Quality Assurance Strategies in Schools

A Case Study

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June 2004
Abstract

The Swedish school system is extremely decentralized, and the commission to raise standards in education is delegated to the municipalities, and to the schools. In my work as a secondary school teacher, I have come to doubt that this strategy leads to school effectiveness. In this dissertation I inquire into the problem of quality assurance strategies in schools. I give examples of how the school system works in Sweden at different levels, and then use English schools to contrast and compare. A juxtaposition of literature from the two countries, and from the USA, throws an additional light on similarities and differences in their approach to quality assurance.

My conclusion is that it is of vital importance to introduce a quality assurance system at a national level to be able to provide a quality education for all pupils. An excellent work at a local level cannot compensate for the lack of overall structure.
Acknowledgements

My particular thanks to my family for their love and support. Without their help this dissertation would not have been written.

I should like to thank all my colleagues from whom I have learnt so much.

I am grateful to Francia Kinchington and Bill Goddard for their good advice.
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Introduction

Bewilderment was my reason for choosing quality assurance as a theme for this dissertation. For some time now, evaluation has been the buzzword in the Swedish school debate, but evaluation in itself does not seem to result in school effectiveness. Why? For a year I worked with an anti-racist project that did not lead to the result we had planned. What were the underlying causes? From a teacher’s point of view the Swedish school system needs improvement. But what about the pupil perspective? Does our decentralized system facilitate learning? How do we improve our schools? Is it possible to use QA principles in school, and what are the advantages?

I need an answer to my many questions. The best way to structure my work seems to be in the form of a case study. To contrast and compare I use the dichotomy of the Swedish and English school systems.

The chapter Review of Literature focuses on literature treating different aspects of quality in schools from an overall point of view. In Methodology I learn about different research methods and decide what approach to use. In the chapter Findings and Evaluation of Findings I give some examples of how the Swedish school system works, and then compare with schools in England. I start at a school level, where I describe how we started to work against racism in my school, and then continue by including interviews with three deputy headteachers, one senior manager and three headteachers from Sweden and England. I finish at a national level with the development project Attraktiv Skola, and a report from the Swedish National Audit Office on the grading system. In Conclusions and Recommendations I discuss what I have learnt and try to give some suggestions or two for the future.
Review of Literature

I start my quest for knowledge in the UK, with Freeman’s introduction to the subject. He (1993:10) defines quality assurance as ‘a systematic approach to identifying market needs and honing working methods to meet those needs’. The standard for quality assurance systems is called ISO 9000, and in the UK it is known as BS 5750. As this system was devised for industry, can it really be used in schools? Yes, says Freeman, (1993:10) ‘its underlying principles, concentrating, as they do, on meeting customer needs, are ones which are fully applicable in the new training and education markets’.

Why is it a good idea to use QA in schools? Because it ensures that

- the organization’s mission and aims are clear and known to all;
- the systems through which work will be done are well thought out, foolproof (well, almost) and communicated to everyone;
- it is always clear who is responsible for what;
- what the organisation regards as ‘quality’ is well-defined and documented;
- there are systems to check that everything is working to plan;
- when things go wrong – and they will – there are agreed ways of putting them right.

(Freeman 1993:16)

But is a documented system not good enough? Freeman claims that the QA approach adds the following three important extras:

- a method of checking up on how well the system is being adhered to;
- a method of correcting mistakes;
- a method of changing the system if it has become out of date.’

(1993:17)
What is the difference between quality control and QA? ‘Quality control is essentially a method for inspecting for, and rejecting, defective work…’ QA, on the other hand, ‘means preventing errors, not putting them right time after time’. (1993:17f) And TQM, total quality management? Freeman points out that TQM adds the cost of quality, or rather ‘the cost of non-quality’ to the debate. Its philosophy is ‘that you must improve quality with fewer resources, because, if you don’t, your competitor will.’ (1993:156f)

The building blocks of a QA system, according to Freeman (1993:24), are quality policy, procedures, work instructions, auditing, corrective action, and management review. These terms need explaining: A quality policy might outline

- who is responsible for setting up and running the QA system,
- how the system is to be monitored and reviewed by management;
- for which functions/tasks defined procedures will be written;
- how the implementation of those procedures will be monitored;
- how failures to adhere to the procedures will be corrected.

(Freeman 1993:24)

Customers or users in training and education could be students, parents, society or employers, and the school has to identify ‘the functions or tasks where performance critically affects the service as perceived by the users’. (1993:25) To each of the critical functions, e.g. assessment and staff development, a procedure has to be written. A procedure describes what is to be done, a work instruction gives a detailed instruction of how just one task is to be completed. What Freeman (1993:26) calls auditing is ‘the means by which the organization checks that the procedures are really being implemented’. These checks or audits are to be carried out in a systematic manner. When the audit shows that the procedures are not being carried out the way they should, the next step is corrective action. Management review is to be held regularly ‘to assess how
well the QA system is meeting the organization’s needs and how well the system is being run’. (1993:27)

To better illustrate the principles of the QA system I add Freeman’s (1993:28) instructive figure:

![Figure 1](image-url)
Freeman continues by describing how to apply the QA system in education, but I leave him, and instead I turn to *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* published by HCMI (Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Schools in England) which throws a great deal of light on the problem.

The Evaluation Schedule, used by inspectors and school evaluators, is structured in the following way:

**CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW**
- *What sort of school is it?* This section describes the school, summarises its quality and standards, outlines strengths and weaknesses and evaluates improvement since the last inspection.

**OUTCOMES**
- *How high are standards?* This is covered in one section, with two areas of enquiry.
  - Evaluation of the school’s results and achievements should focus on the school’s results; trends in performance; strengths and weaknesses in particular subjects. You should also judge how well the pupils achieve, i.e. whether these pupils in this school are getting on as well as they should.
  - The section on pupils’ attitudes, values and personal development explores pupils’ response to the school: their attitudes, behaviour, personal development and relationships, and their attendance.

**QUALITY OF PROVISION**
This is covered in four sections, the first of which is particularly important.
- *How well are pupils or students taught?* This question requires you to look at the quality of teaching and learning. At the heart of the criteria is the extent to which pupils are challenged and engaged in learning, and are learning at the right level.
- *How good are the curricula and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?* This question is concerned with the quality and range of the curriculum including provision for pupils’ spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and extra-curricular provision including study support.
- *How well does the school care for its pupils or students?* This question focuses, in short inspection, on the active steps taken by the school to ensure pupils’ welfare, health and safety, and in full inspections on overall assessment, support and guidance arrangements.
• **How well does the school work in partnership with parents?** This question explores parents’ views of the school and the basis for these views and, in full inspections, the range of parental involvement in, and links with, the school.

**EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF MANAGEMENT**

Effective schools invariably have a clear sense of purpose, drive and direction, supported by efficient and effective management and administration.

• **How well is the school led and managed?** This question covers a range of enquiries into leadership and management, particularly approaches to enhancing the performance of staff and pupils, the role of governors and, in full inspections, detailed questions about staffing, accommodation and resources.

(www.archive.official-documents.co.uk 2001-12-30)

The *Handbook* maps out the lines of enquiry for the evaluation of schools, but it would carry too far to go into detail. Let me just recommend part 3, called Using the Handbook for School Self-Evaluation. These 10 pages contain what a school needs to know to start solving its problems, and they finish with

**SCHOOL SELF-EVALUATION IN A NUTSHELL**

• Start now
• Accept that we can all improve
• Place the raising of standards at the heart of all planning
• Measure standards
• Compare yourself with others
• Regularly observe each other teaching to a set of agreed and rigorous criteria
• Evaluate the effect that teaching has on learning
• Be completely open in feeding back what you find
• Think, discuss and consult
• Set targets for everyone’s improvement
• Ensure that action is supported, monitored and reviewed
• Never stop evaluating

(www.archive.official-documents.co.uk 2001-12-30)
Now let us turn to another interesting publication: ‘In 1994 the Office for Standards in Education (OFSTED) commissioned the International School Effectiveness and Improvement Centre (ISEIC) to conduct a review of school effectiveness research summarising current knowledge about the factors identified in the literature as important in gaining a better understanding of effectiveness.’ (Sammons et al. 1995:1) Eleven key factors were identified. Sammons et al. point out that these factors ought not to be considered as independent of each other:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEVEN FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOLS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Professional leadership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Firm and purposeful</td>
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<tr>
<td>A participative approach</td>
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<tr>
<td>The leading professional</td>
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<td>2 Shared vision and goals</td>
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<td>Unity of purpose</td>
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<td>Consistency of practice</td>
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<td>Collegiality and collaboration</td>
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<td>3 A learning environment</td>
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<td>An orderly atmosphere</td>
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<td>An attractive working environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 Concentration on teaching and learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maximisation of learning time</td>
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<td>Academic emphasis</td>
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<td>Focus on achievement</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Purposeful teaching</td>
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<tr>
<td>Efficient organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>Clarity of purpose</td>
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<tr>
<td>Structured lessons</td>
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<tr>
<td>Adaptive practice</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 High expectations</td>
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<td>High expectations all round</td>
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<tr>
<td>Communicating expectations</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing intellectual challenge</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 Positive reinforcement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear and fair discipline</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Monitoring progress</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitoring pupil performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evaluating school performance</td>
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<tr>
<td>9 Pupil rights and responsibilities</td>
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<td>Raising pupil self-esteem</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positions of responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Control of work</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 Home-school partnership</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parental involvement in their children’s learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 A learning organisation</td>
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<td>School-based staff development</td>
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Diametrically opposed to the extremely structured application of QA in English schools, the Swedish government, through the National Agency for Education, delegates the realization of its intentions to the municipality and to the school. In *Kvalitetssäkring i skolan* (1998:26) it points out that in 1990 a regulatory system was replaced by an approach based on goals and objectives. With the curriculum as a starting point, the local authority writes a school plan, and then each school writes a workplan based on this school plan. The National Agency for Education elucidates:

> Among the major issues covered in the curricula are norms and values, levels of attainment, pupil influence and responsibilities, assessment and grades plus the responsibilities of headteachers. For each of these major issues there are objectives and guidelines. Syllabuses stipulate the purpose and objectives for teaching in each subject. There are two types of objectives: aspiration objectives and objectives which must be achieved. Objectives which must be achieved are those objectives which all pupils must be provided with the opportunity to attain. Yet the aspiration objectives are the ones which should govern the directions which teaching takes: they describe the qualities of pupil attainment which the schools must seek to develop. The aspiration objectives are extensive, since schools should not set limits for pupil attainment. Certain objectives can be achieved whilst this wider aim remains in focus. The syllabuses do not prescribe how teaching should be organised or the working methods which should be used. Yet they do touch upon the qualities of learning and attainment which should be developed in the pupils. This provides a framework for teaching and its content.

*(Skolverket, 2000:15)*

The Swedish code of statutes 1997:702 §1-2 establishes the rules for quality reviews in the following way: Annually, each school has to make up a written quality review, which is to contain an assessment of how the national goals and objectives are attained and an account of what measures the school intends to
take if that is not the case. Each municipality is to make up a written quality review every year, based on the quality reviews of the schools in the area and assessing to what extent goals and objectives are attained, and give an account of what measures are to be taken if this is not achieved. This report is then to be sent to the National Agency for Education. (http://rixlix.riksdagen.se 2002-03-10)

The National Agency for Education has published booklets on how to evaluate in schools, *Att utvärdera skolan, Att organisera utvärdering*, and *Skolverkets allmänna råd om kvalitetsredovisning inom skolväsendet*. They are written in general terms, emphasising the importance of evaluations and follow-up activities but not telling how to do. Each school has to find its solution to the problem. Eriksson (1998:85f) approves of this and advocates that municipalities and schools should have the liberty of evaluating their results without having to account for them to the National Agency for Education. But Bengtsson *et al.* (2000:36) point out that far-reaching local freedom might lead to an increasing demand for control. They discuss what evaluation methods to use and what they result in. Questions to ask are: Where does the incentive to evaluate come from? How are evaluations used? What effect do evaluations have on an organization? (2000:9). To notice is that all methods used to examine, value and control have normative effects, especially if they are of frequent occurrence. (2000:45).

Bengtsson *et al.* also emphasize that society, formally and informally, has given the school a commission with several dimensions, i.e. to educate, to socialize, to sort and to keep. To educate is just one of the duties school has to fulfil. This complexity is the basis of the recurrent discussion on, for example, streaming and grading. It has also led up to conflicts of value in school. In practice, when you decide on a certain method of evaluation, you also take your stand in this conflict of values. (2000:11,13,17)
Benford and Nilsson take the view that the Swedish school system follows the ‘Columbus principle’:

When he set out he didn’t know where he was going.
When he got there he didn’t know where he was.
When he came back he didn’t know where he’d been.
And all this on public money.

(1999:15)

Benford and Nilsson (1999:64) claim that so far Sweden has little understanding for what quality means, what it looks like, how to recognize and measure it. The general lack of pace and challenge in the system noticeably confines what is achieved. During the first six years learning is neglected, and in the years seven to nine it is not always effectively planned. That is why pupils who come to upper secondary school may lack basic knowledge and skill of maths, Swedish and science. They (1999:15) also point out that the curriculum merely contains goals and objectives for year five and nine, and that those guidelines are very free, hardly more than advisory. They argue that steps in between are signposts or milestones on the map of learning: Teachers must know where to start and in what direction to go, and they need guidance to know how quickly they can advance, taking into consideration that children learn differently. In other words, to raise standards in Swedish schools Benford and Nilsson advocate a more structured approach.

Other voices are raised against the Swedish school policy. Helldén is one of them. In his book, a survey of the last forty years, he (2002:149) claims that the Swedish state tends to devalue knowledge in school, and has done so for a considerable time. According to Helldén the political aim is to equalize society and to create equality. But is this the right way to go? Helldén’s answer is no.
He points out that the better school functions as a producer of knowledge, the less important social background is for children’s success in school and in life.

Quite a number of the critics, like Enkvist, teach at the Swedish universities. Enkvist (2003:29f) claims that school effectiveness is lacking in Sweden. The objective of school policy during the last fifty years has been to create citizens who are socially well adjusted rather than knowledgeable and well informed, Enkvist argues. She then refers to a document published by LO, the Swedish Confederation of Trade Unions, where Larsson (2001) points out that the ideals of the working-class movement characterize the Swedish school system. But according to Larsson the aim and direction of the school system does not favour working-class children. (Enkvist 2003:29)

Frykman (2003:13) argues that what we have in Sweden today is a school for the elite, founded on social background. If parents can support and help the children with their schoolwork, their children are more likely to continue to higher education. This socially uneven recruitment to higher education has been the same during the 20th century, in spite of all the efforts made to change it. Frykman (2003:12) also points out that in Sweden only 30% of all school leavers continue their studies. This figure is remarkably low, compared to other European countries like Denmark, Norway, Finland and Holland. According to Frykman (2003:23), problems of receding interest in the future, weariness and unhappiness are more obvious among young people in Sweden than in other countries. It is time to look into what positive qualities there are in grades and rules in school, and the authority of the teacher, he (2003:20) argues.

Three physicians doing research on stress, Währborg, Gottfries, and Ekman (2003:37), maintain that working conditions in Swedish schools are injurious to the health of the pupils. They refer to a noisy and messy situation in the
classroom, pressure from menacing children, and demands for learning that are either too high, too low or unclear. They argue that school today is bad for children, both physically and mentally.

To Enkvist (2003:49) management is one of the weaknesses of Swedish schools. In 1988 the responsibility for schools was transferred from the State to the municipalities. As the early nineties was a period of financial crisis for the municipalities, expenditures for schools were cut down substantially. She (2003:53f) points out, that headteachers have a more difficult job than ever, not getting necessary support, neither locally nor at a national level.

Persson (2003:60) claims, that there are two models of teaching. In the first one the role of the teacher is characterized by his/her personality and inspiring devotion founded on a thorough knowledge of the subject. In this model teaching can be seen as a trade based on pedagogical common sense. The second model focuses development of the pedagogical forms, and sees pedagogy as just another discipline that will give us the basis of an ever more sophisticated technique. The role of the teacher’s knowledge, experience and personality will diminish, as well as the content of the subject, in the same way that modern technology renders man’s physical strength superfluous. Persson prefers the first model. He points out that pedagogy is not a branch of science, and that there is no such thing as a pedagogical canon. He (2003:61) sees pedagogy primarily as a reflecting activity based on empirical knowledge from working as a teacher. There is always a natural resistance to learning, according to Persson (2003:61). How to overcome this opposition in a constructive way is the main question of school pedagogy. He (2003:61f) claims that we have formulated totally wrong answers to this question, and that it is only thanks to the fact that Sweden still has idealistic and competent teachers that school functions as well as it does.
Enkvist (2003:81f) points out that from 2001 the new Teacher Education and Training has lowered standards for secondary school and upper secondary school teachers as far as subject knowledge is concerned. Enkvist questions if this is the right way to raise standards in education.

According to Häggström (2003:28f) measures like the drastic reduction of subject study in Teacher Education and Training, or the relaxation in qualification requirements, (teachers can be ordered to teach subjects they have no training for), are the results of an ideology hostile to knowledge. Another example is the assertion that knowledge quickly grows out of date and consequently, what children need today is ‘to learn how to learn’ rather than to plod through history or math. Information retrieval, critical thinking and overall analysis are general skills that are to be learnt instead. Of course these are important skills, Häggström (2003:28f) argues, but that does not mean that subject knowledge can be ruled out. A pupil who has no basic knowledge of a certain subject will have enormous difficulties in finding and assimilating more advanced knowledge of the same field: what to look for, what is relevant, and how to understand what is found?

Alsheimer (2003:103) writes that reading literature no longer is an important part of schoolwork, and that underprivileged children are those who suffer most from this. Young people thirst for meaning and connection. But today grown-ups, above all parents and a politicised school system, no longer take their most important responsibility, namely to transmit their experience and knowledge to the younger generation. In spite of the fact that politicians have designed the school system, they do not seem to understand that every new generation has to be won for the cause of respect for the individual, for democracy and a state governed by law. The study of literature gives pupils the tools they need to understand society and to take up a definite position (Alsheimer 2003:103f).
In 2000 the Ministry of Finance published a report on quality and efficiency in Swedish education written by three economists, Landell, Gustafsson, and Grannas. Enkvist (2003:109f) points out that in 1998 Sweden spent roughly six percent of its GNP on education, more than most countries in the world. She then refers to Landell et al., who state that inefficiency of the Swedish school system costs the country about twenty milliard crowns per year. With quality they mean cost efficiency, i.e. school turnout within the time intended. Both direct costs and indirect costs such as time have been included. The authors have neither studied content nor methods of teaching. Instead they look at education as an investment, both at a societal and individual level. What quality deficiencies did they find? About fifteen percent of the pupils leave secondary school without having passed in maths, Swedish and English, which means that they do not have the right to start upper secondary school. More than thirty percent of those starting upper secondary school have not finished after four years. Only about fifty percent of the pupils who finish vocational programmes have got a job or study a year and a half after having finished school. Many attend courses for unemployed, which raises the question if the vocational programmes have the right aim and direction, or if expectations are too low (Enkvist 2003:120). For the universities the main problem is that more students are registered than before, but many of them never obtain their degree or certificate (Enkvist 2003:111).

For some pages now I have related criticism of university teachers coming from different academic disciplines. They discuss several aspects of the Swedish school system. The picture is quite a dark one. But Enkvist (2003:125f) points out the good news: there already is money enough in the system to obtain school effectiveness. What is needed is ‘only’ a new system of rules.
What we see in Sweden today is that schools work out their own model or system to raise quality. Jörbeck and Levén describe how four neighbouring schools in Täby started a quality project in 1992. In search for a model they turned to SIQ, (Swedish Institute for Quality) and their 13 core values (1995:12f):

- customer orientation: School exists to serve, primarily, pupils and parents.
- committed leadership
- participation by everyone
- competence development
- long-range perspective
- public responsibility: School has a public function, given to it by the state and the municipalities.
- process orientation: Quality development takes place in the everyday processes.
- prevention: To prevent faults from occurring is preferable to putting things right later.
- continuous improvement
- learning from others
- faster response: Problems are to be dealt with without delay.
- management by facts: Quality measuring must be based on documented and reliable facts (data).
- partnership: Management, staff, pupils and parents must work together to attain quality.

During two years the quality project in Täby was studied by a postgraduate student from the University of Stockholm. In his report, Stefan Lagrosen states that the most prominent effect of the project is that it created a new attitude towards the organisation and to the users, or customers. The report examines
thoroughly whether the SIQ model is appropriate to improve quality in schools. Lagrosen weighs the pro and cons of the model. He warns of concentrating too much on processes that are easy to measure, and thus to evaluate. There is a risk that the definition of knowledge is limited to what is quantifiable. (Jörbeck, Levin 1995:65).

Benford and Nilsson (1999:4f) point out that the SIQ core values do not take into consideration that relations are an important part of schoolwork. They argue that school improvement always has to focus on what happens in the classroom, in the teacher’s meeting with the pupil. They (1999:84-102) advocate a structured approach with the following factors as essential for school effectiveness:

a. Quality of teaching

  Relations: Learning is a social process and the relation between pupil and teacher is central to successful learning. If the pupil trusts and respects the teacher and feels that the teacher wants him/her to learn and succeed, only then effective learning takes place.

  Interaction: Linked with relations is the level and quality of the interaction between pupils and the grown-ups working with them.

  Subject knowledge: Naturally, it helps the quality a lot if the teacher knows the subject well, knows what he or she wants from the pupils and how to get it.

  Tempo and challenge: A sound knowledge of the subject gives the teacher a better opportunity to control how fast the work proceeds and how difficult it is for the pupils. Both tempo and challenge reflect what the teacher expects from the children.

  Expectations: How much the teacher plans for, how he/she interacts and knows his/her subject, and how much he/she thinks it is possible for the pupils to perform, all this show the extent of the teacher’s expectations.
Part of the expectations is to know where we are going. When the road before us is clearly defined, we stand a better chance to make sure that we keep the right pace and direction.

Organization and methods: Quality of teaching depends on how effectively the teacher organizes the three basic resources time, space and people.

Planning: The panning must show that it covers the curriculum, including social and personal development.

b. Quality of response
A response of high quality is when pupils are enthusiastic about their work. Work can not always be fun, but through challenge and interest it must stimulate to enthusiasm and effort.

c. Quality of management

Professional leadership: The professional leadership starts with the vision the headmaster brings forward. It is reflected in the goals of the school but it is also a variable of the headmaster’s own expectations, his/her belief in what is possible, his/her personal commitment. The headmaster sets the tone and standard of the school.

A system for subject leadership is important to insure that individual teacher talents and qualifications are shared by the whole school and, as a part of the process, to reinforce the work of the others. But time, guiding principles and a clearly defined responsibility are important factors.

Subject leaders plan staff development, work with their colleagues in the classroom, give advice and support by planning, and also keep an eye on how resources are spent.

Administrative management:

i. The daily work. For the daily work a quality school needs clear rules and basic routines that are effective and well understood. Both internal and external communication are important areas.
ii. **Policies and planning.** A school must have policies for effective handling of its work. Policy documents will be about syllabuses, teaching methods and organisation, how to support the personal development of the pupils, how to prevent and combat bullying, a behaviour policy, a policy for democracy in school and how to involve parents and community, policy for salaries and expenses, and staff development plans.

Every school should have a development plan that covers at least three years. Planning of school improvement is the basis of all other plans. It is a way to set aims, to encourage new ideas, and to communicate the vision and inspiration that the leadership is based on. The plan must be clear, well structured and cover both short-term and long-term needs of the school, and clearly identify priorities of new activities and growth as well as guide routine development. Progression and results must be monitored and evaluated.

iii. **Budget.** Decision on expenditure have to be assessed in terms of value for money.

**Conclusion:** Responsibility must be clearly worded in all the aspects of management, which ought to be delegated to working teams.

d. **Quality of work.**

Questions to ask are: Is the right work done, considering the age of the pupil and his/her level of learning? Is the work adapted to this particular pupil’s ability? If we have a clear definition of goals and levels, it is possible to measure how far the pupils have developed and how well they are performing.

e. **Other qualities.**

The quality of the premises and how they are used have a considerable effect on teaching and learning. Other examples of quality are equal
opportunities for all pupils, their personal development, and resources for pupils with special needs. The quality of the syllabuses is also important. **Syllabuses:** In all subjects the teacher must make sure that all pupils have the possibility to plan some of the activities themselves and to assess their work.

**Pupils with special needs.** Pupils with special needs are not only children with learning problems. Very gifted children also have special needs, but schools are not particularly good at identifying or taking care of these pupils.

**Personal development** covers several aspects of the pupils’ lives, but it mainly includes their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

(Benford and Nilsson 1999:84-102)

Benford and Nilsson (1999:107f) contend that all the aspects of quality mentioned above can and should be measured. For evaluation and assessment there must be both internal and external systems, all based on observations. The authors (1999:162-168) give detailed suggestions about what proof of quality to look for when observing in the classroom and throughout the school. They also add a model for school self-evaluation. I confine myself to translating ‘Some principles for good teaching’:

1. Allow and encourage pupils to choose and to take their stand.
2. Give the pupils time to produce work with quality and depth.
3. Start out from the pupils’ circumstances, experiences and interests.
4. Let the pupils work practically and learn from first-hand experience.
5. Encourage the pupils to test many different methods of working.
6. Let the pupils decide how to learn, by using their own ideas.
7. Find a way to introduce the syllabus into their own planning.
8. Let the work be a mix of both specialist knowledge and thematic studies.
9. Offer the pupils a chance to organize in many different ways: individually, in small groups, or the whole class.
10. Start with the pupil at the centre of the learning process.
11. Make sure that the work is not too easy, but at the right level for the pupil.

(1999:163)

Since 1998 it is the task of the Swedish National Agency for Education to inspect quality in pre-schools and schools. In 2003 the Educational Inspectorate was formed. A model of inspection was outlined, with seven main areas where all local educational institutions are to be evaluated. The model comprises the results, activities and conditions of local authorities and schools. The seven main areas are:

1. The pupils’ norms and values in relation to the overall goals of the curricula, based on democratic values, responsibility and influence.
2. Knowledge in relation to the goals of curricula, programmes and syllabuses.
3. Working environment and participation to obtain the goals and objectives of the curricula. This main area comprises environment of learning, work against offensive treatment, and co-operation in schools.
4. Pedagogical activities such as teaching, working methods, contact with parents, assessment and grading, co-operation and openness.
5. Steering, leadership and quality development.
6. Access to care and education, information on pedagogical activities/education.
7. Resources, e.g. staff, competence development, allocation of resources, premises, teaching materials and other pedagogical material.

(www.skolverket.se/inspektion/inspektion.shtml 2004-05-06)
A book I find most inspiring is Monroe’s *Nothing’s Impossible*. The author has taken on a personal mission in life: to provide quality education for underprivileged, mostly black children. She is a strong and wise woman with over thirty years of experience as a teacher and administrator in impoverished, crime-ridden areas of New York City. The title of the book reflects her attitude towards problems and difficulties. On ‘working from the heart’ she writes:

> All good work is worthy of our dedication.  
> And the most worthy is what changes lives profoundly - in mind, body and spirit.  
> (1997:36)

And she continues:

> Any life can be a work of art.  
> So how can we but work in the belief that we will make a difference?  
> (1997:36)

Monroe summarizes some of her ideas on teaching and learning in the following way:

> What a teacher feels and thinks about the children in front of her makes all the difference in how much those children learn.  
> When a teacher demonstrates sincerity and decisiveness in the classroom, the children will unconsciously give her permission to teach them. And without that permission, learning won’t happen.  
> A teacher who keeps teaching the same things in the same way slowly but surely dies in front of her students.  
> Designating a few kids as gifted and talented brings out all their gifts and talents. In education, elitism works.  
> Race, ethnicity, and poverty are poor excuses for low expectations.  
> (1997:111)
What I like most about this book is Monroe’s dedication and her focus on what is best for the child. But one is not always rewarded for one’s efforts, she warns:

Often, the evidence of success is slow in coming or impossible to see. Therefore, much good work must be done by faith and by faith alone.

In the face of inept administration or nonsensical bureaucracy, people desperately need confirmation that they are not crazy to go on believing, demanding, caring.

You get what you work for and what you deserve – sometimes.

Unfortunately, competence isn’t always rewarded. But there’s still no alternative to being competent!

Good works will be recognized – ultimately. But if you work for the recognition alone, you may be in for a long wait.

(1997: 76, 94)

Frederick Douglass Academy is a high school in New York’s Harlem that Monroe, as a principal, helped to found and run. 80 per cent of the students are African – Americans, and 20 per cent are Latinos. Most of them come from poor families, and many of them are from troubled or broken homes. Monroe (1997:4) writes: ‘If anyone still claims that black kids, when properly supported, can’t learn and compete with anyone else, the results we’ve achieved at the academy prove otherwise.’

What is then Monroe’s method to obtain school effectiveness? First of all she stresses the importance of leadership, ‘the essential ingredient’ (1997:11). She writes:

First and foremost, get a leader who is fearless (or perhaps crazy) enough to take well-calculated risks.

…
Seek, too, a leader who aspires to a *noble* ideal of education. Noble because this work of transforming children’s lives is particularly ennobling. Noble because the work has merit only when done for no reason except to transform children’s lives. Noble because the work is necessary work in the highest sense of *mission* – what one *is sent to do* for others. Look for someone who is willing to test decision against this highest standard of transformational leadership.

... 

He or she should be a person who loved an academic subject and taught it well.

... 

And once you’ve identified the leader who will spearhead your new creation, surround him or her with a group of insanely dedicated followers, a few people who can infect the rest of the staff with the values and ideals that make education or any work exciting, fruitful, and worthwhile.

(1997:12)

What was her mission, then at the Frederick Douglass Academy? She writes:

I wanted to offer our students an academically rigorous college-preparation program to train them for competition beyond what they’d find in the local high schools, just as kids in suburban schools or private prep schools are prepared to compete against the best in the nation for college acceptances. At the same time, I wanted to balance the academic rigor with lots of extracurricular club and team activities.

(1997:16)

This is how she describes the school that she and her staff dream of:

- a place where teaching and learning were honoured and taken seriously
- a place of order and predictability
- a place where kids, especially boys, could learn that it was okay to be smart
- a place where teachers would have a great deal of autonomy in choosing texts, materials, and methodology – as long as the methodology worked

(1997:17)
How was the staff chosen? Monroe describes:

Each year as we added new staff for the new seventh-graders, the teacher-screening committee and I tried to pick winners: people who would fit the culture of creatively crazy workaholics; people who came early and stayed late; people who talked constantly about individual kids, programs, and projects; people for whom interdisciplinary cooperation is a natural part of professional behavior; people for whom a monthly 3 o’clock faculty conference usually continued with informal conversations and food till 5, 6, or 7 o’clock. Such teachers are not as rare as many people believe; what is rare is the supportive environment that we provide for one another, which makes it possible - even fun! - to work this hard.

(1997:30)

I let Monroe sum up with the following credo:

My five-year stint at the academy called forth every bit of forcefulness and thoroughness I possessed. I cultivated the ability not to see problems as problems and to ignore bureaucratic edicts. I practiced delaying implementation of the newest contrived and mandated ‘solutions’ for ‘at-risk-kids’ (read poor children, children of color, children of immigrants). My years as a teacher have shown me that ‘new solutions’ and bureaucratic edicts invariably miss the mark. To me, challenge of education is simple:

To teach the children who come, regardless of race, religion, ethnicity, socio-economic background, or gender, how to read, write, think, compute, appreciate the arts, speak well, and behave in socially acceptable ways, so that they can become economically independent, contributing members of society.

The heart of the matter is that requiring solid, challenging, interesting work on a par with what excellent public and private schools demand works, with poor kids and with all kids. What is good for the best is good for the rest. To do anything less is obscene.

(1997:34f)

There are so many inspiring books about classroom management, books that I love to read and to discuss. (Some of them are listed in Bibliography.) But if I
had let myself loose on this kind of literature, I would never had been able to keep the word limit of this dissertation. Therefore, I have focused on literature treating aspects of quality from a more general point of view. The reason for this choice is that I consider the main problem of the Swedish school today being overall structure, or rather lack of structure.
Methodology

Action research, case study, survey, the ethnographic style, there are many approaches to educational research. Which one to choose? *Embarras de richesse* as the French say. I turn to literature for an answer. My main source will be Cohen *et al.* (2000), because their book is most informative and they write remarkably logical and to the point.

Cohen *et al.* divide the practice of research into three main groups:

- scientific and positivistic methodologies
- naturalistic and interpretive methodologies
- methodologies from critical theory

(Cohen *et al.* 2000:3)

A researcher that adopts a positivistic method tends to take the ‘view that knowledge is hard, objective and tangible’, demanding of the researcher ‘an observer role, together with an allegiance to the methods of natural science’. A scientific investigation conducted in a positivistic mode is likely to be quantitative. An anti-positivist, on the other hand, is a researcher who rejects the methods of natural science and who sees ‘knowledge as personal, subjective and unique’ and involvement with their subjects as necessary. The researcher adopting the anti-positivist point-of-view will probably make his study with a pre-dominantly quantitative approach. (Cohen *et al.* 2000:6)

But how do the methods used by these two researchers differ? Let us turn to Cohen *et al.* again for an explanation:
Investigators adopting an objectivist (or positivist) approach to the social world and who treat it like the world of natural phenomena as being hard, real and external to the individual will choose from a range of traditional options – surveys, experiments, and the like. Others favouring the more subjectivist (or anti-positivist) approach and who view the social world as being of much softer, personal and humanly created kind will select from a comparable range of recent and emerging techniques – accounts, participant observation and personal contracts, for example.

(2000:6f)

To study complex human behaviour by means of methods used by natural science create enormous problems, especially in the setting of classroom and school, with the problems of teaching, learning and social interaction (Cohen et al. 2000:9f) Anti-positivists are particularly critical to ‘science’s mechanistic and reductionist view of nature which, by definition, excludes notions of choice, freedom, individuality, and moral responsibility’. (Cohen et al. 2000:17)

Furthermore, anti-positivists argue that ‘individuals’ behaviour can only be understood by the researcher sharing their frame of reference: understanding of individuals’ interpretations of the world around them has to come from the inside, not the outside’. (Cohen et al. 2000:19f)

Then the question arises, if findings of positivistic research really can be of any use to, say, teachers. And if not, what are the alternatives? Could naturalistic and interpretive methods be suitable for educational research, then? According to Cohen et al. some distinguishing features of naturalistic and interpretive methodologies are:

- situations are fluid and changing rather than fixed and static; events and behaviour evolve over time and are richly affected by context – they are ‘situated activities’;
- events and individuals are unique and largely non-generalizable;
...
• there are multiple interpretations of, and perspectives on, single events and situations;
• reality is multi-layered and complex;
…
• we need to examine situations through the eyes of participants rather than the researcher.

(2000:22f)

But critics of the naturalistic and interpretative approaches argue that this is going ‘too far in abandoning scientific procedures of verification and in giving up hope of discovering useful generalizations about behaviour.’ (Cohen et al. 2000:27)

Now, what about methodologies from critical theory? Critical theory is prescriptive and normative, i.e. it does not only describe society and behaviour but it wants to create a more equal and democratic world. Principal research methodologies are ideology critique and action research. Cohen et al. continue their explanation:

… critical theory seeks to uncover the interests at work in particular situations and to interrogate the legitimacy of those interests – identifying the extent to which they are legitimate in their service of equality and democracy. Its intention is transformative …

(2000:28)

Curriculum research is a field where the paradigm of critical theory is influential. For more information about this interesting subject I turn once more to Cohen et al:

Curriculum is an ideological selection from a range of possible knowledge.
…
The link between values and power is strong. This theme asks not only what knowledge is important but whose knowledge is important in curricula, what
and whose interests such knowledge serves, and how the curriculum and pedagogy serve (or not serve) differing interests.

(2000:33)

Closely connected to critical theory is feminist research, where the issue of power is important. Cohen et al. (2000:35) state: 'Feminist research too, challenges the legitimacy of research that does not empower oppressed and otherwise invisible groups – women'.

After having outlined the main groups of research methods I now return to the paradigm of naturalistic and ethnographic research. Ely et al. (1991:2) discuss the approach using the terms qualitative, interpretive research. They write (1991:41): ‘Ethnographic research requires attentive observation, empathetic listening, and courageous analysis’. They continue (1991:42): ‘The stance of participant observer is basic to carrying out naturalistic research’.

Cohen et al. define the paradigm of naturalistic inquiry logical and to the point, as always:

- behaviour and, thereby, data are socially situated, context-rich. To understand a situation researchers need to understand the context because situations effect behaviour and perspectives and vice versa;
- realities are multiple, constructed and holistic;
- knower and known are interactive, inseparable;
- only time- and context-bound working hypotheses (idiographic statements) are possible;
- all entities are in a state of mutual simultaneous shaping, so that it is impossible to distinguish causes from effects;
- inquiry is value-bound;
- history and biography intersect – we create our own futures but not necessarily in situations of our own choosing;

…

29
• researchers do not know in advance what they will see or what they will look for;

...  
• meanings and understandings replace proof;

...  
• situations are unique;
• the processes of research and behaviour are as important as the outcomes;

...  
• social reality, experiences and social phenomena are capable of multiple, sometimes contradictory interpretations and are available to us through social interaction;

(2000:137f)

When describing ethnographic approaches they refer to LeCompte and Preissle (1993):

• empirical data are gathered in their naturalistic setting (unlike laboratories or in controlled settings as in other forms of research where variables are manipulated);
• observational techniques are used extensively (both participant and non-participant) to acquire data on real-life settings;
• the research is holistic, that is, it seeks a description and interpretation of ‘total phenomena’:
• there is a move from description and data to inference, explanation, suggestions of causation, and theory generation;

(Cohen et al. 2000:138)

Critical ethnography, with its basis in critical theory, is a fairly new branch of ethnography. Cohen et al. (2000:153) write: 'What separates critical ethnography from other forms of ethnography is that, in the former, question of legitimacy, power, values in society and domination and oppression are foregrounded'.
Bell (1999:13) points out that the ethnographic style has its disadvantages. One of them is time: ‘The researcher has to be accepted by the individuals or groups being studied, and this can mean doing the same job, or living in the same environment and circumstances as the subjects for lengthy periods’. Another difficulty is the problem of representativeness: ‘If the researcher is studying one group in depth over a period of time, who is to say that group is typical of other groups which may have the same title?’

Cohen et al. (2000:157) establish the importance of the naturalistic and ethnographic research methods in education, despite the problems: ‘Their widespread use signals their increasing acceptance as legitimate and important styles of research.’

A method I personally find most interesting is the historical approach. Cohen et al. (2000:158) refer to Borg (1963), for a definition: ‘Historical research has been defined as the systematic and objective location, evaluation and synthesis of evidence in order to establish facts and draw conclusions about past events.’ They point out that it is particularly valuable in the field of education, for example ‘to help us understand how our present educational system has come about; and this kind of understanding can in turn help to establish a sound basis for further progress or change.’ (2000:159). One of the difficulties connected with this approach is the choice of subject of investigation. It has to be defined carefully, because all problems are not adaptable to this method. If there is a lack of relevant data, for example, significant results might not be produced (Cohen et al. (2000:159f). They (2000:160) continue: ‘In hand with the careful specification of the problem goes the need, where this is appropriate, for an equally specific and testable hypothesis…’ Another difficulty with the historical approach could be the collection of data. The researcher has to deal with data that already exist, and he/she usually has to depend on observations made by others.
Cohen et al. (2000:161) point out the two main groups of data in historical research: primary and secondary sources. Primary sources are:

- The remains or relics of a given period. …
- Those items that have had a direct physical relationship with the events being reconstructed. This category would include not only the written and oral testimony provided by actual participants in, or witnesses of, an event, but also the participants themselves.

(2000:161)

A historical study devoted to only one person is called a life history. Cohen et al. (2000:165) turn to Plummer (1983) for a definition: ‘The life history is frequently a full-length book about one persons life in his or her own words.’ The researcher gathers material in the form of tape recordings or episodes written down by the subject over a number of years. This information is often backed up with interviews of the subject’s friends, observations of his or her life and the use of personal documents such as letters or photographs. According to Cohen et al., Plummer (1983) ‘draws attention to a frequent criticism of life history research, namely that its cases are atypical rather than representative.’ (2000:167). The researcher, Plummer (1983) continues, has to ‘work out and explicitly state the life history’s relationship to a wider population’ (2000:167).

Bell (1999:16f) describes a method related to that of life history, namely narrative inquiry. Data collection is made in the form of interviews that often take the form of stories told by the informants, with the researcher asking follow-up questions. For a further explanation of the method Bell quotes Gray:

Narrative inquiry can involve reflective autobiography, life story, or the inclusion of excerpts from participants’ stories to illustrate a theme developed by the researcher. A narrative approach to inquiry is most
appropriate when the researcher is interested in portraying intensely personal
accounts of human experience. Narratives allow voice – to the researcher, the
participants and to cultural groups – and in this sense they can have the
ability to develop a decidedly political and powerful edge.

(1998:1)

As I see it, this method is quite demanding. Bell (1999:18) points out that the
researcher must be able to structure the interviews and yet let the storytellers
recount their stories in their own way, a fact that makes the interviewing rather
time-consuming. The researcher also has to inspire a feeling of mutual trust
between interviewer and interviewee before any intimate information can be
told.

Surveys and longitudinal studies are descriptive research methods. Cohen et al.
(2000:169) write: ‘Such studies look at individuals, groups, institutions, methods
and materials in order to describe, compare, contrast, classify, analyse and
interpret the entities and the events that constitute their various fields of
inquiry.’

As an example of survey Bell (1999:13f) mentions the census. But most surveys
are not on such a large scale. She writes: ‘In most cases, a survey will aim to
obtain information from a representative selection of the population and from
that sample will then be able to present the findings as being representative of
the population as a whole.’ She also points out the difficulties with the survey
method. One of them is choosing a representative sample: ‘… you will need to
consider what characteristics of the total population need to be represented in
your sample to enable you to say with fair confidence that your sample is
reasonably representative.’ Another problem is question wording: ‘… careful
piloting is necessary to ensure that all questions mean the same to all
respondents.’ (1999:14)
The strengths of a survey are ‘generalizability or universality within given parameters, its ability to make statements which are supported by large data banks and its ability to establish the degree of confidence which can be placed in a set of findings.’ (Cohen et al. 2000:171). But if the researcher wants to ‘catch local, institutional or small scale factors and variables’ then a survey is not the best choice of approach (Cohen et al. 2000:171f). But there are alternatives: ‘Collectively longitudinal, cross-sectional and trend or prediction studies are sometimes termed developmental research because they are concerned both to describe what the present relationships are among variables in a given situation and to account for changes occurring in those relationships as a function of time.’ (Cohen et al. 2000:169). As indicated by the name, longitudinal studies are conducted over a period of time, from several weeks to many years. Some disadvantages of longitudinal studies are that they are time-consuming and that there is a problem of what Cohen et al. call ‘sample mortality’, i.e. subjects refuse to co-operate any further, or die (2000:176).

Correlational studies are classified by Cohen et al. (2000:199) as ‘relational studies’ or ‘prediction studies’. They describe the first of these two categories in the following way.

As a method, it is particularly useful in exploratory studies into fields where little previous research has been undertaken. It is often a shot in the dark aimed at verifying hunches a researcher has about a presumed relationship between characteristics or variables.

(2000:199)

Now let us have a short glimpse of another method called *Ex post facto* research. Cohen et al. describe this approach as research done retrospectively, a study which investigates ‘possible cause-and-effect relationships by observing an
existing condition or state of affairs and searching back in time for plausible causal factors.’ (2000:205). They continue:

… many of our important investigations in education and psychology are *ex post facto* designs. There is often no choice in the matter: an investigator cannot cause one group to become failures, delinquent, suicidal, brain-damaged or dropouts. Research must of necessity rely on existing groups. On the other hand, the inability of *ex post facto* designs to incorporate the basic need for control (e.g. through manipulation or randomisation) makes them vulnerable from a scientific point of view and the possibility of their being misleading should be clearly acknowledged. (2000:207)

The experimental style is an approach that can be quite complicated to use in education. Cohen *et al.* (2000:211) write: ‘The essential feature of experimental research is that investigators deliberately control and manipulate the conditions which determine the events in which they are interested’. Bell gives the example of an experiment where the effects of a certain toothpaste are measured. She writes:

It may be fairly straightforward to test the extent of dental caries, … but it is quite another matter to test changes in behaviour. … social causes do not work singly. Any examination of low school attainment or high IQ is product of multiple causes: … (1999:14f)

Bell (1999:15) continues: ‘So, the experimental style does allow conclusions to be drawn about cause and effect, if the experimental design is sound, but in education and the social sciences generally, large groups are needed if the many variations and ambiguities involved in human behaviour are to be controlled.’
According to Cohen et al. (2000:370) a debate is going on ‘over the use of deception in experimental social psychology’, with role-playing, ‘as a substitute for deceit.’ They continue: ‘Role-playing is defined as participation in simulated social situations that are intended to throw light upon the role/rule contexts governing ‘real’ life social episodes.’

When discussing the uses of role-playing Cohen et al. refer to van Ments’ (1978) classification:

- Developing sensitivity and awareness.
- Experiencing the pressures, which create roles.
- Testing out for oneself possible modes of behaviour.
- Simulating a situation for others (and possibly oneself) to learn from. (2000:375)

According to Cohen et al. (2000:377f) role-playing can be both time demanding and expensive. It may not always be accepted as a legitimate educational method.

A paradigm much heard of in education is action research. Let us turn to Bell (1999:10) for a description: ‘It is an approach which has proved to be particularly attractive to educators because of its practical, problem-solving emphasis, because practitioners (sometimes with researchers from outside the institution; other times not) carry out the research and because the research is directed towards greater understanding and improvement of practice over a period of time’.

Patton turns to Whyte (1989) for an explanation of this approach:
Actions research aims at solving specific problems within a program, organization, or community. Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging the people in the program or organization in studying their own problems in order to solve those problems (Whyte 1989). As a result, the distinction between research and action becomes quite blurred and the research methods tend to be less systematic, more informal, and quite specific to the problem, people, and organization for which the research is undertaken.

(2002:221)

Cohen et al. (2000:226) write: ‘The scope of action research as a method is impressive.’ They continue, referring to Holly and Whitehead (1986): ‘It can be undertaken by the individual teacher, a group of teachers working co-operatively within one school, or a teacher or teachers working alongside a researcher or researchers in a sustained relationship, possibly with other interested parties like advisers, university departments and sponsors on the periphery.’

The action research model has four phases: plan, act, observe and reflect (Cohen et al. 2000:236). Examples of areas where action research can be used are teaching methods, learning strategies, evaluative procedures, attitudes and values, continuing professional development of teachers, management and control, and administration. (Cohen et al. 2000:226)

Noffke points out some characteristics of the paradigm in question:

As a research method, action research is cyclical, that is, it does not progress from an initial question to the formulation of data collection, analysis, and conclusion. Rather, it assumes that understandings and action emerge in a constant cycle, one that always highlights the ways in which educators are partially correct, yet in continual need of revision, in their thoughts and actions. The process does not end, as with traditional notions of research, with richer understandings of education for others to implement; rather it aids in the ongoing process of identifying contradictions, which, in turn, help to locate spaces for ethically defensible, politically strategic action.
Action research, then, is about taking everyday things in life of education and unpacking them for their historical and ideological baggage. It is similar to, but not the same as, the everyday process of improvement, in that it is public and collaborative. It highlights process with content, rather than content alone. It allows for a focus on teaching, in addition to student outcomes, and on the interplay between the two.

(1995:4f)

Authors describing action research mention its emancipatory aspect. Stevensson et al. write:

At least in some forms, action research assumes that neither the process of education nor that of educational research is neutral in its political stance. Rather, it reflects a concern with improving educational practices toward building a more just and caring society.

(1995:60)

Cohen et al. (2000:240) call our attention to one of the difficulties that may occur when working on a collaborative basis: ‘Both parties share the same interest in an educational problem, yet their respective orientations to it differ.’ They continue by describing other conceivable problems:

It has been observed (Halsey, 1972, for instance) that research values precision, control, replication and attempts to generalize from specific events. Teaching, on the other hand, is concerned with action, with doing things, and translates generalizations into specific acts. The incompatibility between action and research in these respects, therefore, can be a source of problems (Marris and Rein, 1967).

Another issue of some consequence concerns headteachers’ and teachers’ attitudes to the possibility of change as a result of action research.

(2000:240f)

When discussing the problem of interpreting data in action research, Cohen et al. (2000:241) refer to Winter:
The action research/case study tradition does have a methodology for the creation of data, but not (as yet) for the interpretation of data.

... What we are not shown is how the teacher can or should handle the data thus collected.

(1982)

Cohen et al. continue:

The problem for Winter is how to carry out an interpretive analysis of restricted data, that is, data that can make no claim to be generally representative. In other words, the problem of validity cannot be sidestepped by arguing that the contexts are unique.

(2000:241)

I let Feldman and Atkin conclude with their positive view on the method:

... we believe that teachers’ engaging in action research will have a positive effect on the future of teaching in general by changing the perception that people have about the teacher’s role. By participating in this process, teachers begin to see themselves-and can be seen by others-as more than implementers of policy, curriculum, and pedagogy devised by those who usually are considered authorities. Instead, teachers are recognized as the experts that they are in domains of their own experience. It is possible that such activity by teachers will lead to a redefinition of teaching that recognizes how teachers have the capability of taking the lead in obtaining the insight necessary to improve their own practice. Such recognition begins to create a climate of encouragement wherein teachers become initiators of educational change, not solely implementors of the ideas of others.

(1995:131)

Now last but not least, the case study, another intriguing research paradigm. Cohen et al. refer to Nisbet and Watt (1984:72) for a definition: ‘A case study is a specific instance that is frequently designed to illustrate a more general principle’. Patton puts it in the following way:
The case study is a readable, descriptive picture of or story about a person, program, organization, and so forth, making accessible to the reader all the information necessary to understand the case in all its uniqueness. The case story can be told chronologically or presented thematically (sometimes both). The case study offers a holistic portrayal, presented with any context necessary for understanding the case.

(2002:450)

And Cohen et al. write:

Case studies can establish cause and effect, indeed one of their strengths is that they observe effects in real contexts, recognizing that context is a powerful determinant of both causes and effects. … contexts are unique and dynamic, hence case studies investigate and report the complex dynamic and unfolding interactions of events, human relationships and other factors in a unique instance.

(2000:181)

Cohen et al. describe one of the distinctive features of the approach:

Case studies strive to portray ‘what it is like’ to be in a particular situation, to catch the close-up reality and ‘thick description’ (Geertz, 1973) of participants’ lived experiences of, thoughts about and feelings for, a situation. Hence it is important for events and situations to be allowed to speak for themselves rather than to be largely interpreted, evaluated or judged by the researcher. In this respect the case study is akin to the television documentary.

(2000:182)

Generalization tends to be a problem with this method, as Cohen et al. point out:

Case studies can make theoretical statements, but, like other forms of research and human sciences, these must be supported by the evidence presented. This requires the nature of generalisation in case study to be clarified. Generalization can take various forms, for example:
• from the single instance to the class of instances that it represents (for example a single-sex selective school might act as a case study to catch significant features of other single-sex selective schools);
• from features of the single case to a multiplicity of classes with the same features;
• from the single features of part of the case to the whole of that case.

(2000:182f)

Referring to Nisbet and Watt (1984), Cohen et al. (2000:184) discuss other conceivable problems, such as observer bias, and that results ‘are not easily open to cross-checking, hence they may be selective, biased, personal and subjective.’

There are many ways to do case studies. As Stake (1995:xii) puts it: ‘Before you is a palette of methods.’ But Cohen et al. (2000:183) state that ‘case studies frequently follow the interpretive tradition of research – seeing the situation through the eyes of participants – rather than the quantitative paradigm, though this need not always be the case.’

An important issue is how to select information. Cohen et al. write:

Though it is frequently useful to record typical, representative occurrences, the researcher need not always adhere to criteria of representativeness. For example, it may be that infrequent, unrepresentative but critical incidents or events occur that are crucial to the understanding of the case.

(2000:185)

They (2000:185) continue: ‘Significance rather than frequency is a hallmark of case studies, offering the researcher an insight into the real dynamics of situations and people.’

Action research was the method I decided to use, when I started planning this dissertation. Because of its problem-solving and cyclical character, it seemed to
be the best approach for the anti-racist project I was a part of. But when the project had to be interrupted, I decided to switch to another research method. The reason for this was that I wanted to look into the underlying causes of our unsuccessful attempt, to understand why it went wrong. The case study seemed to be the best approach to get an overall picture.

Our interrupted project was the critical incident that made me fully realize the imperfection of the Swedish school system. I try to minimize the risk of bias by looking at the problem from different angles. To further illustrate the problem I compare with the English school system, and discuss what I learnt. Of course, the issue is seen through my eyes, thus following the interpretive paradigm.

It is important for my professional development to understand the limitations of the Swedish school system, because I want to continue working for school improvement, but I do not again want to waste my energy on a project that is doomed from the beginning.
Findings and Evaluation of Findings

In 2001 we realized that Neo-Nazi ideas were spreading among the pupils of our school. Swastikas were carved on tables and window-panes, Neo-Nazi articles were disseminated, leaflets were distributed, pupils used the Nazi salute and expressed their admiration for racist music. A pupil using revisionist slogans tried to recruit adherents, and racist jargon was becoming more frequent. Naturally, pupils with a foreign background started to feel insecure. This was the more alarming, considering that our school has always had an accepting atmosphere, where bullying is not a big problem.

The institution where I work is a secondary school with slightly more than 500 boys and girls, aged thirteen to sixteen. The area has an industrial and rural character, and many of the pupils come from families without any academic tradition. Few of them are immigrants. The staff is dedicated and caring. Many of the teachers have worked at the school for twenty years and more. Among the colleagues there is an atmosphere of trust. We can discuss problems freely and try to help and support each other.

The school has a well functioning strategy to prevent and combat bullying. There is an anti-bullying group of twelve persons that meet regularly: management, pastoral care and one teacher from every working party. (Every working party consists of six to ten teachers, who teach and take care of three to seven classes.) When an incident happens, the form teacher is told. She / he informs the working party and the parents. There is a close co-operation with the police, social services and the local church. The pupils also take an active part in the work against bullying. Every class elects two pupils considered to have the courage to support pupils who are being harassed. This can be done in different
ways: report to a teacher, accompany the pupil to the classroom, etc. They are
given training in how to prevent and combat bullying. These pupils have regular
meetings with members of the anti-bullying group for guidance and support.
Once a year a questionnaire is filled in by the pupils, and according to the
answers given there, fewer and fewer children are being bullied. Our goal is of
course, that there is no harassment at all.

In 2001, when Neo-Nazi ideas were spreading among our pupils, the same
arguments were heard in the community around us. A far-right party exploited
racial tension in the area and attracted new voters. We, a group of five teachers,
wanted to counteract these tendencies. But we needed money for training and
material, and received quite a generous sum of money from BRÅ,

What we wanted to do was to work on a long-term basis, to “vaccinate” the
pupils against racist and Neo-Nazi propaganda. To start with, we planned to
work out a comprehensive material to use in class, adapted to each form. But our
project group had to learn more about Neo-Nazi symbols, music and other
manifestations. We attended interesting seminars and learned a lot. (Interesting
material on the topic is listed in Bibliography). But we were in doubt about our
suggested working method. Was this the best way to influence the pupils’
attitudes? I contacted the National Agency for Education. They had nothing
issued on the subject. Lärarförbundet (Swedish Teachers’ Union) had published
a booklet on the problem and so had Save the Children, Sweden, but neither of
these publications answered our questions. So we planned an extended version
of a thematic week that we had arranged two years earlier, with interesting
visitors, films, texts and discussions.
I decided to make our anti-racist work the subject of my research project and suggested using questionnaires before and after the thematic week, to see what the pupils had learnt, and if their attitudes had changed. The teachers were to be given questionnaires, too, but with other questions, and some of them were also to be interviewed.

When searching for the right people to come and talk during our thematic week we came into contact with Christer Matsson at Göteborg University. He helped schools to work out strategies to combat racism and to bring round pupils with Neo-Nazi views. Our little group spent a both interesting and frustrating afternoon with him. We were not happy to learn that we were completely on the wrong track. Thematic weeks tend to reinforce the opinions of pupils with Neo-Nazi views. But how to tackle the problem then? Christer Matsson argued that there are different groups of pupils: the core group, the followers, the social confirmers, the searchers, the ideological confirmers, and the girls. Each group is to be dealt with separately. What an enormous work! This was in May. For months we had spent many hours on planning and looking for answers. We all taught full-time and were given no extra time for our anti-racist project. By then we were exhausted and disappointed. We decided to wait until autumn to make a new try.

In September, the year nine pupils spent a lesson to fill in a questionnaire (see Appendix 1). The result showed that there was a lot of work to be done. A shorter and slightly different version of the questionnaire was answered by the teachers (see Appendix 2). Then I interviewed seven members of the staff, asking them to give further comments to the problem of how to combat racism and xenophobia. They stressed the following points as important:
• To write an action plan on how to prevent and address racism, and to revise that plan regularly. To integrate the combat against racism into the anti-bullying work.

• To work in a positive way with the pupils by winning their confidence and respect, and by making them feel that they are good enough persons. Important is also to help them pass in the subjects.

• The staff must learn how to recognize Nazi symbols and signs and have the knowledge how to answer Nazi arguments.

The local church organizes recreational activities for young people. I interviewed the man who works with our pupils. He pointed out that racism often comes from the parents. When we speak against racism in school, we say that their parents are wrong. Who are the children then to believe?

Christer Matsson was booked to lecture twice in September, once for the staff and once for the parents. Both lectures were much appreciated. Our project group now had many new ideas. But we realized that we could not both carry on with our project and teach full-time, as we had done for a year now. We wanted one of us to be able to work half-time with this difficult problem. At a meeting with local politicians and members of BRÅ (The National Council for Crime Prevention) we presented our ideas and our work so far, and stressed the importance of having the time needed. Our ideas were received in a positive way, but we were not granted the resources we had asked for. We then turned to our headteacher, but he could not help us either. So we came to the conclusion that our project could not be continued.

A couple of months after this decision I got in touch with a headteacher in Derbyshire in England. She sent me the material they use in her primary school to combat racism. The scope is impressive. Here is everything a school needs to
deal with the problem of racism: a guide how to promote race equality, performance guidelines, and detailed suggestions about how to develop a global dimension in the school curriculum. The Derbyshire Advisory and Inspection Service publishes a Curriculum Bulletin, which appears monthly and gives detailed information on how to prepare and maintain a written race equality policy, the possibilities to include the work against racism in every subject, how to address and prevent racism, resources on the internet, etc. (The titles are listed in References.) When I read this material I cannot help but envy English schools. If Swedish schools had had access to that kind of material, our group would have achieved what we wanted: a strategy, a plan and a way of working that the staff could use and improve during the years to come. Instead, a year of hard work ended up in nothing.

Our school has now got a new headteacher, who is interested in resuming the project in another form. One suggestion is to send small groups of pupils to visit the concentration camp Neuengamme near Hamburg. Neuengamme was the main concentration camp in northern Germany, a work camp with more than 80 extensions in the area.

Now let us look at school improvement from another angle. I have interviewed seven persons in Sweden and in England: three headteachers, three deputy headteachers and one senior manager. I asked them the following questions:

a) What do you understand by quality assurance? Do you think it is important to use quality assurance in school?

b) Where can you use quality assurance systems in school?

c) To what purpose?

They answered as follows:
1. Deputy head, secondary school, Sweden, 500 pupils (boys and girls).

   a) Important, a recurrent element in the work of a school. I use the term quality review instead of quality assurance, the latter being a term introduced in the production industry and not applicable in schools. Quality review covers the goals we have, how we intend to reach them and how we did or did not reach those goals. An annual report is written and sent to the local politicians. A model with three steps: goals, fulfilment of goals, taking measures for development.

   b) Two goals are selected from the local work plan each year. This year’s goal is the psychosocial working environment and last year’s was knowledge and proficiency. There is also an annual bullying questionnaire. The environmental account could be better in our district. The National Agency for Education has published some excellent material (questionnaires) for evaluation. There is much to be gained by an appropriate evaluation.

   c) Important that there is a continuous quality review in schools, that gives us credibility towards all parties: pupils, parents, staff, and politicians. It is important that the politicians know when we do not reach our goals, in case the problem is lack of funding.

2. Deputy head, secondary school, Sweden, 500 pupils (boys and girls).

   a) QA is very important. We have to check that we did what we had planned and what we ought to do. This can be done in different ways, not necessarily in a formal way. But sometimes written reports are essential to make the results clear to everybody.
b) Important to evaluate is how we attain goals and objectives, how the pupils perform. But if the children do not feel secure in school they do not learn, so we also have to look at how we work with this question. Statistics are easy to check but they are not the whole truth. It is essential to have a continuous discussion about the goals and objectives, what they imply, and what we can do to attain them, considering the pupils and resources we have. Questions to ask are: What have I/we done? What had I/we planned to do? Why do some teachers succeed better than others, and what factors come into play? Good ideas are to be spread among the colleagues. Important to look at is why some pupils did not pass: What have we done to make them pass? Why was that not sufficient? What else could we have done, and why did we not do it?

c) To be constantly aware of what the goals and objectives imply, and how we attain them. To meet the needs of the pupils, and to change our way of working. Society is changing and we must adapt our teaching accordingly. Some pupils are used to being constantly entertained since they started day nursery. If something is not fun, they will not do it! We must always be able to motivate all pupils to work.


a) To maintain quality for the children in the school. What we try to do is to ensure that the pupils in every lesson and in every subject are offered a quality education.

b) We use a departmentally review system, where Heads of Department and Senior Teachers work together as a team. They go into classrooms and observe teachers: They make sure that the curriculum is being delivered and
that the syllabuses being delivered are of a high quality. That goes across the whole school. Every department is given a time during the year, after or before the half term period, when they will be under review. The Head of Department is then responsible to look for things like outputs of the examination results, not just the department, but all individual members within the department. That is what we call the residuals or residual notices.

An example: if there are, say, 5 English GCSE groups the Head of Department will be given data to analyse which teacher got the best results. It is not just how many grade C, grade B and grade A there are. What we do is to look at what each pupil was given in terms of a grade across all of his subjects, take an average across all of those subjects, and then see how he in that particular subject performed against that average. An example: Suppose a boy got a grade E in PE for his GCSE. That’s a pretty poor grade. But if in all of his other subjects he’s got grades F and G, he’s actually done pretty well in PE. Then that teacher will be given credit for that. So all the teachers are given a residual now for GCSE. That shows the Head of Department who the stronger teachers are and who the weaker teachers are. That information is spread on to the senior management team. We make sure that through that system there is quality teaching going on in all the lessons, because if there is a weaker teacher that teacher will be given support, INSET or whatever is needed, to try and make sure that the quality is maintained.

In Key Stage 3 we’ve got the SAT (Standard Assessment Task) results at the end of year 9. In the lesson we saw, those boys had been given a test when they first came into the school, a base line test. We can see from the results at the end of Key Stage 3 what progress they have made. It’s not quite so easy to define because in year 10 and 11, the same teacher has the same class through those two years, but in years 7, 8 and 9 they have three different teachers, so it would be wrong to judge the teacher in year 9 from what has been going on in three whole years.
c) To maintain the quality of education. To me it comes down to equal opportunities. Every pupil at the school should have an equal access to quality education. It’s wrong that if a boy goes to one teacher he gets a bad deal, and if he goes to another teacher he gets a good deal. That’s inequality.


a) To measure the schools and the individuals compared to national criteria and international performance. If it is important to use quality assurance in schools? Yes, it can be useful but one should not be too hung up on statistical data.

b) At any stage, but particularly at key stages. Before the last two or three years we used to have what we called VR, verbal reasoning, scores and also NVR scores, non verbal reasoning. If you were lucky, depending on what primary school they came from, they would come in with those two scores, and they used to give us some information. But now we have got what we call MIDYIS scores. When the year 7 boys arrive, within the first two or three weeks they are tested, and those tests are marked somewhere, based on some standardized score. From that information we can work out, based on their ability at that particular age, what they should be getting at Key Stage 3 and at Key Stage 4. We find it quite useful because the boys at year 7, there could be almost a year’s difference in their age. Normally, if you went back to my mark book from last year, I used to put into my mark book VR score, MIDYIS score, a Key Stage 3 prediction and a Key Stage 4 prediction. But of course, it hasn’t been going on long enough in this school yet to see whether the expects that we go to, the time that we go to will have any valid. I have to say that the Key Stage 3 results, a couple of years ago, based on
what we know, are quite close. There is quite a good correlation. Those are some of the measures we have for quality assurance.

Now the other thing we’ve introduced the last three or four years is tracking, but it’s more an internal thing. It indicates to us whether the boys are performing. Year 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 we have these sheets (*He shows me the sheets*). What we do with these sheets? The first column means if they’ve not attended, the next if they’ve turned up late. This column means the effort grade. It is very subjective, it’s what I think about their effort. Next columns mean the attainment grade and the homework. If the boy ends up with a 4, it’s alright. 4 is satisfactory. If he ends up with a 5 it’s even better. It’s only a 5 points scale. If you are in set 1 for mathematics, for example, you should be getting a 4 or a 5. If you are in set 6 or 7 you can’t possibly get that but a 1 or a 2. These grades here for year 11 indicate what grade they should expect to get at Key Stage 4, if they continue to perform as they’re performing now. As you can see, this is a set 2, and my target grade is C. This is what tracking is all about. The year is split up in 4 periods, 4 separate tracking periods. The parents get a copy of the tracking sheets. The idea is a form of communication. It is not a quality assurance as such, but it is a measurement. The Head of Department will get all the maths results back, for example, to have a look at how every single boy in a particular teaching group is performing. But then, it could also be used in yet another way. The actual Head of Year for the whole of year 10, he could have a copy of everything and share that with the form tutor, for example. I don’t know if that is happening, but it is the facility here for that to happen. I think, if I were Head of Year, I would ask to have a copy of every single sheet of paper, and I would spend time analysing that sheet of paper, certainly from the second tracking period onwards, when you start to make those comparisons to see if the pupils are getting better.
c) To predict, to monitor, to assess value added. Have you heard the word PANDA (Performance and Assessment Report) yet? There will be scores in this country that have what we call the cohort, the boys or the girls who have similar abilities, based on the information they’ve been given from primary school. The inspectors or the DfEE would say how well they’re doing in the eyes of themselves compared to other schools of like ability, and that’s a PANDA. That is given straight to the Headmaster. What I mean by quality assurance is using data valid, comparing ourselves and our performance against some other criteria, quality assurance both at individual level, at school level, school performance compared to other schools.

(For interviews 5-7 see Appendix 3)

When I interviewed the Swedish headteachers one of them said: ‘An interesting question is how to organize QA work in school, so that the staff regard it as meaningful and as a support in their daily work.’ It is a question I do not think that an English headteacher would ask, because he/she would already know the answer. DfEE and OFSTED have published documents on every aspect of school effectiveness. But the National Agency for Education, and the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement formed in 2003, give Swedish headteachers little support in their work to raise standards. This fact is illustrated in the interviews. Two of the English but none of the Swedish interviewees describe in detail how they use QA systems.

Another aspect of this issue is how resources are to be spent: On trying to put things right afterwards or on doing an excellent work from the start? An example: In my school we have noticed that every year a even higher percentage of the year 7 pupils we receive have reading and writing difficulties. Have the
primary school teachers in the area changed their way of working, or are there other reasons? We do not know. With the resources we have, it is difficult to help these children to the extent they need, and when they leave us after three years some of them still have serious problems. The older the children get, the more expensive it will be to help them in an adequate way.

In my opinion, frustration of being hindered to do excellent work by lack of structure might be a reason why Swedish teachers have a high rate of absence due to illness, and why many teachers leave the profession. The schools of education also have far fewer applicants now than some years ago. But on the other hand, there is a shortage of teachers in England as well. So there are no simple answers. Nevertheless, it is imperative to make the teaching profession more popular. As the English headteacher in the seventh interview points out: ‘But whatever philosophy or theoretical model, unless you have got quality teachers who are committed and dedicated, any of these strategies will fail’.

As I see it, there are also negative sides of the well-structured English system. One of them is the workload. The Sunday Times writes that one of the reasons for English teachers to leave the profession is pay, but also status, workload and ‘the loss of autonomy and creative satisfaction’. And it continues: ‘Above all, government must learn to trust teachers and let them take creative risks.’ (2001-09-09:27,26) When in England I was surprised to notice that, say, an English lesson in year 7 was almost identical in all schools I visited. The teachers prepare the pupils for the exams, using ‘detailed procedures laid down, supervised and tested by the government education bureaucrats from the office for Standard in Education (OFSTED) and the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA)’. (Sunday Times 2001-09-09:24) In Sweden teachers have the freedom to plan their lessons more according to their own ideas, and I find this very good indeed. Getting the opportunity to set my creativity free is one of the
best parts of my job! And in my opinion, it is possible to combine a certain creative freedom with QA strategies.

In May 2000 all municipalities in Sweden were invited to participate in a school development project that is to go on for five years. It is called Attraktiv Skola (Attractive School) and is organized by the national unions for teachers and school managers (Lärarförbundet, Lärarnas Riksförbund, Sveriges Skolledarförbund), the Swedish Association of Local Authorities, the Ministry of Education and Science, and the National Agency for Education. More than 100 municipalities applied, and 34 were chosen. The project started in March 2001, and its purpose is to raise quality in school, e.g. by developing networks, and to make the teaching profession more attractive. (Attraktiv skola – en utvecklande organisation 2001-2006). But unfortunately, the good intentions have not been carried out altogether, due to the stretched economy of the municipalities. This year the situation is worse than ever: four out of five municipalities cut down on school funding. (Skolvärlden no. 9, Mai 2004:9).

The Swedish National Audit Office, SNAO, has just published its inspection report on how the State and the authorities have fulfilled their obligations, since the goal-related grading system was introduced in 1994. The criticism is devastating. SNAO states, that grades are not equivalent all over the country, and that this fact has negative consequences. The National Agency for Education and the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement are responsible. Teachers and headteachers do not get enough support and training, and the authorities do not follow-up and control adequately. It is difficult for the State to use the grades as instruments to follow-up and govern the decentralized school. This is a problem for the legal rights of the individual pupil.
The fundamental fault is that the statutes are too unclear, when it comes to the question of who is responsible for what. To make the grading system work, cooperation and clear guidelines are required. SNAO also proposes that the Agencies introduce national tests in more subjects than just maths, Swedish, and English (plus second foreign languages in upper secondary school). The Agencies answer that they now work full steam to repair their omissions. So for example, they have started a new project, to teach grading to those who study to become teachers or headteachers, and a web page with questions about grading is being put up in the autumn. (Skolvärlden no. 10-11, June 2004:14).
Conclusions and Recommendations

To learn gives me enormous satisfaction. I try to convey this feeling to my pupils, because I am convinced that knowledge makes them self-confident and resourceful. But this ambition is not always easy to fulfil, because educating is just one of our many duties. But my opinion is that we have to focus on teaching and learning. When schools do not deliver an education of high quality, it threatens the progress and growth of the country. One of Sweden’s best assets has been its well-educated manpower. A small country cannot afford to lose such an advantage.

I see our extremely decentralized system as utopian. If there was no shortage of time and money it might have been both stimulating and rewarding. Instead, it is an enormous waste of human and financial resources. Every school, every municipality has to work out its own model or system to raise quality. Headteachers have little guidance how to structure this work. With a shortage of staff, due to reduction of funding, the result is that there is little time for school improvement. Another aspect of this issue is that local authorities tend to deal with schools as just budget problems. Finances have become more important than curriculum.

The lack of structure is a source of frustration and stress for the staff, because it hinders them to do a good job and to live up to their own ambitions. Swedish teachers have a high rate of absence due to illness. And when we look at the Swedish school from a pupil perspective the situation is disastrous, too: inefficiency, grades that are not equivalent all over the country, a school only for the elite, health problems. We also must take into account that Sweden spends more money on schools than most countries in the world.
New methods and ways of working are encouraged, but we do not know if the new approach is more or less efficient than the one we used before. There is a focus on methods, not results. But how can we improve quality, if we do not know what the success criteria are? I do not agree with the predominant attitude in Swedish schools that change in itself is a criterion of quality. I want to know what I am doing and why!

A lot of good work is done at a local level. But, as our anti-racist project shows, local initiatives tend to fail owing to the lack of guidelines. Enthusiasm and hard work is not enough. That every municipality, every school does its own development work from the beginning, instead of only adjusting national guidelines to the local school takes a lot of time. This time could have been spent with the pupils and to improve the work in the classroom.

Is the Swedish school system organized according to QA principles? The answer must be no. But why is a documented system not god enough? Once more I quote Freeman (see Review of Literature) who argues that working according to a QA system adds three important extras:

- a method of checking up on how well the system is being adhered to;
- a method of correcting mistakes;
- a method of changing the system if it has become out of date.’
(1993:17)

The Swedish school system is badly in need of these three extras.

But does it really work to use QA in schools? Yes, the English school system is the proof. But as I see it, there should be more of a teacher perspective than in
England, where workload is heavy, and where there is not enough room for creative freedom.

Would it not be enough to introduce QA strategies at a local level? No, not to my mind. School effectiveness would then depend on the financial situation of the municipality, and if there are committed people willing to take on development work. The quality of schools should be equal all over the country.

What are my recommendations, then, to improve quality in Swedish schools? First of all, it is of vital importance to introduce a QA system at a national level. This can only be done if the State takes over the responsibility from the municipalities and helps them with the financing. But when it comes to school questions there seems to be a paralysing fear not to be politically correct, in Sweden today. Even the National Agency for Education has a tendency to tread lightly.

My recommendation at a local level is to continue the good work and not to give up hope. There is always a possibility of school improvement, in spite of certain obstacles. At a personal level my intention is to carry on my quest for knowledge, and to continue my efforts to improve as a teacher. I now know where the limitations within the Swedish school system are. This knowledge will prevent me from entering upon projects of a quixotic nature in the future, I hope.
References


Bibliography


### Appendix 1

**Questionnaire: The pupils in year 9 (boys and girls)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Alternative</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Do you know what Nazism stands for?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>73,6%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>26,4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have you seen any racist or Nazi symbols or signs in our school?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>33,2%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>27,3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>39,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have you seen racist or Nazi symbols or signs anywhere else?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>73,5%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>12,9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>13,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Do you talk with other persons about xenophobia?</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>4,9%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>58,2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>36,8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Have you ever heard someone express xenophobic opinions?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>76,8%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>23,2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you think that there is much xenophobia in our community?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>20,3%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>60,3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>19,4%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Do you think that xenophobia is a problem in our school?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>11,8%</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>45,0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>43,2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you think that what is done in our school against xenophobia is sufficient?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9,5%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>48,0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>42,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Have you worked with the problem of xenophobia in your class?</td>
<td>A lot</td>
<td>0,9%</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>24,1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>75,0%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Do you know any pupils who are members of a xenophobic organization or party?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3,3%</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>96,7%</td>
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<td>-----------------------------</td>
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<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Have you listened to racist music?</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>6,3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>31,6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>62,2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Have you ever visited a xenophobic homepage?</td>
<td>Yes, deliberately</td>
<td>3,4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Yes, by mistake</td>
<td>9,6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Do you know the name of any xenophobic organization or party?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>43,4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>56,6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Do you agree with the views of xenophobic organizations / parties on immigrants?</td>
<td>Always/often</td>
<td>2,4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>28,9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Seldom/never</td>
<td>68,7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Have you received information about xenophobia in any other way?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>17,9%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>40,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>41,7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Do you dare to stand by your opinions in a conversation or discussion?</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>55,2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>39,5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>5,2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2

Questionnaire: The teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Alternative</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Number of answers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Have you seen any racist or Nazi symbols or signs in our school?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>22,1%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>7,8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>70,1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Have you heard pupils express xenophobic opinions?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>45,0%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>55,0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Have any of your pupils been a member of a xenophobic party or</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5,6%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>organization?</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>94,4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Are you of the opinion that racist tendencies are a big problem in</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>9,0%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>our school?</td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>20,2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>70,8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Do you think that we do enough in our school to combat racist and</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>44,9%</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nazi tendencies?</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>55,1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Do you have enough knowledge to meet pupils’ racist / Nazi arguments?</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>23,9%</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I don’t know</td>
<td>25,4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No</td>
<td>50,7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Do you meet pupils’ racist / Nazi argumentation?</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>40,4%</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>28,1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>31,6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Do you let your pupils discuss / work with racism and / or Nazism?</td>
<td>Often</td>
<td>5,2%</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>59,7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Never</td>
<td>35,1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

Interviews

5. Headteacher, secondary school, Sweden, 500 pupils (boys and girls).

a) Clear goals must be formulated in the areas where the school is to work, using the national and municipal school documents. Then we must follow up and evaluate these goals. A follow up is a collection of results, while an evaluation is an estimation of those results. The school then uses these results to develop its work further. The discussion of quality assurance started in industry where products are manufactured. But in a learning organisation like a school this work is never completed, one is never contented with the ”product”; there is always a need for further development. It is a process of constant change.

b) Important areas for quality assurance in school are pupils’ learning and their comfort and wellbeing. Important for their learning is the teachers’ understanding of different learning problems and learning styles. What I can do as a headteacher is to make sure that the staff have the time needed for this work and to inspire them.

c) It is desirable that the goals are formulated in a way that they are a support for the staff in their daily work.

a) To me quality assurance / quality review is to describe how goals and objectives are attained, in accordance with the curriculum, and also to describe what measures to take if the objectives are not met.

b) Quality assurance is a tool to help the teacher and the school to find out if the goals and objectives are attained.

c) Through continuous development, explicit routines for quality management and a structured approach we create the best opportunities for attaining goals and objectives.


a) The concept is not new, it was first used in industry. It is an inappropriate model that has to be modified to the context of the school. To me quality assurance means equity, excellence, inclusion, in the context of value for money, and quality teaching and learning by qualified and caring staff. But whatever philosophy or theoretical model, unless you have got quality teachers who are committed and dedicated, any of these strategies will fail.

b) Can be used at all levels: teaching, non-teaching, pupils. But only with full staff will it be possible to raise standards. To get quality teachers is an enormous problem here.

c) To raise standards of teaching and learning.