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The teaching of writing in three Swedish course books
How writing is taught in comparison to requirements of the national grading criteria

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1. Introduction

Since the introduction of the new curriculum in 2011, Swedish lower secondary students have generally performed worse in writing at the national tests in English than in reading, speaking or listening. As the national tests are a tool to examine how well students nationwide perform according to the curriculum, the test results indicate that students might not be adequately trained in the skill of writing in English as a foreign language. Therefore, it is interesting to analyze how the writing of English is taught in Swedish lower secondary schools.

In the teaching of English in Sweden, course books of various types are one of the most common forms of teaching material. English teachers have expressed a lot of faith in course books and their content and many, especially novice teachers, consider course books to be a guarantee of following the curriculum. Course books therefore often constitute the core of lesson planning and teaching. Yet, studies have shown that course books for the teaching of English as a foreign language (EFL) often tend to be overly focused on grammar and language mechanics (Tomlinson 2012, 143). Furthermore, many schools have been unable to upgrade their course books to post-2011 publications due to the lack of sufficient financial resources, leaving both teachers and students with outdated material. This leaves the question of whether the course books currently in use offer the necessary input for students to develop the skills required by the syllabus for writing in English.

The aim of this study is therefore to analyze how well course books currently in use align with the national grading criteria for writing in English. In order to investigate this, the writing tasks in three course books that are used in three different Swedish schools have been analyzed. As the national test in English writing proficiency is meant to cover most of the criteria within English writing it was used as a comparison for the writing tasks in the course books. Before further describing the study in section 4, I will first outline the aim in section 2, followed by background information and the theoretical framework in section 3. The results will then be presented in section 5 and discussed in section 6. The study is summarized in a conclusion in section 7.

2. Aim

The aim of this essay is to establish if the writing assignments in three English course books for years 7-9 adequately prepare students to fulfill the national grading criteria for writing by comparing them to the assignment in the national test for English writing proficiency. By working as an English teacher in Sweden over the last 3 years I have sometimes struggled to find appropriate material for the teaching of writing in the course books provided, often having to create material on my own in order to meet the requirements of the curriculum. Often writing tasks in the course books tended to be too focused on the mechanics of language rather than the content. Furthermore, tasks were often very short and only focused on the product rather than process of writing. As the national tests are meant to test students' abilities and competencies in relation to the national grading criteria, I hypothesize that course books, especially older ones, do not adequately prepare students for the current national test in English writing proficiency.

In order to investigate the different writing tasks in the course books it will be necessary to categorize them according to their functions. For this purpose, the categorization systems of Kern (2002) and Hyland (2003) will be used which are addressed in further detail in section 3.2.3. With this said, the research questions this study attempts to answer are:

1. Which type of writing task, according to Kern's categorization system, is practiced the most in each of the course books?
2. Which type of writing skill, according to Hyland's categories, is practiced the most in each of the course books?
3. Which of the four main approaches to writing (see section 3.2.2.1) dominate in each course book?
4. How do the tasks in the course books correspond to the tasks in the national tests for English writing proficiency and the national grading criteria?

3. Background

This section is divided into three parts. Section 3.1 consists of background information about the place of English as a subject within the Swedish curriculum. Section 3.2 is concerned with the theoretical framework used for this study while section 3.3 provides an outline of previous research on the study of writing tasks in course books.

3.1 English in Sweden

Three aspects that relate to English as a subject in the Swedish curriculum will be discussed below. First, the Swedish school system, the national curriculum and the English syllabus will be briefly outlined. This will be followed by an account of the role and use of national tests for the teaching and grading of English. Finally, there will be a discussion of the use of English course books in Swedish schools.

3.1.1 The national curriculum and English syllabus in Sweden (2011)

The Swedish school system includes nine years of compulsory school. These nine years are divided into three stages; primary school (years one to three), middle school (years four to six) and lower secondary school (years seven to nine). Every subject has a syllabus for each of the three school stages and with grading criteria for years six and nine. However, the grading criteria are applied throughout all three years of each respective stage, meaning that throughout middle school and lower secondary school, students are assessed according to the grading criteria for year six and nine respectively. Students therefore have three years to show their abilities in relation to the grading criteria before the final grade is set in each subject.

In Sweden, English is taught from grade one and upward. The English syllabus consists of three parts: the purpose of the subject, a core content and grading criteria. The grading criteria consist of certain skills and abilities the students must have shown to receive a certain grade. Criteria exist for the grades E, C and A in year six and nine, E being the minimum pass grade. To be given one of the grades all criteria for this grade must have been reached.

There are nine main grading criteria for the subject of English by year nine. Out of the nine main grading criteria, four can be linked to writing as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The national grading criteria for writing in English for grades E, C and A (Skolverket 2011b, 37-38).

E	C	A
In oral and written production, pupils can express themselves simply, understandably and relatively	In oral and written production, pupils can express themselves in relatively varied ways, relatively clearly and relatively	In oral and written production, pupils can express themselves in relatively varied ways,

coherently.	coherently. Pupils express themselves also with some ease and to some extent adapted to purpose, recipient and situation.	clearly and coherently. Pupils express themselves with ease and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation.
To clarify and vary their communication, pupils can work on and make simple improvements to their communications.	To clarify and vary their communication, pupils can work on and make well grounded improvements to their own communications.	To clarify and vary their communication, pupils can work on and make well grounded improvements to their own communications.
In oral and written interaction in different contexts, pupils can express themselves simply and understandably and also to some extent adapted to purpose, recipient and situation.	In oral and written interaction in different contexts, pupils can express themselves clearly and with some ease and with some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation.	In oral and written interaction in different contexts, pupils can express themselves clearly and with ease, and also with some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation.
In addition, pupils can choose and apply basically functional strategies which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction.	In addition, pupils can choose and use functional strategies to solve problems and improve their interaction.	In addition, pupils can choose and apply well functioning strategies to solve problems and improve their interaction and take it forward in a constructive way.

3.1.2 National tests in English

Every year Swedish third, sixth and ninth graders have to take mandatory national tests in various subjects, the number of subjects increasing with the level of education. The tests are provided by Skolverket, the Swedish Ministry of Education, and are the same for every student nationwide. At the end of year three, six and nine, students are assessed according to how well they have reached the goals and criteria in the respective syllabus. The point of national tests, according to Skolverket, is therefore to provide support for teachers for both assessment and grading in order to reach a more equivalent level of student assessment and grading in the country (Skolverket 2017). With each test follows a set of instructions and examples for assessment which illustrate the grading criteria tested in that particular test. Depending on the test there are also various student answers provided and assigned a certain grade to assist assessment. This provides teachers with an estimation of what qualities are assigned a certain

grade level and how the criteria should be interpreted according to Skolverket. The type of test tasks also provide insight into what students are expected to be able to perform by year three, six and nine respectively, which can help teachers plan their teaching accordingly. Until recently, the tests were supposed to only support teachers in student assessment, and teachers were therefore supposed to use the results of the national tests in combination with each student's performance throughout the years when grading (Skolverket 2014). However, as of November 15, 2017, the government has decided that the national test is to be taken into account to a greater extent than before when setting the final grade (SOU 2016:25).

The national test in English consists of three subtests covering speaking (test A), reading and listening (test B) and writing (test C). Since the introduction of the new curriculum in 2011, national tests following that curriculum have been conducted for five consecutive years starting in the school year of 2012/2013. The statistics of 2016/2017 have not yet been published (Skolverket 2016). As can be seen in Table 2 below, writing proficiency has had the highest fail rate all but once, in 2014/2015, and has had the lowest percentage of the highest grade, A, in all four years.

Table 2. Compilation of the test results for the grades F and A of all students that participated (c. 90% of all 9th grade students/year) in the national English writing proficiency tests between 2013-2016 (Skolverket 2016, Provresultat i grundskolan). Entries in percent.

Grade	2012/2013			2013/2014		
	Test A speaking	Test B reading listening	Test C writing	Test A speaking	Test B reading listening	Test C writing
F	3.6	4.9	5.8	3.2	4.8	5.5
A	17.2	23.7	12.8	20.3	20.6	14.2
	2014/2015			2015/2016		
	Test A speaking	Test B reading listening	Test C writing	Test A speaking	Test B reading listening	Test C writing
F	3.2	6.6	5.5	2.3	7.4	13.1
A	23.9	22.0	17.1	18.2	13.3	8.5

The results raise the question of whether the students are properly trained in English writing skills in relation to the performance required by the syllabus.

The writing test usually consists of a single writing assignment explicitly testing the first and third of the above-mentioned grading criteria. The second and fourth criteria are not explicitly tested but the test still allows for it to be part of the assessment (Bedömningsanvisningar Part C - Writing 2012/2013). The national test in English writing proficiency can therefore be said to cover all writing criteria in the English syllabus to some extent.

3.1.3 The use of English course books in Sweden

Course books constitute a common form of teaching material. According to Tomlinson (2012) however, there has been a lively debate among experts over the last three decades on whether traditional course books are the best tool to learn a language. He also points out that, despite the criticism towards the use of course books by experts, language teachers continue using them (Tomlinson 2012,157-158). This seems to also be the situation in Sweden. According to a study conducted by Skolverket (the Swedish Ministry of Education) course books are a common form of teaching material in Swedish EFL classes. Among the 472 English teachers in the study, 56 percent answered that they use a course book every or almost every lesson, making course books the most common form of teaching material (Skolverket 2006, 70). Many of the teachers interviewed also stated that the textbook constitutes the core of their teaching, as lessons are both planned and executed in accordance with it (2006, 72). One of the reasons for relying heavily on course books that was mentioned by teachers is that they experience following a textbook as a safe way of teaching, as course books seem to cover all important aspects of language learning. This makes teachers feel like course books are a guarantee for following the syllabus and curriculum. Overall, teachers expressed that they mostly believe that course books provide appropriate learning material and trust them to be in line with the national test, syllabus, curriculum and grading criteria (2006, 73-74).

Considering the extensive use of course books in Swedish classrooms and the trust teachers put in them it is worth noting that teaching materials, including course books, do not undergo any formal control by the government anymore. Until 1991 course books were checked

by government institutions to ensure they would be in line with the curriculum. As the institutions responsible for checking course books were shut down, the mandatory surveying of course books vanished as well. After 1991 the possibility of surveying course books was passed on to the newly-founded Skolverket. Unlike its predecessors, Skolverket surveys course books only in retrospect and has no actual responsibility to examine course books at all. The responsibility of surveying course books for their suitability has instead been passed down to teachers at an individual level (Skolverket 2015a). Yet, the most common factor named by English teachers for the choice of textbook is the school's financial resources, making it a higher-ranking factor than students' needs (Skolverket 2006, 80). Therefore, not all schools have been able to upgrade to new course books that are modeled to fit the 2011 curriculum. Out of the three schools providing course books for this study only one had made the switch to a course book published after 2011.

3.2 Theory

This section presents the theoretical framework of this study. Section 3.2.1 deals with the development of teaching materials such as course books and how it may influence teaching procedure. Section 3.2.2 is concerned with how approaches to writing, feedback and assessment may influence the teaching of writing. Finally, 3.2.3 provides an account of Kern's (2002) and Hyland's classification systems for writing tasks that were used in this study.

3.2.1 Materials development

Teaching materials are an essential part in the teaching of writing (Hyland 2003, 85). Different forms of teaching materials, mostly paper-based, are widely used to stimulate, model and support writing. These materials provide most of the exposure to written language students receive in a classroom environment, which is why the choice of material is important for the learning process (Hyland 2003, 85). Tomlinson (2012) states that to provide all types of learners with the input they need to learn a language, teaching materials should be informative, instructional, experiential, eliciting and exploratory. Unfortunately, the majority of commercially-produced materials tend to mainly focus on informing students about language features and instructing them on how to use and practice these features (Tomlinson 2012, 143). Hyland (2003, 101-102)

agrees that teaching materials in writing tend to lack one or more of the elements required to write successfully.

There are various factors that might influence the design of teaching material. One is which theoretical approach to learning the producer had in mind, as different approaches have different views on the learning process. Another might be what is expected to be provided by teachers in terms of feedback and assessment. This will be explored in more detail in the next section.

3.2.2 Teaching and assessing writing skills

Writing is a complex skill. There are a lot of different aspects to learning how to produce effective texts. There are also various teaching practices, all highlighting different aspects of writing, around which writing classes and teaching material can be arranged. Depending on the practice, writing is both taught and learned differently. The choice of teaching practice also affects assessment and how feedback is provided by teachers, as different practices require different levels and forms of input.

3.2.2.1 Approaches to writing

A lot of different theories and methodologies about L2 writing and learning have emerged since EFL/ESL writing became an individual area of study back in the 1980s. Many of those theories have come to complement rather than oppose one another, which is why Hyland refers to them as “complementary and overlapping perspectives, representing potentially compatible means of understanding the complex reality of writing” (2003, 2). Hyland goes on to point out that one specific approach to writing might still dominate in the classroom but parts of other approaches and theories are often still used as a complement (2003, 2). Four commonly referred to approaches to writing are process, product, genre and context (Badger & White 2000; Lin 2017), which will be outlined in the paragraphs below.

The process-based writing approach focuses on the actual process of writing. Badger and White (2000) refer to Tribble (1996), who stresses that process writing approaches are about “writing activities which move learners from the generation of ideas and the collection of data through to the ‘publication’ of a finished text” (154). Despite there being different process approaches in existence they still tend to have that aspect in common. Furthermore, they also

tend to mostly deal with linguistic skills like planning and drafting and less with linguistic knowledge such as grammar or text structures. In most process approaches, learners are also considered to go through four stages while producing a written text: prewriting, composing or drafting, revising and editing. These four stages are cyclical. Writers may return to earlier stages and restart the process. In process approaches, teachers are also primarily supposed to facilitate learners' writing, to draw out their potential, rather than providing input, as learners are thought to develop skills rather than learn them (Badger & White 2000, 154).

The product approach focuses on a coherent arrangement of words, clauses and sentences. Learning to write, according to this view, therefore focuses on linguistic knowledge, vocabulary choices, syntax and cohesive devices (Badger & White 2000, 153). It consists of four stages: familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing and free writing. During the familiarization stage students are taught certain features of a text type which they then practice during the controlled and guided writing stages. The students practice with increasing freedom until they are ready for the free writing stage where they can use the learned skill in a genuine activity such as letter writing. Product-based approaches view writing as mainly concerned with knowledge about language structure, and writing development as mainly the result of imitation of input provided by teachers (Badger & White 2006, 154).

The genre approach is a relatively new addition to the teaching of English. Genre approaches are in many ways similar to product approaches as they regard writing as being mainly about linguistics. However, genre approaches also emphasize that writing varies with the social context in which it is produced. Genre is closely connected to purpose, as different kinds of writing such as recipes or law reports fulfil a different kind of purpose. Genre is also influenced by subject matter and the relationship between writer and reader. So, even though genre approaches are concerned with knowledge of language as in the product approaches, genre approaches are also intimately concerned with the social purpose of writing (Badger & White 2000, 155-156).

Context-model approaches are also fairly new to teaching English as a foreign language. Lin (2017, 142) claims that writing in English as a second or foreign language is simultaneously a cognitive, social and intercultural activity. To compose a text, the writer needs knowledge of the English language that is required for the particular text, knowledge of the writing process of how to construct a text, knowledge of the genre the text belongs to as well as knowledge of the

context that involves the reader's expectation, cultural preference and related texts. Different cultures perceive the same situation or the same text differently. It is therefore of great importance that writers have an understanding of their target group and relevant discourse. For their text to be accepted, writers have to be able to adapt to different circumstances, to different contexts. This is in many ways similar to the genre-based approaches. However, while the genre-based approaches are understood from the perspective of the written product, the context-model approach is conceived from the perspective of the learner. The context-model approach is therefore more focused on the learners' agency (Lin 2017, 142-144).

Depending on which of these approaches dominate the teaching of writing, the skills students acquire may differ. As all Swedish 9th graders are required to also partake in the same writing proficiency test, their chances of succeeding can be closely tied to which writing skills they were previously provided with. Because course books are the most common teaching material in Swedish schools they provide a starting point for analyzing how writing in English is taught. By comparing the writing tasks in the course books to the task in the national writing proficiency test it can provide insight into how well-adjusted the course books are to the curriculum in terms of writing.

3.2.2.2 Feedback

According to Hyland (2003, 177), providing feedback is often seen as one of the EFL writing teacher's most important tasks, as it provides the kind of individualized attention that is otherwise rarely possible under normal classroom conditions. Feedback on a written task can be provided in different ways, the most common one being written feedback by the teacher, followed by oral feedback and peer-reviewing. However, the effectiveness of teacher feedback to improve students' writing is highly dependent on its quality and understandability. There has been very little research on feedback in second or foreign language writing tasks, but what has been learned from feedback in first language exercises is that too often feedback tends to be too vague and too form-focused to be useful for students to improve their writing (Hyland 2003, 178). This is also suggested by Cohen and Cavalcanti (1990, 160-165), who found a discrepancy between teachers' and students' beliefs of what students need in order to improve their writing. While teachers were more concerned with mechanics, grammar and organization, students wished for more feedback on content. It has also been shown that the type of feedback teachers

choose to focus on is what students learn to be most important when writing a text, which is why it is very important that the feedback reflects the curriculum rather than their own ideas (Kern 2002, 267). It has also been shown that teacher feedback in the early stages of writing seems to lead to improvement in subsequent drafts in both first and second language writing (Hyland 2003, 177-179). This indicates that teacher input is a relevant factor to consider when examining how students learn to write, as, in one way or another, it affects their learning. As this study only focuses of the input provided by writing tasks in course books I am not able to include other factors, such as feedback, that can affect the learning process.

3.2.2.3 Assessment

Evaluating student performance is a crucial aspect of teaching. Assessment provides data that can be used to measure student progress, identify problems, suggest instructional solutions and evaluate course effectiveness (Hyland 2003, 212). However, assessing students' writing reliably has proven to be rather difficult. As writing is a complex activity in which students draw on a wide range of knowledge and skill, it is unlikely for the same individual to perform equally well on different occasions and tasks. Furthermore, assessing writing involves subjective judgement, which means that an assessment of the same text may vary between different teachers. To make assessment as reliable as possible, all assessors must agree on the rating of the same learner performance and each assessor must assess the same performance in the same way on different occasions (Hyland 2003, 215-216).

The main objective of the national tests is to increase reliability in assessment among teachers nationwide. By assessing the produced texts according to the provided instructions, teachers may reflect on their regular assessment of their students' writing and to what extent it corresponds to the standard set by the Skolverket.

Another crucial aspect of assessment besides reliability is validity. For an assessment task to be valid it must assess what it claims to assess and what has been taught. For example, it is not considered valid if students are asked to write in a genre they have never studied (Hyland 2003, 217). For national tests in writing to be valid it is therefore necessary for students to have been taught what is required of them in the test. For students to have an equal chance they must have had equal training. As students learn with different materials, this is not necessarily the case. By

examining the writing tasks in in-use course books, this study will shed further light on the equality or inequality in the practice of the writing skill.

3.2.3 Writing tasks

Different types of writing tasks are a fundamental part of the process of learning to write, as they focus on different aspects of writing. Therefore, tasks can be categorized according to their function. The study of writing tasks in Swedish EFL course books is therefore a good start to examine if the practice of writing is in line with the national test and the curriculum.

As tasks have been of great interest within the fields of language learning and curriculum design (Hyland 2003,112), the functions of writing tasks have been thoroughly analyzed. For this study, a combination of Hyland's (2003) and Kern's (2002) classification system will be used, as they, in combination, cover a wide range of task types that can be found in writing.

3.2.3.1 Hyland's task types

Hyland (2003) starts by dividing writing tasks into two categories: real-world tasks and pedagogic tasks. While real-world tasks are based on the learner's communicative goals, pedagogic tasks are designed to improve the student's knowledge about genre and composition skills. Hyland (2003, 113) emphasizes that these tasks are best learned in combination with each other, so students are able to see the link between the tasks assigned and their communicative goals.

To effectively classify different tasks used in the second or foreign language classes Hyland divided them further into five categories. The five categories signify the areas of writing knowledge students need to possess to create effective texts: content, system, process, genre and context. In order to create an effective text, students need to know what to write about and what to address (content), as well as knowledge of the appropriate language forms for the particular text (system), the process of drafting and revising (process), communicative purposes (genre) and readers' expectations (context). Tasks are categorized according to which of the five above mentioned areas of writing the specific task is designed to improve (Hyland 2003, 113-114).

3.2.3.2 Kern's task types

Kern (2002, 191) bases his classification system on the most common types of writing tasks and activities in foreign language classrooms. He places those activities on a continuum as can be seen in Figure 1 below, where form-focused tasks can be found on the left end and content-focused task on the right end.

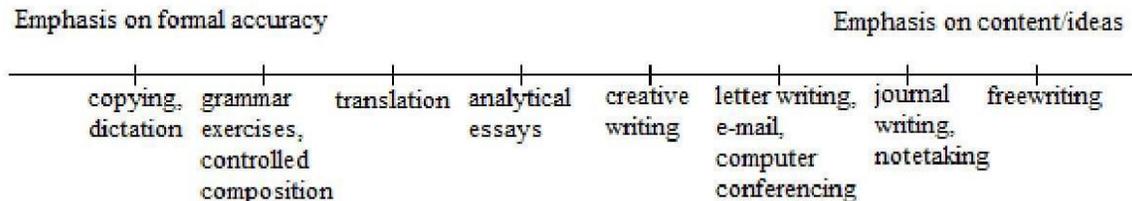


Figure 1. Continuum of writing activity types in language teaching by Kern (2002).

The continuum ranges from strictly controlled transcription exercises to “freewriting” activities in which students are encouraged to write down whatever comes to mind. Within these two extremes, Kern (2002, 191) explains, lie the most common writing activities found in foreign language classrooms. Each one of these activities demands a particular level of language proficiency, which is why beginners tend to engage in activities found on the left end of the spectrum.

The more form-focused tasks such as copying, dictation, grammar exercises or translation tend to focus more on grammar, vocabulary and mechanics, especially in workbook exercises. Analytical essays, found towards the middle of the continuum, focus on various aspects of the former but also emphasize knowledge of genre. Creative or free writing tasks allow learners to experiment with the language and give them a chance to express themselves (Kern 2002, 191-194). In other words, while Hyland (2003) categorizes writing tasks according to which skill they are meant to develop, Kern (2002) categorizes them according their real-life purposes outside the classroom environment and the amount of language proficiency the task requires in order to be successfully executed.

3.3 Previous research

Although there has been little research in this area published internationally, many students before me have examined teaching/learning materials from different angles. Asunmaa (2015)

analyzed writing tasks in Finnish course books, using the categorizations provided by Hyland (2003) and Kern (2002) to find out what type of writing skills and texts are practiced in classrooms. Asunmaa (2015) found, despite the curriculum's lack of instruction on how to teach writing, the tasks and skills practiced in the two course books analyzed to be remarkably similar. Both books prioritized analytical writing tasks, focusing on the middle between form and content focused tasks, while also stressing the content and process skills. Kobayakawa (2011) conducted a quantitative study of writing tasks in course books used to teach English in Japan. Kobayakawa (2011) categorized the writing tasks in a similar way to Kern's (2003) classification system, finding that the course books were dominated by gap-fills, controlled writing and translation exercises. As this was not in line with the instructions provided by the Japanese government on how writing courses were supposed to be designed, Asunmaa (2015) concluded that Japanese teachers needed to complement the writing tasks provided by the course books with material focused on free writing activities.

4. Material and Method

In this section, the course books and the national test that were analyzed will be presented (section 4.1) followed by a method section with an overview of the categorizations used to analyze the material (section 4.2).

4.1 Material

Three course books from three different schools were selected for this study. In order to gain insight in how writing is taught in Swedish schools, the main criteria for selection was that the course books had to be in current use at local schools at lower secondary school level. Therefore, their date of publication did not matter in the selection as long as they were actively being used. This resulted in one course book from 2004, one from 2005 and a digital one that is constantly updated, which is why its publication date is given as 2017.

Years seven to nine have the same syllabus and grading criteria. Therefore, all course books for lower secondary school are supposed to prepare students to meet the same criteria, no matter which of the three years it was designed for. To cover all three years of lower secondary school I have chosen one course book from three different series for each year, one for year seven, one for year eight and one for year nine. My selection of course books consists of *Digilär*

Engelska Year 7 (2017) for year seven, *Happy Workbook No. 2* (2005) for year eight and *Good Stuff D Workbook* (2004) for year nine. All course books include texts, grammar and listening exercises that were not included in this study. The material that was included in the study is explained in 4.1.1-4.1.3. As the course books together cover all three years of lower secondary school, a progression of the tasks' complexity and difficulty between year seven and year nine is to be expected as the students become older and more experienced. The age group towards which each of the course books is aimed has therefore been taken into account in the analysis and discussion of the results.

For comparison of the tasks I have used the only available national test for English writing proficiency (test C) for year nine since the introduction of the 2011 curriculum. The national test in writing proficiency constitutes a good comparison, as it tests the grading criteria for English writing in year nine. Even though the content of the test changes every year it always examines the same criteria. As the grading criteria are the same for years seven to nine, the test is also comparable to all three course books.

4.1.1 *Digilär Engelska Year 7*

Digilär is a completely digital and an all-in-one solution that includes texts, exercises, audio recordings and special aid tools. A major difference between *Digilär* and printed resources is that *Digilär*'s material is updated and improved over time and is hence dated 2017 for this study. Therefore, it is also important to remember that the *Digilär* material used in this study might be changed in the future.

When students log on to the platform they can choose a subject, in this case English year 7-9. After that students must choose what year to access, as all three are available. For this study only year seven was used. At the time of this study, year 7 included six main sections with different themes: Stars and Fame, Food and Cooking, Dreams and Sleep, Clothes and Fashion, Money and Pirates. Within the main sections there are also specific grammar chapters provided that students can work with. There is also a theme called "English speaking countries" that has chapters within each section throughout year 7. Beyond the main section, students have access to a library offering grammar guides and exercises, diagnostic tests, further reading material, listening activities and other extra materials. Each of the six main theme sections include between three to five chapters that in some way deal with the current theme. Each chapter starts

with a text which may vary in length and is available in a standard and advanced version. Each chapter includes several different types of exercises. For this study, only the exercises linked to every chapter within year 7 were of interest.

4.1.2 *Happy Workbook No. 2*

Happy Workbook No. 2 was published in 2005 as part of the *Happy* series and is aimed at 8th graders. The workbook is complemented with a textbook and an audio CD. Other complementary publications are available, such as the Handy Helper, another workbook with even more exercises and diagnostic tests. Only the workbook was used in this study.

The workbook consists of nine sections. Section one to eight correspond to texts in the textbook. Section nine deals with basic grammar and is therefore independent of the textbook. The exercises in each of the eight main sections vary in difficulty, starting simple then slowly increasing in difficulty. The type of exercises also vary, but recurring tasks are crossword puzzles, gap-fills, reading and listening comprehension, and different writing exercises.

4.1.3 *Good Stuff D Workbook*

Good Stuff D Workbook was published in 2004 and is the fourth book in the *Good Stuff* series aimed at 9th graders. *Good Stuff D Workbook* consists of a textbook, workbook and audio material. For this study only the workbook was of interest as it contains all of the tasks. The workbook consists of eight sections which correspond to the eight themes in the textbook. Each section consists of four to five subjects which correspond to a text found within each theme in the textbook. Each subject includes a varying number of tasks, ranging from only six in some to twelve in others. The tasks are often similar for the different subjects, including gap-fills, speaking exercises, reading comprehension and so forth. Some chapters end with a “Pick & Choose” where students can choose among different types of extra tasks. These tasks were not included, as it would be impossible to determine which task students would choose.

4.1.4 The National Test: *Our Time – My Story*

The national test used for comparison is *Our Time - My Story* (2013) (see Appendix). So far, no further national tests from after 2011 in writing proficiency have been released by Skolverket, limiting my selection to the test mentioned above.

The test consists of one single assignment in which the students are required to compose a text. The test assignment requires the students to write a certain type of text. *In Our Time - Our Story* students are asked to write a story about themselves and the time they live in for Life Story Archives, to contribute to a story collection about what life in the 21st century is like. Students are required to write between 250 and 500 words and include a description of their life, an explanation of how different styles and trends influence them and a discussion of one or two issues that are important to them or other people now or in the future.

4.2 Method

To create an initial categorization of the task types presented within each textbook, Kern's (2002) list of the most common task types from his continuum from form-focused to content-focused was used (see section 3.2.3.2). The initial categorization of writing tasks presented in the course books will follow the same arrangement. Because tasks were categorized according to their placement on the continuum, if two or more types of tasks were located on the same place like, for example, copying and dictation, they counted as only one category (see Table 3).

As Swedish lower secondary students work at a lower academic level than Kern's continuum might have been intended for, some adjustments had to be made. The adjustments mainly affected the length of the tasks. Translation exercises, for example, never exceeded more than a few sentences at a time. Analytical essays, creative writing exercises or letters usually could be completed within the span of a single page. Many tasks also provided suggestions or examples of how to start or what to include. The focus has therefore been on the tasks intent of practice rather than their academic level. Furthermore, one extra category had to be added. Due to the level of control some of the more creative writing task exhibited, the category 'Creative controlled composition' was created and placed between translation and analytical essays.

To be included in the skill category of writing, a task needed to practice the creation of text in some way. Typically, this included the students having to write more than one word. However, gap-fills, tasks that asked students to combine different parts of sentences or rearrange scrambled sentences were considered an exception to this, as it still requires students to understand and analyze the text systematically to complete the task. Furthermore, instructions had to in some way indicate the creation of a written product. In cases where the instructions required, for example, a presentation, without specifying any form of written product, the

assignment was not included. If the instructions provided an option of a written presentation or another piece of writing, the assignment was included.

In order to assign the tasks in a consistent manner, subcategories were created to further specify the tasks content: see Table 3. Tasks in the category ‘Copying, dictation’ only required students to write down an already completed text, meaning they would not actually have to create a text of their own. ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’ included different forms of gap-fill, both with alternatives to choose from and those without any help, as well as the combining of phrases into sentences and tasks that strictly controlled what was to be written. ‘Translation’ included tasks in which students are asked to translate phrases or sentences into the other language. Both Swedish to English and English to Swedish were therefore included. Single-word translations were not included as they focus on vocabulary rather than writing. ‘Creative controlled composition’ is the extra category that was added. It included freer writing tasks than those in the ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’ category, yet not as free as analytical essays or creative writing tasks. While being very specific about what to write about, these tasks also tend to provide structure and examples of how to write. The category of ‘Analytical essay’ requires some form of analysis or discussion of a topic. Writing tasks that were also included are those requesting students to take a stance about a certain topic and motivate their position. ‘Creative writing’ included tasks that were freer and often only required a certain genre or topic. The category of ‘Letter writing, e-mail, computer conferencing’ included tasks that are specified to be written as letters or emails. ‘Journal writing, notetaking’ included, for example, tasks that required students to write diary entries. For a task to be included in the category of ‘Freewriting’ the task had to not give any instructions on what to write about or how.

Table 3. Sub-categorizations used for further specification of Kern’s categories.

Main category	Sub-category	Examples of writing tasks
Copying, dictation	Write down a completed text	Write the phrases from the text into your notebook
Grammar exercises, controlled composition	Gap-fills Combine phrases Tasks that clearly specify what has to be written	Write the following sentence in another way, explain the words, write five sentences about...

		use the Internet to find information/answers to the following questions.
Translation	Translate phrases/sentences into Swedish/English	Translate the phrases into English
Creative controlled composition	Write short texts based on other material, rewrite an existing text in another way	Use the internet to find information about... and write a short text about it, rewrite the dialogue, continue the story, write about one of the following, write a summary.
Analytical essays	Analyze or discuss a topic Choose a side and argue for it	Discuss an issue that is important to you
Creative writing	Freer tasks that may require a topic or genre	Write an advertisement, write a story, make up an interview between...
Letter writing, email, computer conferencing	Letters Postcards Emails	Write a letter to Pamela expressing your sympathy
Journal writing, notetaking	Diary entries	Write a diary entry for the night before a test
Freewriting	Tasks without instructions on what or how it has to be written	Take a look at the picture and write about anything that comes to mind

To establish which writing skills the different tasks intend to develop, Hyland's (2003) classification system was applied (see section 3.2.3.1). As Hyland's (2003) classification system is aimed at writing courses rather than writing as a part of second language learning, some adjustments had to be made here as well. Even though Hyland provides a list of tasks categorized according to their pedagogic function, it proved difficult to apply it to the tasks found in a course book at lower secondary school level. Therefore, the intention of each task was analyzed to decide which skill it practiced. If students were asked to write in a certain genre, like an article, a

fairytale or a letter it was classified as practicing the genre skill. If the text that was to be written had a specific audience or was intended for a specific purpose or situation it was considered to practice context. If the task required several steps, such as an information search, analyzing a text or creating mind maps before the actual writing, it was considered to practice the process skill. However, Hyland added process as a skill trained when practicing various text types, as he presumably considered students to have the opportunity to rewrite and develop their texts. This is not often the case in course book exercises, which is why these types of task were considered to practice the process skill only if the instructions mentioned several steps in the writing process. Tasks that provided instructions on the content of the text were considered to practice the content. Finally, tasks that required certain words or phrases to be included, outlined a clear structure or focused on the basic construction of sentences were classified as focusing on the system skill. Gap-fills and translation exercises were included in this category as both task types focus on the system of language. It is also worth mentioning that it is likely for one and the same task to practice several different skills, which means that the same task might be represented in more than one of Hyland's categories.

In both *Digilär Engelska Year 7* and *Happy Workbook No. 2* students were sometimes given the chance to choose between two writing assignments. If the assignments differed in character, both were categorized separately, meaning they were listed as two assignments quantitatively. In cases where students could, for example, either choose to write a letter to their mother or father, but the rest of the task was the same, the assignment was categorized as one.

5. Results

This section is divided into five subsections. First, the analysis of the three course books are presented in their own respective subsections (5.1-5.3). This is then followed by a comparative subsection (5.4) where the results of subsections 5.1-5.3 are reviewed in relation to each other. The last subsection (5.5) consists of an analysis of the national test.

Both the course books and the national test are first presented in relation to Kern's categorization and then in relation to Hyland's. The results of both categorizations of the course books will then be used to determine which type of approach within the teaching of writing they lean towards.

5.1 *Digilär Engelska Year 7*

According to the parameters of this study, *Digilär Engelska Year 7* has 85 writing tasks overall. Out of these, 49 are within the course book's 'Main chapters', 11 are found in the extra section 'English speaking countries' and 25 can be found in the associated 'Grammar chapters'. Initially, all writing tasks were categorized according to Kern's (2002) continuum (see Table 4).

Table 4. Writing tasks according to Kern's categories

Category	Main chapters	English speaking countries	Grammar chapters	Total	%
Copying, dictation	0	0	0	0	0
Grammar exercises, controlled composition	23 (10+13)	2 (0+2)	13 (12+1)	38	45
Translation	5	0	12	17	20
Creative controlled composition	8	6	0	15	18
Analytical essays	0	0	0	0	0
Creative writing	11	2	0	13	15
Letter writing, email, computer conferencing	0	1	0	1	1
Journal writing, notetaking	0	0	0	0	0
Freewriting	1	0	0	1	1
Total	49	11	25	85	100

The first category within the continuum is 'Copying, dictation' but no writing tasks fitting that category could be found. The next category, 'Grammar exercises, controlled composition', consists of 38 writing tasks, (45%), which makes it the most represented task type in the course book. The second largest category was 'Translation' with 17 exercises (20%). The extra category created for this study, 'Creative controlled composition', was the third largest category with 15 tasks (18%). No writing tasks that fitted the category of 'Analytical essay' were found. There were 13 tasks (15%) matching the category 'Creative writing'. One task (1%) could

be categorized as ‘Letter writing, e-mail, computer conferencing’, while there were none matching the category ‘Journal writing, notetaking’. One writing task (1%) could be found that fit the category ‘Freewriting’.

Secondly, all writing tasks were analyzed according to Hyland’s five categories of writing skills (see Table 5). The same task could be placed in more than one category depending on which skills it aimed to practice. Out of the 85 writing tasks, 40 (47%) focused on the content skill. This makes content the second most practiced writing skill. The most practiced writing skill is, however, system with 62 tasks (73%). The process skill was practiced in 17 tasks (20%), making it the third most practiced writing skill. The genre skill was practiced in 11 tasks (13%), while the context skill was practiced in 6 tasks (7%).

Table 5. Writing tasks categorized according to Hyland’s writing skills

Category	Main chapters	English speaking countries	Grammar chapters	Total	%
Content	29	11	0	40	47
System	36	1	25	62	73
Process	8	9	0	17	20
Genre	5	6	0	11	13
Context	3	3	0	6	7

As the majority of the tasks focus on formal accuracy and the system skill, *Digilär Engelska Year 7* seems to lean towards a product-based approach.

5.2 *Happy Workbook No. 2*

According to the parameters of this study, *Happy Workbook No. 2* has a total of 156 writing tasks. There are 111 tasks within the course book’s ‘Main chapters’ while 45 can be found in the ‘Grammar chapters’.

No writing tasks could be found to fit Kern’s (2002) first category, ‘Copying, dictation’. Out of the 156 writing tasks, 80 (51%) could be found to qualify within the second category, ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’, making it the most extensive category. The

‘Translation’ category was the second largest category with 32 writing tasks (21%). Altogether 16 tasks (10%) belonged to the ‘Creative controlled composition’ category, while there were no tasks that fit the ‘Analytical essay’ category. There were 19 tasks (12%) found that matched the category of ‘Creative writing’. Furthermore, 6 tasks (4%) matched ‘Letter writing, email, computer conferencing’, 3 tasks (2%) fit ‘Journal writing, notetaking’, while none matched the last category of ‘Freewriting’.

Table 6. Writing tasks according to Kern’s categories

Category	Main chapters	Grammar chapters	Total	%
Copying, dictation	0	0	0	0
Grammar exercises, controlled composition	55 (20+35)	25 (15+10)	80	51
Translation	18	14	32	21
Creative controlled composition	12	4	16	10
Analytical Essays	0	0	0	0
Creative writing	18	1	19	12
Letter writing, email, computer conferencing	6	0	6	4
Journal writing, notetaking	2 (2+0)	1 (1+0)	3	2
Freewriting	0	0	0	0
Total	111	45	156	100

In Table 7 below it is shown that out of 156 tasks in *Happy Workbook No. 2*, 56 (36%) focused on the content of the text making content the second largest category. The most extensive category was system, as 133 tasks (85%) in some way practiced this skill. The process skill was practiced the least with only 5 tasks (3%) focusing on it. Genre was practiced the third most with 22 tasks (14%) focused on it, while 16 tasks (10%) focused on context.

Table 7. Writing tasks categorized according to Hyland’s writing skills

Category	Main chapters	Grammar chapters	Total	%
Content	46	10	56	36
System	89	44	133	85
Process	5	0	5	3
Genre	20	2	22	14
Context	15	1	16	10

While providing some variation among the type of tasks and the skills practiced, *Happy Workbook No.2* also leans towards a product-based approach due to its focus on tasks favoring formal accuracy and the system skill.

5.3 Good Stuff D Workbook

According to the parameters of this study, *Good Stuff D Workbook* has 144 writing tasks overall. Of these 96 are within the course book’s ‘Main chapters’ while 46 can be found in the ‘Grammar chapters’.

As can be seen in Table 8, there were no writing tasks in the course book that fit Kern’s first category of ‘Copying, dictation’. Overall, 76 writing tasks (53%) fit the ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’ category. This makes ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’ the largest category. There were all in all 42 ‘Translation’ exercises (29%) in the course book, while 17 writing tasks (12%) could be categorized into the extra category created for this study, ‘Creative controlled composition’, making it the second and third largest categories respectively. No writing task could be found that fit the category of ‘Analytical essay’ but 6 tasks (4%) could be found to match the category of ‘Creative writing’. Furthermore, 2 tasks (1%) were categorized as ‘Letter writing, e-mail, computer conferencing’, while only one task (1%) was found to match the category of ‘Journal writing, notetaking’. No writing tasks fit the category of ‘Freewriting’.

Table 8. Writing tasks according to Kern's categories

Category	Main chapters	Grammar chapters	Total	%
Copying, dictation	0	0	0	0
Grammar exercises, controlled composition	58 (39+19)	18 (17+1)	76	53
Translation	14	28	42	29
Creative controlled composition	17	0	17	12
Analytical Essays	0	0	0	0
Creative writing	6	0	6	4
Letter writing, email, computer conferencing	2	0	2	1
Journal writing, notetaking	1 (1+0)	0	1	1
Freewriting	0	0	0	0
Total	98	46	144	100

As shown in Table 9 below, out of 142 writing tasks in *Good Stuff D Workbook*, 28 (20%) focused on content in some way, making content the second most practiced of the five skills. The single most practiced skill was system with 139 writing tasks (98%) focused on it. There were 9 tasks (6%) identified as focusing on the process skill, while 15 (11%) focused on genre. Context was the least practiced skill with 4 tasks (3%).

Table 9. Writing tasks categorized according to Hyland's writing skills

Category	Main chapters	Grammar chapters	Total	%
Content	28	0	28	20
System	93	46	139	98
Process	9	0	9	6
Genre	15	0	15	11

Context	4	0	4	3
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Both categorizations show a tendency towards the practice of the systematic use of language within writing, which indicates a product-based approach towards writing.

5.4 Comparative overview of the course books

As can be seen in Figure 2 below, ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’ is the most common type of task in all three course books. Furthermore, it becomes quite clear that all of the course books also favor formal accuracy over more content-based tasks. However, something that is also noticeable is that *Digilär Engelska Year 7*’s distribution of tasks leans more towards complex tasks than *Happy Workbook No. 2* and *Good Stuff D Workbook*, despite being aimed at the youngest age group in lower secondary school, while *Good Stuff D Workbook*, which is aimed at the oldest age group, seems to be the course book with the least focus on complex tasks.

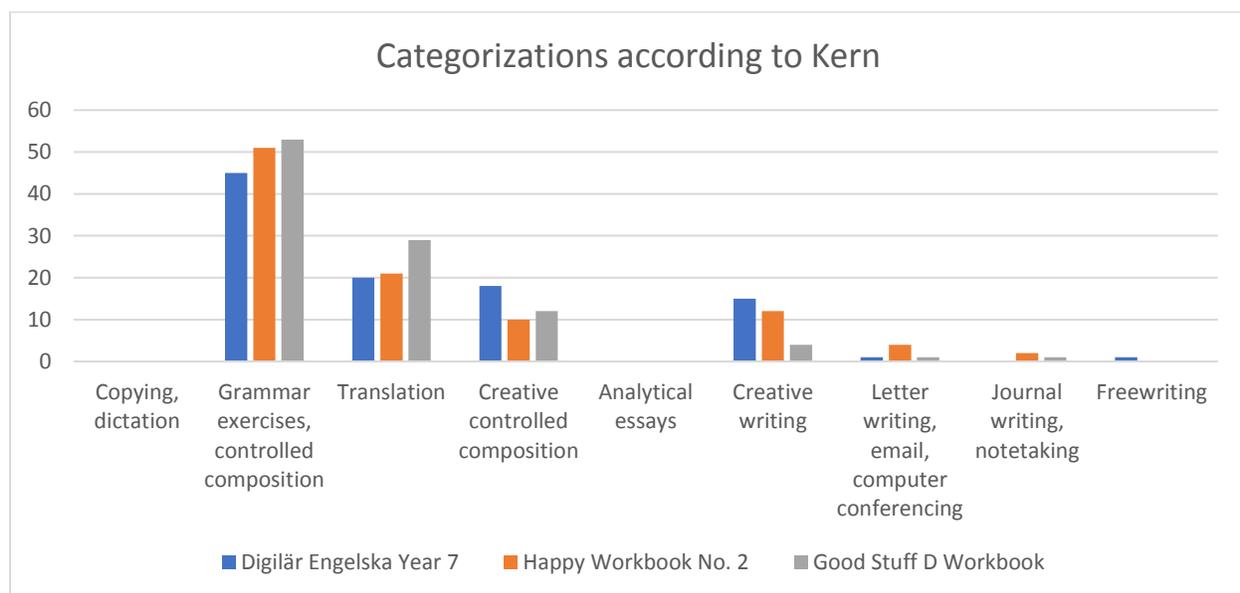


Figure 2. Comparative chart of the categorization according to Kern (2002) of all three course books. Figures in percent.

The distribution of tasks according to Kern’s (2002) categorization in the course books is mirrored in the categorization according to Hyland (2003), as illustrated in Figure 3. The system skill dominates in all of the three course books analyzed, which corresponds to the large amount of ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’ tasks shown in Figure 2. Also, while *Digilär*

Engelska Year 7 has the smallest proportion of system-focused tasks, *Good Stuff D Workbook* has the largest.

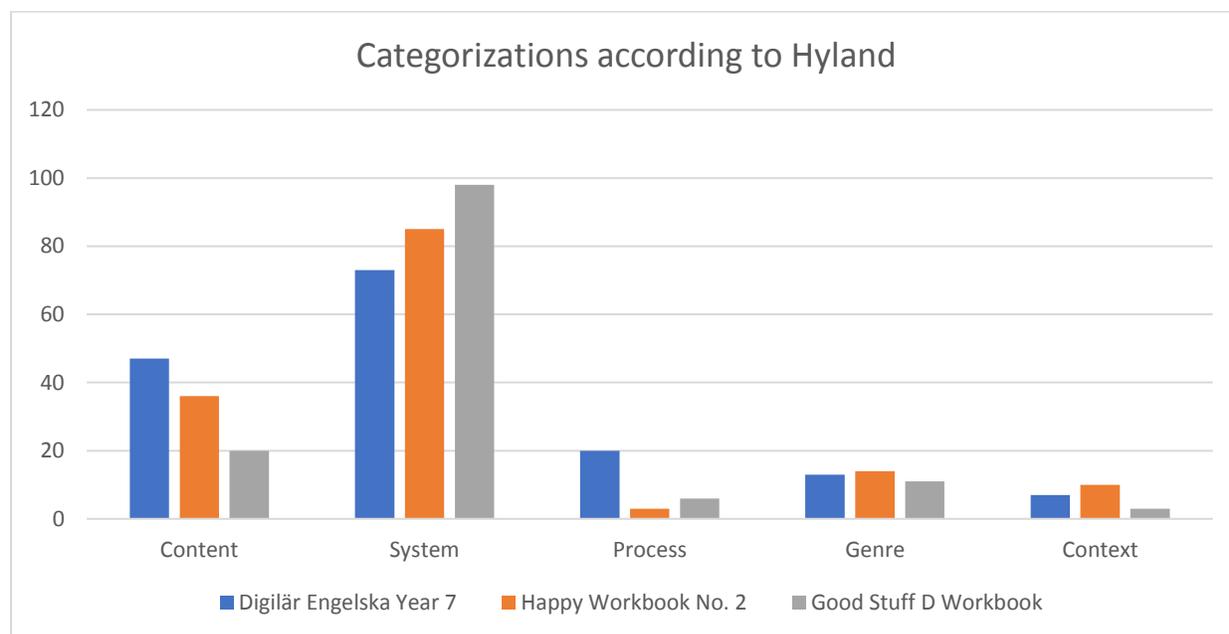


Figure 3. Comparative chart of the categorization according to Hyland (2003) of all three course books. Figures in percent.

5.5 The National Test: *Our Time – My Story*

The national writing proficiency test *Our Time - My Story* (see Appendix) was categorized as an analytical essay within Kern’s continuum. The instructions do not call for an essay per se as they only require the student to “write a text”. However, the instructions propose an essay-like structure and require the students to explain and discuss a certain topic. A certain degree of analytical thinking is required in order to complete the task, especially the part where the students are asked to discuss one or two issues that are important to them or other people, both today and in the future.

The analysis of the assignment revealed that four out of five of the writing skills suggested by Hyland, namely content, context, process and system, were tested. Firstly, the assignment has a clear topic and outlines certain parts that have to be included in order to complete the assignment. Secondly, the instructions provide a clear context, as they outline for whom and for what purpose the text is to be written. Thirdly, the process skill was included, as the instructions encourage the students to plan their text carefully and outline a structure that is

easily built upon within the process of writing. Finally, the system skill was included, as the instructions provide a very clear structure for the text by providing a word count and marking the three parts that have to be included with A, B and C. Furthermore, even though the instructions do not literally include this, it is after all a writing proficiency test and the students will be evaluated on their mastery of the English language, which all students should be aware of before the beginning of the test. The only skill not included was the genre skill. Even though the outlined structure is similar to an essay, the instructions only require the students to “write a text” without further specification of what type of text.

As there is only one national English writing proficiency test available for study, with only one assignment, it could be considered a rather small sample size to decide which approach the tests lean towards in general. However, the tests must be rather similar from year to year in order to be considered reliable and fair. It is therefore likely that the test used in this study is representative of other national writing proficiency tests from since 2011.

As the students will clearly be graded on their writing proficiency and are not allowed to rewrite their text at a later time, there are some product approach aspects built into the basic concept of the test. However, according to the instructions, students also have clear demands on what has to be included in the text, while also providing a basic structure. Furthermore, students are provided with a clear context for the text, as well as an audience and purpose. The national grading criteria, which are also applied in the grading of this test, focus particularly on the adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation (Skolverket 2011, 37-38). These aspects correspond to the context-model approach in which texts are constructed with regard to context, audience, situation and purpose.

6. Discussion

In this section, each of the four research questions will be discussed in the order presented in section 2.

6.1 The dominating writing task according to Kern’s categorizations

The first research question of this study was concerned with what type of task according to Kern’s (2002) categorization is practiced the most in each of the three course books. The results of this study (see section 5) clearly show that ‘Grammar exercises, controlled composition’ is the

most common type of writing task in all three course books. These tasks are located towards the left of Kern's (2002) continuum that focuses on formal accuracy (see section 3.2.3.2). Overall, tasks emphasizing formal accuracy were the most common in all three course books. In the *Good Stuff D Workbook*, 135 writing tasks (94%) were categorized to the left of Kern's (2002) continuum, i.e. with more focus on accuracy, while nine (6%) were categorized to the right, i.e. with more focus on content. In *Happy Workbook No. 2*, the corresponding numbers were 128 (82%) and 28 (18%), and *Digilär Engelska Year 7* had 70 tasks (82%) leaning towards formal accuracy and 15 (18%) leaning towards content. These results are rather interesting as, according to Kern (2002, 191), it is more common for beginners to work with writing tasks that emphasize formal accuracy. Not only does *Digilär Engelska Year 7* and *Happy Workbook No. 2* have the same proportions, even though they are aimed at seventh and eighth graders respectively, but also *Good Stuff D Workbook* actually favors formal accuracy the most, despite being aimed at ninth graders. Rather than a progression, there seems to be a regression in tasks that practice more complex skills.

6.2 The dominating writing skill according to Hyland's categorization

The results discussed in section 6.1 correspond well to the more qualitative analysis that was conducted to answer the second research question about which skill was practiced the most according to Hyland's (2003) categorization. The analysis clearly identified system, which is mostly concerned with formal accuracy and language mechanics, to be the most commonly practiced writing skill in all three course books. The system skill is practiced in 139 tasks (98%) in *Good Stuff D Workbook*, 133 tasks (85%) in *Happy Workbook No. 2* and in 62 tasks (73%) in *Digilär Engelska Year 7*. As a comparison, while the content skill is still the second most practiced skill in all three course books, the number of tasks focusing on it is significantly lower, reaching only 20%, 36% and 48% respectively. This confirms Tomlinson's (2012, 143) statement (see section 3.2.1) that course books tend to often be overly focused on informing students about language features and instructing them how to use them instead of emphasizing the more creative aspects of language learning. This would not constitute a problem if the syllabus emphasized the importance of linguistic knowledge. However, the grading criteria for writing (see section 3.1.1) do not explicitly mention the importance of correct grammar. Instead, focus lies on how the language is used and adapted to different circumstances.

6.3 The dominating writing approaches

The third research question in this study was concerned with which approach to writing dominates in each course book. Despite the fact that the distribution of the type of writing tasks and the skills practiced varies among the three course books, their focus on linguistic knowledge indicates a leaning towards a product approach that focuses on a coherent arrangement of words, clauses and sentences (see section 3.2.2.1). As lower secondary school students still work on a rather basic level of English, it is logical for course books to focus on the mechanics in the language that students need to grasp to be able to successfully communicate. Therefore, it is also understandable that a lot of focus lies on the actual production of text, as it provides the opportunity to practice these mechanics. However, the task in the national test leans toward a context-model approach that stresses writing to be a simultaneously cognitive, social and intercultural activity and therefore requires knowledge of content, genre, context and the writing process (see section 3.2.2.1). As the national test is supposed to test students in accordance to the grading criteria as Skolverket interprets them, it should be safe to say that the grading criteria themselves are modeled on a context-model approach as well. This means that while it is of course essential for students to practice language mechanics, they also need to familiarize themselves with the different aspects of writing in order to fulfill the requirements of the grading criteria. Students would therefore benefit from a greater mixture of the four approaches to writing.

6.4 Comparison of the course books, the national test and grading criteria

The fourth and last research question in this study was concerned with how the tasks in the respective course books correspond to the task in the national test for English writing proficiency.

Digilär Engelska Year 7 is the course book that provides the fewest but most evenly distributed number of tasks among those analyzed. *Digilär Engelska Year 7* is aimed at the youngest group of students at lower secondary school. Kern (2002) noted that beginners tend to usually engage in tasks found more towards the left side of the continuum, i.e. that focus on formal accuracy rather than content. Despite targeting a younger and less experienced group, *Digilär Engelska Year 7* provides a relatively large proportion of content focused tasks, 15 out of

85 (18%). Furthermore, it also gives room for the practice of more complex writing skills, such as content (47%) and process (20%), that are required at the national test. What students might benefit from is the chance to practice writing more often, but considering that the target group has another two school years to develop more complex writing skills *Digilär Engelska Year 7* still provides a solid base for writing skills and the task in the national test in English writing proficiency.

Happy Workbook No. 2 is the course book with the highest number of writing tasks. The majority of tasks focus on the left side of Kern's continuum, emphasizing formal accuracy. Out of the 156 writing tasks, 28 (18%) in the course book are, however, content focused which is the same ratio as for *Digilär Engelska Year 7*. Unlike *Digilär Engelska Year 7*, *Happy Workbook No. 2* is aimed at 8th graders, which could be one reason to increase the number of content-based tasks. As *Happy Workbook No. 2* has an overall larger number of writing tasks, this could be considered to compensate for the low ratio of content-based tasks. This is supported by the fact that it has a larger proportion of tasks promoting complex skills such as genre (14%) and context (10%) than *Digilär Engelska Year 7*. Here it is also important to remember that *Happy Workbook No. 2* has almost double the number of writing tasks as *Digilär Engelska Year 7*. This means that even though the proportions differ only slightly, the actual number of tasks practicing most of the skills are close to twice as many. The only skill that is practiced remarkably little in relation to the other four skills is process, with only five tasks (3%) focusing on it. One reason for this could be that most tasks and assignments at this stage are rather short and might not need much planning or revising. However, planning is a necessity for a test like the national test in writing proficiency, which is why students could benefit from practicing it early on. Furthermore, revising a written text is part of the grading criteria for writing (see section 3.1.1), which should be another reason to work on the process skill continuously. Apart from that, *Happy Workbook No. 2* provides good practice towards the national test, as it provides a large number of different tasks that practice most skills many times.

Good Stuff D Workbook, despite being aimed at 9th graders, has the highest number of writing tasks emphasizing formal accuracy on Kern's (2002) continuum in relation to the overall number of writing tasks. Only 9 out of the 144 writing tasks were categorized to be content-based. Furthermore, as much as 98% of the writing tasks focus on the system skill in some way while the remaining four writing skills content, process, genre and context put together are

present in only 40% of all writing tasks. As ninth grade is the final year of lower secondary school and the year students have to take part in the national tests, it is remarkable that *Good Stuff D Workbook* has such a strong focus on linguistic knowledge and so little on the complex writing skills. If students only work with *Good Stuff D Workbook* to practice their writing skills, there is a risk that they will not be sufficiently prepared for the national test in writing proficiency, as it requires them to also draw on more complex writing skills. In order to give students the opportunity to also practice more content-focused tasks and more complex writing skills, teachers at this stage will therefore be forced to compensate by either altering already existing tasks in the course book or by using complementary tasks.

Swedish teachers have shown great faith in course books' conformity with the national curriculum, often even putting them at the center of their lesson planning and teaching (see section 3.1.3). As this study has shown, however, course books are not necessarily a guarantee of following the curriculum. On the contrary, there are many potential risks connected with putting too much faith in course books' conformity to the curriculum. The type of skill that is most exploited in the course book might create the impression that it is also the most important skill. If, as in the course books in this study, grammar exercises and the system skill are over-represented, teachers using them might put extra focus on linguistic knowledge, both in their lesson planning, feedback and assessment. If students spend a large amount of time on practicing the system skill they miss out on practicing other skills required by the national tests and the grading criteria, which could affect their final grade negatively. Also, as students might spend a lot of time working with the system skill, teachers might focus more on students' grammar in their feedback than the actual content of the text. As students interpret the area the teachers choose to focus on in their feedback to be the most important (see section 3.2.2.2), there is a risk of other writing skills being overlooked. When the time comes for the national tests, students risk being unprepared for the performance required of them. This factor could be a reason why the national test results for writing, as presented in the background section, have generally been lower over the past years than for reading, listening and speaking (see section 3.1.2).

One reason for the discrepancy between course book and national test is of course the fact that *Good Stuff D Workbook* and *Happy Workbook No. 2* were published before the introduction of the new curriculum. *Digilär Engelska Year 7* has, despite being aimed at the youngest group of lower secondary school students, shown a greater conformity to the

curriculum than the other two. However, even *Digilär Engelska Year 7* tends more toward a product approach than a context-model approach, despite being a post-2011 production and being updated regularly. Also, as financial resources are one of the main dictators of the choice of teaching material, schools using course books from before 2011 are not uncommon. Both *Good Stuff D Workbook* and *Happy Workbook No. 2* are an example of this as they are still in use in schools. In other words, teachers cannot take for granted that the course books are in line with the current curriculum and should always be critical no matter when they were published.

7. Conclusion

In this study, the writing tasks in three course books and one national English writing proficiency test were categorized according to Kern's (2002) and Hyland's (2003) categorization systems. The categorizations have shown that the majority of the writing tasks in all three course books analyzed focus on formal accuracy and the system skill respectively, which is why they lean towards a product-based writing approach. The national test, however, is located in the middle of Kern's (2002) continuum, drawing on both formal accuracy and content, and also requires knowledge of the context, process and content skill to be completed successfully. This indicates a discrepancy between course books in use and the national tests. As the national tests are used to give an indication of how students perform in relation to the national grading criteria, the results also indicate a discrepancy between the course books and the national curriculum. The results of this study therefore show that teachers have to always critically evaluate course books and their contents to ensure that their teaching is in line with the curriculum, rather than blindly trusting the course books.

In the light of this, it is important to remember that many teachers complement the course books with extra material to fulfill the requirements of the curriculum, which was not analyzed in this study. Furthermore, as mentioned in the background, both feedback and assessment are notable factors in the teaching of writing (see section 3.2.2.2 and 3.2.2.3), which were also not included in this study. To get a broader picture of how writing is taught in Swedish schools it would therefore be necessary to study these contributions to the learning process as well. Furthermore, another option would be to interview the English teachers at the schools that provided the material, in order to gain insight into how they work with the course books and how they provide feedback. A third alternative to complement this study would be to consider the

amount of time that is spent on working with simple and complex tasks respectively. As simpler tasks can be finished in considerably less time than more complex tasks, the actual amount of time students spend working with certain skills could be an interesting aspect in this context.

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Appendix

Our Time – My Story

At **LifeStory** we are making an online collection of texts written by people all over the world. Our idea is to create an archive of texts about what living in the 21st century is like. We believe that the stories will help future generations to understand our time.



You are invited to write a text for the Life Story Archive – about yourself and the time you live in.

*Plan your writing and make sure that you have time to write about **all three** parts (A–C). Altogether you should write between 250 and 500 words.*



Use the following points:

A. Describe your life right now – for example, school, activities and interests.

B. Explain how different styles and trends influence you now – or have influenced you before. It could be in, for example, music, clothes or technology.

C. Discuss *one or two* issues that are important to you or to other people, today and in the future. It could be about health, the environment, politics, religion, etc.



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