. This was a good example of when Thornbury (1992: 22) talked about putting the focus on form in a live and 'useful' context. The third stage saw the teacher and the students interact with each other orally to explain the concept of celebrating Halloween. The last stage saw the students producing sentences, something that incorporates both form and function. Sarah's lesson consisted of four assessable stages and received the scores of 2, 5, 5 and 3 on the scale.  $2 + 5 + 5 + 3$  equals 15; 15 split in 4 equals approximately 4. However, one has to take into consideration that while the four stages together received a ranking of 4, the first stage and too some extent the last stage were more influenced by form than function. They (particularly the first stage) did also make up for most of the lesson's time: between 20-35 minutes compared to the 11-15 minutes of the second and third stage. Therefore, especially since the form focused first stage may have taken up as much time as the second and the third stage together or even more, it stands to reason to give that stage's score more significance for the lesson overall. In compliance with this paper's method (section 3.2) regarding vast differences between lesson stages' focus and time spent, the lesson's ranking will drop one "point" down to 3. Since that about half the time were spent on form focused activities or such imbedded within functional tasks. In conclusion, Sarah's lesson plan equals that of a shallow-end CLT lesson. Thornbury (1999: 22) stated that shallow-end CLT often did have a focus on both function and form, with the latter dressed up in a functional way, for example by putting the vocabulary into a larger context, something that which Sarah did.

**Table 6. Sarah's average score**

Stage	Score
1	2
2	5
3	5
4	3
<b>Average Score</b>	<b>3</b>



## 4.3 Overview of the results of the remaining lesson plans

As was mentioned in section 3, only two lesson plans would be presented in detail. The remaining 18 will be presented with a table in a summarized form.

**Table 7. Overall rating of the trainees' lesson plans**

Name and age of the trainee	Level of institution	Lesson plans' stage scores'	Average score
Alicia: 23 years old	Junior High	4, 2, 2	3
Alicia's second plan		5, 5, 1, 5, 1, 2	3
Amanda: 23 years old	Junior High	4, 4, 5, 2, 4, 5	4
Amanda's second plan		4, 4, 3, 3, 3, 3	3
Alexander: 21 years old	High School	5, 4, 4, 5	5
Alexander's second plan		2, 2	2
Caroline: 25 years old	High School	5, 5, 5	5
Caroline's second plan		5, 5, 4, 4, 3, 4,	4
Denise: 21 years old	Junior High	4, 4	4
Denise's second plan		5, 4, 3	4
Gustav: 21 years old	High School	5, 5, 4, 5	5
Gustav's second plan		5, 5, 5, 5	5
Jimmy: 25 years old	Junior High	4, 4, 5	4
Jimmy's second plan		5, 4, 4	4
Martin: 27 years old	High School	5, 4, 3, 2	4
Martin's second plan		5, 5, 5, 4	5
<b>Sarah: 24 years old</b>	Junior High	2, 5, 5, 3	3
Sarah's second plan		4, 2	3
Vanja: 41 years old	High School	5, 5, 5, 5, 5	5
Vanja's second plan		4, 5, 3, 4	4

The highlighting in bold of Sarah's first lesson plan in table 7 indicates that it was the only lesson where the extra point system came into practice; hers was the only plan that met the requirements described in section 3.2. The results show that most of the teacher trainees'



lesson plans were influenced by a CLT approach. Alexander's second lesson plan was the only one to receive a score of 2 on the chart; the communicative skills were very limited in favor of grammatical focus. Out of the 20 plans, 5 had a score of 3, which would make them wholesome shallow-end CLT lessons. Shallow-end CLT usually consists of both a focus on function and form, with the form part integrated in a larger "meaningful" context (Thornbury, 1999: 22). Moving on, 8 received a score of 4 which makes them dominantly communicative with a limited focus on form. The remaining 6 plans scored 5 on the chart, qualifying for deep-end CLT / natural approach. These were the trainee lessons who completely favored a communicative classroom to the point where they had virtually zero focus on any grammatical form. The Swedish syllabus for English (National Agency for Education [www.skolverket.se]) states that the students should develop their communicative skills by learning the language in a functional way. Receiving a score of 4 or 5, as the majority did means that the lessons in question were indeed functional. The five shallow-end CLT lessons ought to also be regarded as functional. Although, with a slightly more regard for form than their higher rank counterparts. Furthermore, another influence behind the high numbers of CLT among the lesson plans could be the trainees' VFU teaching practice supervisor. He was taught Swedish in a natural approach environment. It would not be too far-fetched to assume that his background to some extent has influenced his way of teaching. Furthermore, as Byram stated (2004: 128) both reading and writing exercises can be communicative when they work with interpretations and negotiation of meaning. There were several lessons which had different stages of writing and reception included and ranked rather high on the scale.

The most difficult aspect in the rankings process came from insufficient information in the lesson plan stage descriptions. For instance, during stage 3 in Alicia's first lesson plan the students worked in their workbooks, but the lesson plan simply recorded the student teacher as saying 'I asked the students to work in their workbooks with tasks that related to the chapter'. Nothing is said about the manner of tasks or if they paired up or worked individually. The stage was given a score of 3 since it is in the middle of the chart and therefore would not account for a significant margin of error, whether it was towards function or form. Another complex lesson to rate was Alexander's second. During stage 1 the students received a lecture on verb tenses followed by an exercise where the students got to practice what they just learned. The problem here is that it is not stated whether the exercise had the students talk to each other using sentences with the right verb form or if they did writing exercises like "fill in the gap". The first would be a version of shallow-end CLT, while the



second one leans more heavily towards grammar-translation methods. It was given a score of 2 for limited communicative skills, since it stands to reason to have the students round up that stage with a brief oral exercise before moving on to the next stage, which was purely a grammar focused writing task.

Another thing worth mentioning is that the vast majority of the trainees kept their lesson plans relatively diverse with the number of stages most of the times ranging from 4 to 6. Savignon (1997: 4) stated that it is very important to vary the learning activities. By doing so the odds are higher for the students to stay active and thus become more susceptible to the learning process. It should also be taken into consideration that the lesson time that the trainees had at their disposal differed. Some lessons were 40 minutes long (Denise's second with two stages for instance) while some (like Caroline's second that had two stages) could be up to 90 minutes. Keeping that in mind, it could explain why some lessons had fewer stages than others. Another explanation regarding the uneven number of lesson stages could be that the trainees had different views regarding the importance of filling out the lesson plans in detail. Some were very detailed, others less so. Nonetheless, this paper did not find that the number of stages favored any particular side of the chart. Alexander's second plan with two stages was focused on grammar and received a score of 2. Sarah's second plan favored shallow-end CLT and got a score of 3 with only two stages. Denise's second plan, which also only had two stages, received a score of 4. Caroline's first plan had three stages and qualified for deep-end CLT with a rating of 5. Alicia's second plan had twice that number of lesson stages and yet it received a ranking of 3, for shallow-end CLT.

#### 4.4 Differences between Junior High and High School in terms of Communicative language teaching

As mentioned in section 1.1, the reason behind comparing Junior High with High School was because of the gap in earlier research about teacher trainees' lesson planning in these two school levels. While the curriculum favors a communicative approach in both of them, it would be interesting to see if one could find any difference in practice between them. The next step of the study is therefore to see if there were any notable differences in terms of the average score between Junior High and High School, regarding the extent to which they were influenced by a communicative approach. The numbers in the respective column are the rankings of each lesson plan, as was presented in section 4.3. To calculate their average score here, the individual lesson stages will not be added up and then divided by the number of



stages in a particular lesson plan. Instead the rankings of every plan in Junior High and every plan in High school will be added together (but separate of each other) and divided by the number of plans, which is 10 in both cases.

**Table 8. Level of institution**

<b>Junior High</b>	<b>High School</b>
3	5
3	2
4	5
3	4
4	5
4	5
4	4
4	5
3	5
3	4
<b>Average score</b>	<b>Average score</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>

The lesson plans made for High School appear to favor a communicative approach more than the ones that took place in Junior High. Perhaps this was the case because the High School students often were on such a level that the teacher trainees felt that they could focus more on a particular task than on grammatical rules. The topics of the tasks were oftentimes at a more complex level than their counterparts at Junior High, which of course stands to reason since the students are several years older. Examples of this could be Caroline's lesson that focused on what defined a scary horror story and idioms. Vanja asked her students to create their own fairy-tales. Gustav had a poetry interpretation lesson where the students worked with Lord Tennyson's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. Examples of topics from lessons in Junior High are Denise's favorite actor/actress theme, Jimmy's English speaking countries or Amanda's Job interview exercise. While lessons from High School or Junior High are in no way superior to one another, it might have been easier for the Junior High trainees to incorporate a focus on



form more often because their students accepted it as an ordinary part of the process of language learning. High School students on the other hand, were perhaps more motivated to work with more complex topics, such as the ones mentioned above in addition to societal and race-related themes, which were also included in the lessons plans from High School.



## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to find out to what extent English teacher trainees' lesson plans were influenced by communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches that the Swedish syllabus and the teachers at the author's university advocate. In addition, it also examined if one could draw any conclusions regarding differences concerning the level of institution that the trainees had their work practice at.

The results show that nearly every lesson plan examined did adapt a significant CLT approach; only 1 lesson clearly favored a focus on form. 5 out of 20 positioned themselves as shallow-end CLT, 8 of them received a score of 4, which puts them between deep-end CLT and shallow-end CLT. As such they were predominantly communicative. The remaining 6 clearly adopted a deep-end CLT / Natural approach. These 6 had basically no focus on form at all, the entirety of the lessons revolved around the students using the targeted language to solve the tasks they received from the teacher.

The study also revealed that lessons planned and executed at a High School level were slightly more communicative than their counterparts at Junior High. One reason behind this phenomenon could perhaps be that the language proficiency level of the students there are higher than the one at the lower levels. This could potentially make it easier to come up with more creative activities to do in the classroom. If the proficiency level in a class is very low it could be tempting to fall back on translation- and 'fill-in-the-gap' exercises. Furthermore, if the proficiency is very low it is probably an indication that the students need to learn the basic grammar of the language before moving on towards more creative discussion oriented tasks. If the proficiency in a class is high the students might want to be challenged in more, in their eyes, meaningful exercises.

The conclusion that this paper arrives at is that the English teacher trainees at this training institution regardless of work placement adhere fairly closely to a communicative teaching approach. As stated in section 4.3 the reasons for this could be that they have taken the Swedish syllabus for English teaching to heart, or that they were influenced by the university's courses where a communicative approach is also favored.

The author's personal belief is that a rating of 3 or 4 is ideal. As is stated by Thornbury in section 2.6 a complete exclusion of form focus can easily cause fossilization to occur in the learners' language proficiency. Some of the lesson plans that scored a 5 could potentially be



in the danger zone. That being said, continuously ending up on other end of the scale could be just as harmful to a student's language abilities. Proof of this can be found in decades of research done by Savignon, Canale and Swain, among others. A 'fundamentalist' deep-end CLT approach or grammar-translation methods are both far from optimal in the long process that signifies language teaching. Having a predominantly shallow-end CLT approach, the middle ground between the two above mentioned, should at least in theory make sure that the students get to learn both how to use the target language in a natural way as well as giving them sufficient grammatical skills to build upon as they improve their proficiency.

Regarding the method used, Thornbury's (1999) adapted chart was of great assistance when carrying out the analysis. The choice to examine the author's classmates submitted lesson plans negated the workload that would have derived from transcribing material collected from field studies. This ensured a more thorough attention to the literature review and research on communicative language teaching as a whole. However, one weakness with the chosen method is that there is no template available for rating every stage of a lesson in terms of CLT versus grammar-translation as diametric opposites. Therefore the ratings are exclusively based on the author's understanding of the subject, which make them subjective. However, as was mentioned in section 3.2 the results of this paper should not be seen as something to be applied on every English teacher trainee in the country. It would be preferable to see it as a sample study of an area where little to no research has been carried out. As such, perhaps this paper can promote an interest in the topic of teacher trainees' lesson planning while out in the field.



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## Appendix

### Practical lesson plan

Adapted from the *Teaching Knowledge Test Practical Module*

<b>Student teacher name:</b>			
<b>Level:</b>		<b>Lesson type</b>	
<b>Lesson length:</b>			

**Information about the class:**

**Main aim:**

**Subsidiary aim(s):**

**Personal aim:**

**Materials and tech support:**

**Assumptions:**

<b>Anticipated problems with materials, activities and tasks</b>	<b>Solutions</b>



## Language analysis

Form	Meaning	Phonology	Anticipated problems

## Skills analysis

Skill / subskill	Tasks for skills development	Preparing learners for tasks	Anticipated problems

## Board plan



## Lesson stages (this would easily be a week's lessons)

Stage	Stage aim	Procedure	Interaction	Time






## Letter (email) of consent

Fellow students!

In my bachelor thesis I intend to work with teacher trainees' lesson plans, to see to which extent they are communicative or otherwise. Do I have your consent to use your two plans which you submitted during the five-week teaching practise period? They will be treated anonymously in the paper. Participation is of course voluntarily, you do not have to accept and you also have the option to withdraw your consent during the study. I will then omit your lesson plans from my thesis. In case you do accept and grant me permission to make use of your lesson plans they will be stored on my personal computer and processed only by me. Two randomly selected lesson plans will be presented along with commentary in my paper, the names replaced with pseudonyms. After my thesis has passed I will delete the folder with your lesson plans from my computer.

Please send me an email with your answer.

Kind regards,  
Axel Sjöqvist