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Contents

Abstract

This thesis examines how two upper secondary schools in Norway approach the assessment of English at the first year level. It aims at comparing the teachers' and pupils' attitudes to, beliefs and experiences of assessment in the two schools. One of the schools is an experimental school with a 'whole school' project in connection with assessment, in which teachers engage in sub-projects involving applying formative assessment methods. The other school is a control school offering a similar range of courses without a whole school approach. The data was primarily collected through the use of teacher and pupil focus group interviews.

Assessment is one of the fundamental tasks in teaching. One of the main distinctions discussed in the thesis is between formative and summative assessment. Assessment is especially relevant with the current new reform ˈAssessment for learningˈ, initiated by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, which emphasizes formative assessment. The aim is to implement the reform in schools and it will be evaluated in 2014. This thesis contributes to the evaluation through a case study of how two schools have approached the assessment of English in the reform period.

Several recent Norwegian research projects into assessment show that teaching pupils about meta-cognitive aspects of learning and learning strategies is important for developing self-regulated learners. Studies also show that many teachers are positive to national assessment policies and are relatively updated on what assessment for learning entails. School owners are predominantly concerned with reliability and delegate the responsibility of ensuring validity to the individual schools and teachers. Consequently, there are large differences between the way schools implement the national assessment guidelines.

In both schools of this study there was more focus on writing than oral assessment and oral assessment primarily related to giving oral presentations. However, the experimental school put the pupils' learning in focus with regard to assessment through its ˈwhole schoolˈ project. The project was approved by the teachers and led to a positive and constructive change in their attitudes to and practices of assessment. The project provided a common language for teachers to discuss and relate to assessment. Feedback to help pupils develop their oral and writing skills was very important. However, the pupils at this school did not ˈfeelˈ the change to the same extent, and mostly still thought in terms of grades. They did not seem to have the same understanding of assessment and the possible advantages of formative assessment as the teachers had.

The teachers in the control school, in contrast, emphasized giving their pupils grades. They had no common approach to ´Assessment for learning´, even though they were familiar with its principles. In fact they sometimes applied assessment methods which they knew were not optimal for helping the pupils' learning. According to the teachers, this was due to practical issues concerning organizational challenges. However, in this school, the pupils seemed more informed and reflected about the assessment methods the teachers applied, and why, than their peers in the experimental school, possibly because they were more ambitious.

1. Introduction

This thesis is an investigation into how two upper secondary schools in Norway approach assessment of English at the first year level. One of the schools is an experimental school which focuses on assessment as a tool in the learning process. The other school is a control school that offers the same range of both general and vocational courses. The main method of data collection was focus group interviews: a teacher focus group and a pupil focus group interview in each school. Through this method one was able to examine the experiences, attitudes to, beliefs and expectations of both teachers and pupils towards the assessment of English. Simons et. al. (1993: 239), cited in James (2001: 7), define 'attitude' as a 'way of thinking that inclines one to feel and behave in certain ways'. Borg's (2006: 36) references to 'beliefs' include 'a form of personal knowledge consisting of implicit assumptions about students, learning, classrooms and the subject matter to be taught'.

Assessment is an important aspect of education in Norwegian schools. It can also be challenging because not enough attention has been paid to assessment in the Norwegian system of educating teachers and for that reason many teachers feel insecure about how to best assess and give feedback (Fjørtoft 2009:14). However, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training launched a national initiative in 2010, in which they challenged all schools at all levels to focus on assessment through a project called 'Assessment for learning'. 'Assessment for learning' is defined by the Directorate as 'all assessment and feedback given during the learning process that promotes learning'[1]. The aim of this initiative is to develop teachers' assessment practices through giving them more competence and understanding of assessment as a tool for learning. The initiative is built on research and experiences from other countries. Today, in the light of this national initiative, there is a new focus on assessment in Norwegian schools and this will lead to discussions about the necessity and the organization of assessment and how to use it to enhance learning.

In the wake of the current *LK06* national curriculum in Norway, many teachers and researchers have shown a growing interest in how to merge assessment and learning into a method that can be used to enhance learning. Fjørtoft (2011: 15) refers to a large scale project called *Better assessment practice* (2007-2009), where the agenda was to investigate the need for national standards in subjects to ease the teachers' work on assessing and contribute to a more standardized system of pupil assessment in a national perspective. The reports following

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[1] 12.11.2012. http://www.udir.no/Vurdering/

the project emphasized the necessity for a criteria-based tool for assessment in schools and that schools need a strengthened and more systematic culture of assessment. The researchers noticed, however, that many teachers had difficulties identifying what and how to assess, and that several of the teachers involved in the project wanted models and examples of how best to assess their pupils. Fjørtoft (2009:15) describes how the *Better assessment practice* project led to more emphasis on assessment in general and a stronger focus on formative assessment practice and assessment for learning. This new emphasis was due to a firm interest in formative assessment practice in the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, and a revision, in 2007 and 2009, of the Norwegian law on education, which underlined such an assessment practice.

The Norwegian law on education states that the aim of assessment in different subjects is to promote learning during the learning process and that assessment should give the learner good feedback and guidance. Assessment during the learning process is to be used as a tool, as a basis for individual learning and it should contribute to enhance competence. Taking this law into consideration, the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training has consequently set the tone for how assessment for learning can be defined, but it is generally up to each school to develop its own assessment practice (Forskrift til opplæringslova,§3-2)[2]. This study compares a school which has made 'assessment for learning' into a project that includes the whole school at different levels with a control school without a whole school policy concerning assessment.

The focus on assessment in this thesis is relevant in that it provides contemporary insight into what actually goes on in two upper secondary schools when it comes to assessment in English at the first year level. The national *Assessment for learning* initiative will be evaluated in 2014 and there will be reports written on its effects. This thesis will hopefully make a contribution to research in assessment by studying how two schools have approached this challenge in the middle of the project period. It may shed light on the benefits and challenges of new approaches compared to traditional ones.

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[2] 12.11.2012. http://www.lovdata.no/for/sf/kd/td-20060623-0724-005.html#3-2

1.1 The present study and its aims

The emphasis on assessment for learning is a recent idea. Since it has been an initiative promoted by The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training, all schools have to, in one form or other, take into consideration and implement the concept of *Assessment for learning* into their school. By carrying out focus group interviews with teachers and pupils, the aim of the present research is to find out how assessment in English, at the first year level of upper secondary school, is practised and experienced in two schools. The study thus addresses the following research questions:

● How do the two Norwegian upper secondary schools approach the assessment of English at the first year level?

● What experiences of, beliefs and attitudes to assessment do the pupils and teachers have in these two schools?

1.2 The outline of the thesis

The thesis will first of all give an introduction to English in upper secondary schools in Chapter 2 to provide background about the context. In Chapter 3 the theoretical foundation of learning for the thesis will be presented in addition to theory on assessment in general, the distinction between summative and formative assessment, and assessment of written and oral skills. The chapter also contains a review of recent studies of assessment in Norway. Chapter 4 explains the methodology applied in the thesis, with special attention to focus groups as a method of data collection, how the subjects were chosen and what they discussed in the interviews. Chapter 5 is dedicated to presenting the findings, primarily summaries of the focus group interviews in the two schools. The findings are discussed in Chapter 6 by comparing the pupils and teachers in each school and the pupils and teachers across the schools. There are also sections on implications, recommendations and limitations of the study. In the final chapter, Chapter 7, conclusions are drawn.

2. English in Norwegian upper secondary schools

2.1 Introduction

At the age of 16, Norwegian pupils have to choose which way to pursue their education. All teenagers have a statutory right to upper secondary education after the 10-year compulsory school. Statistics show that at the age of 16, about 91 per cent of all teenagers are registered as pupils or apprentices. The transition from compulsory school to upper secondary school is a physical change, and to make this transition as successful as possible, much time is spent in lower secondary school on informing the pupils about different schools and educational programmes available. The pupils are given individual advice on which school and programmes to apply for, and they visit two schools of their choice to get an impression of the upper secondary level and the programmes they are thinking about joining. Despite these efforts, roughly 30 per cent [3] of pupils do not complete upper secondary education for various reasons.

Upper secondary education either results in admission into universities or colleges or into a vocation. It is divided into two main areas: general and vocational programmes. There are three different general education programmes: the programme for sports, the programme for music, dance and drama, and the academic programme. There are nine vocational programmes: construction, design, service and transport, electronics, healthcare, media and communication, nature, restaurant and food, and technical and industrial production. The general education programmes have a three-year time frame. The vocational programmes, on the other hand, are organized into two years in school and two years in an apprenticeship, at the end of which pupils are awarded a certificate. Another option for the vocational pupils is to continue school after the first two years and take a third year of academic subjects in order to gain the necessary competence to enter college or university.

In both general and vocational education programmes, English is an obligatory subject. In the general education programmes, one can expect to sit a final exam after the first year. In the vocational education programmes, this happens after the second year. The English subject, both in general and vocational education programmes, has the same curriculum and

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[3] http://www.nrk.no/nyheter/norge/1.7022059

competence aims and the same exam. It is up to the individual English teachers to organize the instruction so that the competence aims are met.

2.2 The curriculum

The Norwegian law on education contains laws and regulations which describe the English subject curriculum (*LK06*)[4], and how the pupils should be assessed. The English subject curriculum places a general emphasis on the basic skills of being able to express oneself orally and in writing, in reading, in numeracy and in the use of digital tools. The objectives of the curriculum state that English is a world language and that one therefore needs to learn English for communicative reasons. One needs to master the language and:

> …develop our vocabulary and our skills in using the systems of the English language; its phonology, grammar and text structuring. We need these skills to listen, speak, read and write, and to adapt our language to an ever increasing number of topics, areas of interest and communication situations. (*LK06* English subject curriculum)

The curriculum also emphasizes the importance of being aware of the strategies one uses when learning a foreign language, to be able to establish one's own goals for learning, and to determine how these can be obtained and also to evaluate the way the language is used.

The English subject has competence aims after the second, fourth, seventh and tenth year in primary and lower secondary school and after the first year in the programmes for general studies (Vg1) and after the second year of vocational education programmes (Vg2) in upper secondary school. The competence aims for general and vocational education programmes are divided into three main areas: 'Language learning', 'Communication' and 'Culture, society and literature'. The main area of 'Language learning' focuses on:

> …knowledge about the language, language usage and insight into one's own language learning. Being able to assess one's own language use, define one's own needs and select strategies and ways of working are requirements for attaining this. The main focus is on seeing what is involved in learning a new language and seeing relationships between English, one's native language and other languages (*LK06* English curriculum).

Next, the main area of 'Communication' focuses on using the English language to communicate through listening, reading, writing, prepared oral production, spontaneous oral

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[4] 11.12.2012. http://www.udir.no/kl06/ENG1-02/Kompetansemaal/?tbm=Vg1%2bEtter_Vg1___studieforberedende_utdanningsprogramme_og_Vg2___yrkesfaglige_utdanningsprogramme

interaction and through using appropriate communication strategies. Good communication requires knowledge and skills in using vocabulary and idiomatic structures, pronunciation, intonation, spelling, grammar and syntax of sentences and texts and the new media is a part of this main area.

Finally, the main area of 'Culture, society and literature' focuses on the English-speaking world and covers key topics connected to social issues, literature and other cultural forms. This main area also focuses on developing knowledge about English as a world language, with many areas of use.

2.3 Assessment

Pupils are continuously assessed both in oral and written English, but the two modes are merged into one grade at the end of the first year for general education programmes and at the end of the second year for vocational education programmes. The final grade is set on the grounds of written and oral assignments the pupils have produced in the final months of the second term. The Norwegian law on education (Forskrift til opplæringslova § 3-1)[5] states that all pupils have the right to assessment, both formative and summative, and it should be formally documented. Assessment during the learning process should also be given consecutively, be systematic and be both of an oral and written nature. It should contain information about competence and it should be given as reports on how to move forward and how to progress in the subject.

The pupils have the right to a conference with the teacher at least once each term, which should be focused on the pupils' development and progress in relation to the English subject's competence aims. The Norwegian law on education also states that the pupils' evaluation of their own work should be a part of the assessment during the learning process. It is implied that pupils should be active participants in the assessment of their work, and of their competence and development in the subject (Forskrift til opplæringslova § 3-12).

The Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training constructs the national written exams. However, the oral exams[6] are made locally in the different regions. Pupils can be picked out both for an oral or a written exam, for general education programmes in year one and year two for vocational education programmes. The current written exam format includes

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[5] 11.12.2012. http://lovdata.no/for/sf/kd/xd-20060623-0724.html#3-1
[6] 14.04.2013. http://www.udir.no/Vurdering/Eksamen-videregaende1/

a preparation day and an examination day. The exam questions are related to the preparation day topic, and pupils are expected to read information about and reflect over a particular topic prior to sitting the actual exam. Consequently, pupils have the opportunity to prepare by gathering further information about the topic and by discussing with fellow pupils and getting help from the teacher. The pupils are allowed to bring the material they have gathered on the preparation day with them to the exam and also other materials, such as books, articles, and dictionaries. No interaction is allowed during the exam: the Internet and cell phones are prohibited. The exam lasts five hours, where the pupil is expected to answer one or two shorter tasks and write one longer text.

The regionally arranged oral exam is announced 48 hours before the actual exam day. The individual school can choose to organize the exam with or without preparation time, which can be up to 48 hours. When time for preparation is allowed, pupils are usually given the topics, tasks and questions related to the exam. The national exam regulations state that it is the actual competence the pupils show in the exam that is to be assessed. The pupil cannot simply present a product from the preparation, e.g. PowerPoint, and not show their oral competence during the exam besides answering questions in relation to the presentation. In principle, the examiner can ask questions from all the competence aims in the subject curriculum.

2.4 Teacher education

To work as a teacher in upper secondary schools in Norway one has to have at least a Bachelor degree, which involves at least two subjects. Most upper secondary schools prefer their teachers to have a Master's degree in the teacher's main subject. To gain tenure as a teacher one needs to have completed a one-year Postgraduate Certificate of Education[7], which gives the competence to teach at the intermediate, lower and upper secondary levels. It comprises three elements: educational theory, subject-specific didactics and 12-14 weeks of supervised practice in two different schools, of which one should be at the upper secondary level.

The competence aims in the Postgraduate Certificate of Education do not emphasize assessment. In the general educational theory courses, two out of twelve competence aims

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[7] 02.02.2013. http://www.uis.no/studietilbud/laererutdanninger/ppu-praktisk-pedagogisk-utdanning/praktisk-pedagogisk-utdanning-heltid/studieplan-og-emner/

mention assessment: the student should be able to *account* for and *discuss* basic principles within planning, implementing and the assessment of instruction. In the didactics courses, two out of twenty competence aims focus on assessment: the student should have *knowledge* and be able to *use* different types of testing and assessment appropriate for the English subject. Although these are the competence aims stated in the Postgraduate Certificate of Education's curriculum[8], it is difficult to comment on the focus put on assessment in the actual education as a whole, as assessment may be linked to other competence aims as well.

To be a professional teacher one has to take into consideration the regulations given by the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training. The Norwegian law on education and its regulations are the most important tools for teachers provided by the state and, together with the *LK06* curriculum, they build a framework for teachers to work within for each subject.

In 2010 the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training saw the need to get schools to focus on assessment, thus the *Assessment for learning* initiative. This is not a new phenomenon. Much research has been done on the effect of assessment over the past decades, but it is in the last few years that it has really been given serious attention in the Norwegian educational system.

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[8] 02.02.2013. http://www.uis.no/studietilbud/laererutdanninger/ppu-praktisk-pedagogisk-utdanning/praktisk-pedagogisk-utdanning-heltid/studieplan-og-emner/

3. Theory and literature review

3.1 Introduction

The aim of the present chapter is to examine issues related to assessment. First, section 3.2 presents the theoretical foundations of learning that underpin the study. The main section, section 3.3, addresses the topic of assessment in detail, commenting on purpose of assessment, reliability and validity of assessment, summative and formative assessment, oral and writing assessment, and motivation and assessment. Section 3.4 sums up the chapter and finally, section 3.5 refers to some Norwegian studies on assessment.

3.2 Theoretical foundation

The theoretical foundations of learning are labelled ˙behaviourist˙, ˙constructivist˙ and ˙socio-cultural˙ (Black and William 2012). From a behaviourist point of view, learning is taught through complex knowledge broken down into parts where one is to master ˙simple˙ facts and concepts before moving on to learn more complicated material (Torrance and Pryor 2002:15). In a constructivist spirit, learning is individual sense-making. In a socio-cultural way of thinking, learning is building knowledge while collaborating with others. Black and William (2012:190) point out that these different perspectives are based on a view of what learning is, and how it takes place, but implications for assessment are seldom developed.

The cognitive constructivist theories focus on how people construct meaning and make sense of the world. In this respect Black and William (2012) stress that prior knowledge is an indicator of pupils' capacity to learn something new. The construction of knowledge is done through understanding and problem solving. From this perspective pupils gain new knowledge through understanding concepts and their relationships, therefore, it is important to be capable of using processing strategies. In that respect the two components of meta-cognition: self-monitoring and self-regulation are important (Black and William 2012).

The reason why meta-cognition is an important dimension of learning is that it challenges pupils' mental models in order to ˙scaffold their understanding of knowledge structures and to provide them with opportunities to apply concepts and strategies in novel

situations˒ (Black and William 2012:191). In this context, teaching and assessment are combined to close gaps between current understanding and new understanding. Therefore, formative assessment is often associated with the cognitive constructivist theoretical orientation.

Black and William (2012) comment on the implication for assessment of the socio-cultural learning theory. They refer to Vygotsky (1978), who argues that learning occurs in the interactions between the individual and the social environment. Thinking is conducted through interaction with others which alter the situation and the situation changes the thinking; the two constantly interact (Vygotsky 1978). Thus, learning is a ˒social and collaborative activity in which people develop their thinking together˒ (Black and William 2012:192).

Torrance and Pryor (2002:15) refer to Vygotsky's (1978) claim that it is important to identify not just what pupils have achieved, but what they might be able to do with the help of an adult or a collaborating peer in the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). The main characteristic of the ZPD is that it individualises; it gives a unique profile of each pupil's skills. Generally, when pupils' skills are evaluated, the focus is on what the pupils are capable of doing on their own. Vygotsky (1978) argues that the level to which a pupil can perform a set task on his/her own is important, but is not the only indicator of development. The dynamic process of development has to be taken into account and the level of the pupil's assisted performance should also be considered (Black and William 2012:192). Black and William (2012) thereby argue firstly, that there is a certain value in making a pupil's development into a profile within a zone, because then they are encouraged to expand and challenge their knowledge, skills and understanding. Secondly, there is a benefit in assessing how learners respond to assistance and the teaching of something new by, for example, peers. By assessing how pupils respond to help from others, Black and William (2012:194) claim that the pupil's true level is more likely to be determined than by testing unassisted performance. This perspective provides a concept of assessment which looks forward rather than backwards and which anticipates teacher-pupil interaction as part of the assessment process itself (Torrance and Pryor 2002:16).

3.3 Assessment

3.3.1 Purposes of assessment

Assessment in an educational context involves deciding, collecting and making judgements about evidence relating to the goals of the learning being assessed (Harlen 2012:87). Assessment is an umbrella term which includes diverse practices. Smith (2011:57) defines assessment as ˙a group of processes which we use when we try to understand and draw conclusions about pupils' learning process, progress and learning outcome˙.

The main practical issue teachers face when making decisions about assessing writing is that, without the information obtained from assessment, it would be ˙difficult to identify the gap between pupils' current and targeted performances and to help them progress˙ (Hyland 2010:212). This applies to assessment in general. Assessment thus provides information that can be used to measure progress, identify problems, suggest instructional solutions, and evaluate course effectiveness.

The purpose of assessment is to obtain data about pupils' performance, and to reflect on how this information can be analyzed and used to make decisions about how to arrange a course and what tasks and materials to use. Hyland (2010:214) mentions five main purposes for assessing pupils: Placement, diagnostic, achievement, performance and proficiency. *Placement* as a reason for assessing refers to the gathering of data, by the use of tests, which will help place pupils in appropriate classes. These tests can also be used for diagnostic purposes, though the *diagnostic* purpose of assessing pupils is usually to identify strengths and weaknesses. Diagnostic tests are also useful in identifying areas that need to be adjusted as a course progresses, and to inform the pupils about their progress. The *achievement* aspect of assessment makes it easy for the pupils to demonstrate their writing progress. Such assessments should be based on a clear indication of what has been taught, testing only the genres that have been in focus in class, and reflecting the progress rather than failure. *Performance* gives information about the pupils' ability to perform particular tasks, and finally, *proficiency* indicates the pupils' level of competence, and seeks to give an overall picture of ability. Proficiency tests are often standardized for global use.

In addition, Hyland (2010:214) argues that teachers use assessment for motivational purposes, to get pupils to work harder, to provide practice for national exams, to gather information about what to teach next and, last but not least, to be able to evaluate the success of their methods, tasks or materials.

3.3.2 Reliability and validity

According to Hyland (2010:14), validity and reliability in writing assessment can be summed up as ˈa test should do what it is intended to do and it should do it consistentlyˈ. *Reliability* in writing tasks has to do with consistency, both performance of the same pupil on different occasions and the same task assessed by different teachers. It involves minimizing variations in scores caused by factors which are not related to the test. Hyland (2010:215) refers Hughes (1989), who argues that to ensure reliability of performance one has to have a sufficient number of samples, restrict the candidate's choice of topics and genres, give clear task directions, and make sure the pupils are familiar with the assessment format.

The consistency in assessing pupil writing is arguably a problematic area as it involves subjective judgments. Two main issues occur in this respect: all teachers should agree on how to rate the same pupil's performance and each teacher should assess the same performance in the same way on different occasions. Hyland (2010:216) refers to one solution to the reliability problem which has been to make scoring ˈrater-proofˈ. This implies that by using indirect assessments which seek to minimize variation in test results through the use of objective formats, such as multiple choice questions or cloze tests, reliability would be maintained. While some researchers claim that indirect assessments are reliable measures of writing skill (e.g. DeMauro 1992), these measures are largely concerned with accuracy rather than how the text communicates, and classroom assessments are mostly based on texts produced by pupils. Though indirect writing assessments have been a major response to improving reliability, absolute reliability is no longer a major goal (Hyland 2010:217).

The quality that most affects the value of writing assessment is *validity*. Hyland (2010:217) points out that, although dependent on reliability, ˈvalidity is crucial to fair and meaningful writing assessmentˈ. This means that an assessment task has to assess what it claims to assess, and must assess what has been taught. To establish validity is one of the fundamental concerns in language testing. The evidence for validity can either be *internal,* concerned with the cues given in the tests and the responses these cues evoke, or *external*, relating to what is actually being tested and the criteria for assessing performance.

Hyland (2010:218) presents different types of validity which provides different viewpoints on collecting and interpreting data. The most important ones are: firstly, *face validity,* which implies that assessments seem credible if both teachers and students believe the task measures what it claims to measure, and the assessments have to be authentic, relevant to real life writing experiences; secondly, *content validity* refers to whether the test

adequately represents the content of the target area, the topics the pupils are required to discuss; thirdly, *criterion validity* measures how far the test results match those from other tests or writing tasks. A fourth type is *construct validity*, which refers to the extent to which an assessment measures particular writing abilities. Finally, *consequential validity* refers to the possible consequences of the use of test scores and the impact of a test on teachers and pupils and on subsequent teaching.

Assessment has an impact on what is taught, how learners are assessed, and on the evaluation of course effectiveness. Consequently, teachers need a basic understanding of validity and reliability principles to make sure that the assessment process is fair, useful, and appropriate. The most effective assessments will, according to Hyland (2010:219), be to have several samples of topics and genres taught in class (*performance reliability),* have tools for clear and consistent marking across texts and raters (*scoring reliability),* provide opportunities for authentic writing which are as much like the real ability required as possible (*face and content validities),* produce results that broadly match pupils' performances in other tests (*criterion validity),* only assess skills that are part of the focus ability/skill (*construct ability),* and ensure that results are used ethically in the treatment of pupils/teachers *(consequential validity).*

3.3.3 The distinction between summative and formative assessment

Summative and formative assessment are often referred to in a learning context as *assessment of learning* and *assessment for learning* respectively (Gardner 2012:2). The history of formative assessment, summarised by Clarke (2012:8), goes back to the late 1960s, where Scriven (1967) proposed the terms *formative* and *summative* to distinguish between the different roles assessment could play, and suggested that formative assessment could have a role to play in the improvement of the curriculum. Bloom (1969) used the same distinctions in classroom tests and claimed that formative evaluation was much more effective if it was separated from the grading process and applied mainly to aid teaching. In the late 1980's Natriello (1987) and Crooks (1988) both provided evidence that formative assessment in classroom evaluation had an impact on pupils' learning. Natriello (1987) introduced the assessment cycle: purpose, setting of task, criteria and standards, evaluating performance and providing feedback. Crooks (1988) concluded that the summative function of assessment had been too dominant. In the late 1990's Black and William were appointed to review the literature about formative assessment written between 1987 and 1997. The review looked at

250 studies and found that effective use of formative assessment gave improvements in pupil achievement and was likely to lead to lifelong learning (Clarke 2012:8).

Assessment is not a separate aspect of education but is an integrated element of the curriculum. Assessment feeds back into and influences the teachers' analysis of what is required, the design of courses, and the selection of tasks and materials (Hyland 2010:239). Formative and summative assessment contribute in different ways to the larger goals of the assessment process. Smith (2011:219) emphasizes that it is the pedagogical work the teachers do which forms the meeting between instruction, learning and assessment. This function of assessment is often called formative assessment, and it occurs during the learning process, and describes the function the assessment has, namely to form.

Black and William (2009), referred to in Gardner (2012:51), define assessment as functioning formatively when:

> …the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited.

Assessment for learning is a common synonym for formative assessment.

Hattie and Timperley (2007:81) use the term ˙feedback˙ when talking about formative feedback as a function of formative assessment. Feedback is defined as ˙information provided by an agent regarding aspects of one's performance or understanding˙. Hattie and Timperley (2007:81) further explain that feedback is a consequence of performance: it is what happens after a pupil has responded to prior instruction and it is powerful when given in a learning context.

In contrast, summative assessment is defined as being concerned with ˙the summing up of how much a student has learned at the end of a course˙ (Hyland 2010:213). Summative assessment is commonly referred to as *assessment of learning*, and helps determine to what extent the instructional and learning goals have been met. Although formative and summative assessments serve different purposes, they should ultimately be integrated into a system of assessment, curriculum, and instruction.

Harlen and Gardner (2010:18) present an argument for not using the terms ˙formative assessment˙ and ˙summative assessment, but instead use the terms ˙assessment for formative purposes˙ and ˙assessment for summative purposes˙ because these are more explicable. However, the main point made is that one understands that information gathered from any

assessment processes has the potential to be used directly to help or simply to judge or records. This thesis uses the terms 'formative' and 'summative' when talking about assessment used to promote learning and assessment for grading or keeping record, respectively.

3.3.4 Summative assessment

Summative assessment is generally carried out at the end of a course or project mainly to report what has been achieved at a particular time (Harlan and Gardner 2010:16). Clarke (2012:14) points out that in an educational setting, summative assessments are typically used to assign pupils a course grade, and they are evaluative. In long term summative assessment, pupils' progress is summarized to meet a variety of purposes: reporting to parents, supporting the transition to other teachers, certification of learning through exams, and comparing schools to each other. In a more medium-term summative assessment, one reviews pupils' progress at termly intervals, so that teachers can decide whether the pupils are on track and make sure that measures are being taken for those who are not.

Summative functions of assessment give priority to consistent meanings in different contexts and with different individuals (Black and William 1996). This means that the basis for reporting achievement ought to be comparable across pupils. Typically with summative assessment, evidence relating to the goals of learning may be gathered from regular activities or from special assessment tasks or tests (Gardner 2012:91). The interpretation of the evidence is in terms of achievement of certain skills, understandings and attitudes as a result of a number of activities. The summative assessment will be criterion-referenced, using the same criteria for all pupils. There is no washback effect on teaching, at least not as immediately as in purely formative assessment, and the pupils play no role in the assessment.

The distinction between summative and formative assessment is often made very clear, but Gardner (2012:92) reflects on whether these distinctions really are all that clear in practice. Can evidence collected to summarize learning be used to help learning? Can evidence collected for formative purposes also be used for summative purposes? If so, how does this happen, and what does it say about any real distinction between formative and summative assessment purposes? Black et al. (2003) show that evidence gathered which serves a summative purpose can also help learning. This is exemplified in the use of a portfolio of evidence, where pupils' work is collected over time. The portfolio provides feedback to pupils, making them able to improve their performance during the course, as well

as reporting what they have achieved by the end of the year. For this approach to work it is necessary to express the learning expectations in terms of success criteria, which need to be relatively detailed in order to give guidance (Gardner 2012:92).

Gardner (2012:94) refers to principles of assessment for learning that provide a way of checking to which extent data obtained from summative assessment can be truly formative. Before assuming that summative evidence is capable of helping learning, the following questions might be helpful in that process:

- Does the assessment focus on how pupils learn?
- Is it sensitive and constructive?
- Does it foster motivation?
- Does it promote understanding of goals and criteria?
- Does it help learners to know how to improve?
- Does it develop the capacity for self-assessment?
- Does it recognize all educational achievements?

According to Gardner (2012:94) the portfolio system seems to match most of these requirements quite well. It is designed to serve a formative purpose as well as a summative one. The same cannot be said for the summative assessment of tests and examinations. These can be helpful in identifying further learning, but can never be adequate to meet the claims of assessment for learning. The reason for this, according to Gardner (2012:94), is that the collection of summative evidence does not occur frequently enough, and the information is not detailed enough to be diagnostic.

Formative assessment used for summative purposes, on the other hand, is a question of whether teachers' on-going assessment in class through observing, questioning, listening to informal discussions among pupils, reviewing writing and using pupils' self-assessment, can be used for summative reporting. Gardner (2012:95) refers to Harlen and James (1997), who propose that one can use formative assessment for summative purposes provided that a distinction is made between the *evidence* and the *interpretation of the evidence*. For formative assessment, the evidence is interpreted in relation to pupil progress towards the goals of a particular piece of work, and focus on feedback that relates to what needs to be done to help further learning, not what level or grade a student has reached. The move from formative day-to-day evidence to a summative overview of achievement in terms of grades or levels needs to

be certain on at least two matters: firstly, that the evidence is valid and sufficiently reflects the learning goals, and secondly, that the assessments are reliable.

3.3.5 Formative assessment

During the twentieth century the understanding of how learning occurs developed rapidly. According to Black and William (2012:188), learning was no longer seen as primarily related to an individual's generally stable characteristics, such as general intelligence. While new understandings of learning had developed, this was not necessarily true of developments in assessment systems. To accommodate this development in both understandings of learning and assessment, it was necessary to help teachers to become more effective. Black and William (2012) argue that this implied a change in both teachers' assessment practices and a change in their beliefs about learning. When implementing assessment for learning, i.e. formative assessment, a teacher needs to reflect on what effective learning is, and also what the teacher's role is in promoting effective learning.

Formative assessment occurs during the learning process and the information obtained through different assessment activities is used in teaching to aid the pupils' learning. William (2011) claims that assessment can be viewed as being the bridge between teaching and learning. Assessment has such a central position in good teaching because one cannot foresee what pupils will learn, no matter how the teaching is designed. The important features of effective learning environments are creating pupil engagement and ascertain that the learning is heading in the right direction. The only way to do this is through assessment, and that is why assessment links teaching and learning (William 2011:46-50).

Before teachers decide how to assess they need to establish why assess. Smith (2011:215) refers to several prominent researchers when claiming that the most important function of assessment is to strengthen the pupils' learning. The teacher has to find out how the assessment practice best can inform about the pupils' learning, and how to make use of this information to work on the individual pupil's learning. Assessment is as important to the teacher in his practice as it is for the pupils' learning process.

3.3.5.1 Strategies of formative assessment
William (2011:51) proposes five key strategies of formative assessment that are essential to help pupils progress:

1. Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success;

2. Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning;

3. Providing feedback that moves learning forward;

4. Activating learners as instructional resources for one another;

5. Activating learners as the owners of their own learning.

Clarifying, sharing, and understanding learning intentions and criteria for success

The first key strategy concerns the advantage of pupils knowing what they are going to learn. However, consistently sharing learning objectives with pupils is a relatively recent activity in most classrooms. William (2011:51) comments on research evidence on the effects of making sure the learners understand what they are meant to be doing and explains why it is helpful to differentiate between learning objectives, the context of learning, and success criteria.

Although this strategy aims to help the pupils know where they are going in the process of learning, William (2011) argues that it cannot be done in a ˈformulaic wayˈ. Sometimes it is not even a good idea to tell the pupils what the lesson is about, because it will spoil the ˈjourneyˈ. Other times, although one would be more than happy to give the pupils clear guidance about what is expected, it may turn out to be too difficult to put into words what exactly is expected (William 2011:56-57). William (2011:58) refers to Polanyi (1958), who concluded that one cannot write down rules for what makes something good, but one can often summarize our ideas of quality through maxims, which are general truths or statements. Polanyi's (1958) insight was that maxims are useful to those who already understand what quality means in a specific context, but they are useless to those who do not understand what is meant. The point made is that learning objectives are sometimes used as if they are definitions of quality when in fact they are ˈpost-hoc rationalizationsˈ of quality, familiar to those who know what they are doing but not helpful to those who are not.

With this in mind, when communicating learning objectives to pupils, one has to decide whether one is giving rules or maxims. Sometimes one can be specific, while at other times the best one can do is to help pupils develop a sense of what is good quality (William 2011:58). Rubrics can play a role in this process. To develop learning objectives together with pupils is often valuable. The advantage is that the pupils come to own the learning objectives and success criteria because they have a better understanding of what they are about. Consequently, this makes it more likely for them to apply the learning objectives and success

criteria to their own work. However, this is not a democratic process. The teacher is in charge (William, 2011:59).

William (2011) claims that in language and arts, when pupils have to make corrections on a final draft, teachers hope that the pupils will transfer what they have learned to other pieces of writing. This is why scoring rubrics that are too detailed can be counterproductive. As William (2011:60) puts it: ˈThe clearer you are about what you want, the more likely you are to get it, but the less likely it is to mean anythingˈ. It is important to distinguish the learning objectives from the context of the learning. Doing this makes it much easier to differentiate instruction without the result being different pupils working toward different goals. The differentiation comes in the success criteria. All pupils should be able to transfer what they have learned to very similar contexts, while others can be challenged by assessing how far they can transfer what they have learned.

In developing learning objectives and success criteria, William (2011:62) proposes some useful considerations. There is a distinction between task-specific and generic scoring rubrics. A scoring rubric is a way of presenting success criteria. If it is task-specific, it applies to just one single task. If it is generic, the same rubric can be applied to a number of different tasks. William (2011:62) refers to Arter and McTighe (2001), who argue that task-specific rubrics are more appropriate for summative assessment. They make sure that pupils know what was expected, and thus are useful at the end of learning. During learning, however, it is useful to generalise scoring rubrics to promote transfer of the knowledge gained in one particular task to a similar task later on.

There are differences between product-focused criteria and process-focused criteria. The product-focused criteria focus on the outcome of the learning, what the pupils are expected to be able to do at the end of a period of instruction. However, process-focused criteria are also useful. They break down complex skills into simpler ones and then reassemble them. William (2011:63-65) emphasizes that process criteria are particularly important in helping pupils become owners of their own learning. Providing pupils with process criteria breaks up the journey of progress into smaller steps, making it more manageable to find the way from where they are to where they want to be. When one is in a summative mode, the purpose of success criteria is to determine the extent to which pupils have been successful. On the other hand, when one is in a formative mode, the purpose of success criteria is to bring about success.

Engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning

The second key strategy for formative assessment is engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning. William (2011:71) points out that the most important task is to find out what pupils know, namely where they are in their learning. However, teachers rarely plan this in any great detail. It is important to plan this process because what pupils learn is not necessarily what the teachers intended. This mismatch is unavoidable because teaching is unpredictable, which teachers need to acknowledge. Thus, it is essential that teachers try to find out what the pupils know before assuming that they have understood something. However, it is far from simple to come up with questions that provide insights into pupils' thinking, although teachers should try because these questions are important in improving the quality of pupils' learning (William 2011:77).

Providing feedback that moves learning forward

Providing feedback that moves learning forward is a third key strategy for formative assessment, which William (2011:109) comments on as being far more difficult than it appears. Much of the feedback that pupils are provided with has little or no effect on their learning, and some kinds of feedback are actually counterproductive. William (2011:109) refers to studies by Hattie and Timperley (2007), which show that it is a waste of time for teachers to provide careful diagnostic comments and, in addition, put a grade on the work. They might just as well only give a grade because the pupils would probably not learn anything from the comments anyways, and the teacher would save a great deal of time. William (2011:123) states that although one cannot do away with grades, there is a way of designing grading systems that give accurate information about pupil achievement while supporting learning. William (2011:123) cites Kohn (1994), who argues ˙never grade pupils while they are learning˙. As soon as pupils get a grade, the learning stops. Pupils should be given grades as infrequently as possible. What classroom assessment needs are systems designed primarily to support learning and which give data that are recorded at a level that is useful for teachers, pupils, and parents in determining where pupils are in their learning (William 2011:124).

Another ineffective method is giving praise for task performance, which is hardly surprising as it contains such little learning-related information. The important factor is the quality rather than the quantity of praise, and it is ˙far more effective if it is infrequent,

credible, contingent, specific, and genuine᾿ (William 2011:111). It should also be related to factors the individual controls, consequently, praising gifted pupils simply for being gifted is not a good idea.

The timing of feedback is also important. William (2011:111-113) argues that if it is given too early, before pupils have had a chance to work on the problem, they will consequently learn less. However, the crucial matter is how much attention the pupils give to the feedback. Those pupils who make use of ᾿scaffolding response᾿, a response that challenges them to solve the task together with a more able peer or teacher, learn more and maintain their learning longer than those who are given full solutions.

Giving feedback is difficult. If teachers get it wrong, pupils give up, reject the feedback, or choose an easier solution. Simply commenting on what is wrong is not enough. To be effective, ᾿feedback must provide a recipe for future action᾿ (William 2011:121). Hattie and Timperley (2007:86) promote a model of feedback which emphasizes that the main purpose of feedback is to reduce the gap between the pupils' current understandings, performance and a goal. This model aims to answer three major questions: First, *Where am I going*? This question concerns what goals are related to the learning task. These goals typically involve challenge and commitment. Challenging goals inform individuals:

> …as to what type or level of performance is to be attained so that they can direct and evaluate their actions and efforts accordingly. Feedback allows them to set reasonable goals and to track their performance in relation to their goals so that adjustments in effort, direction, and even strategy can be made as needed (Locke and Latham 1990:23).

These levels of accomplishment have been termed by Hattie and Timperley (2007) as ᾿success criteria᾿. If the goal is poorly defined, it is difficult to give feedback that reduces the difference between the existing situation and the intended learning. A clearer understanding of the success criteria is likely to be shared if the goals have appropriate challenges and teachers and pupils are committed to them (Hattie and Timperley 2007:89).

The second question Hattie and Timperley's (2007) model holds as important is: *How am I going*? This question should lead to information about progress toward the intended goal. Feedback is effective when it consists of information about pupil progress, and about how to proceed. Although this question often results in assessment and testing, tests are just one method. However, tests often fail to communicate feedback information that is helpful to teachers and their pupils when trying to find out what progress is being made toward the goal (Hattie and Timperley 2007:89).

Where to next? Is the final question in the model and aims to address the activities needed to make better progress. This is the power of feedback. If one is able to answer this question, it will provide information that leads to greater possibilities for learning. The focus of feedback should be on feedback about the task, about the processing of the task and about self-regulation. An ideal learning environment or experience occurs when both teachers and pupils seek answers to each of these questions in the model (Hattie and Timperley 2007:90).

Activating learners as instructional resources for one another
The fourth key strategy for formative assessment William (2011:133) promotes is activating learners as instructional resources for one another. Even though there is extensive research which claims that collaborative and cooperative learning is powerful, it is rarely used effectively in classrooms. According to William (2011), there appear to be four main factors to why cooperative learning has such a significant effect: Motivation, social cohesion, personalization, and cognitive elaboration. All these factors play a role, but some act more powerfully than others. William (2011:134) cites Webb (1991) who argues: ˙personalization and cognitive elaboration are important, and when the help took the form of elaborated explanations, both those giving and getting help benefitted, and this benefit was especially great for those giving help˙.

Hyland (2010) argues that the theoretical advantages of peer response are based largely on the fact that writing and learning are social processes. Using this method for organising instruction helps learners engage in a group of equals who respond to each other's work. This creates an authentic social setting, where the writer gets feedback from real readers, sometimes several of them, in a setting that is nonthreatening to most pupils. Other benefits mentioned are seeing fellow pupils' understanding of ideas and what needs to be improved, and gaining the skills for critical analysis and revision of one's own writing (Hyland 2010:198).

According to Grabe and Kaplan (1996:380), if peer response is to be useful, pupils first need to learn how to practise it. Grabe and Kaplan (1996) argue that pupils need to have clear goals and guidelines for the work, and that it is essential that the pupils participating are held accountable for their feedback. Further, Grabe and Kaplan (1996:387) claim that peer groups are most effective when pupils are:

> …motivated by the approach, when they are trained carefully to carry out the group work, when they are given many suggestions and guidelines for supportive feedback, when they are assisted in giving appropriate feedback and when the feedback provided by them is reviewed by the teacher.

Peer tutoring can almost be as powerful as one-to-one instruction from the teacher. This is due to the change in power relationship. Effective cooperative learning requires the presence of two elements. First, there must be group goals. Second, there must be individual accountability. As long as these two key features are present, cooperative learning is equally effective for all pupils at all achievement levels.

Activating learners as the owners of their own learning
The fifth key strategy for formative assessment is activating learners as the owners of their own learning. In all other learning situations outside the classroom learners instinctively know that the work has to be done by them whether it is to learn how to play an instrument or ride a bike, and yet the classrooms seem to be based on the opposite principle – that if they try really hard, teachers can do the learning for the learners. William (2011:145) refers to research on the impact of getting pupils more involved in their own learning, which shows that activating pupils as owners of their own learning can result in extraordinary improvements in achievement.

How, exactly, attention to pupil self-assessment improves learning is not yet clear, but William (2011:147) claims that the most obvious element seems to be the pupils' understanding of self-regulation. The basic idea of self-regulated learning is that the pupil is able to use and direct cognitive resources, emotions, and actions towards assigned learning goals. This meta-cognitive aspect of learning includes having an understanding of what one knows, what one can do, and what one knows about one's own cognitive abilities. The most effective learners are therefore self-regulated. Consequently, training pupils' meta-cognitive awareness will raise their performance and make them capable of generalising what they have learned to new situations (William 2011:147-148).

3.3.6 Writing assessment

Writing is one of the basic skills described in the current National Curriculum, *LK06*. Writing involves ˈexpressing oneself understandably and appropriately about different topics and communicating with others in the written modeˈ (*LK06*). The curriculum further states that writing is developing and coordinating different partial skills which can be put into sub-categories including being able to plan, construct, and revise texts relevant to content, purpose and audience.

Plan involves using different strategies and sources in preparation of writing, and revising texts based on one's own judgment and feedback from others. *Construct* means to master spelling, grammar, sentence construction, cohesion and text binding on paper and screen together with other modes of expression such as pictures, figures and symbols if relevant. *Communicate* means being able to express opinions, discuss issues, share knowledge and experience though adapting one's own texts to audience and content and purpose. *Reflect and assess* means applying writing as a tool to monitor and develop awareness about one's own learning (*LK06*).

According to *LK06* curriculum, basic writing instruction involves developing orthography, a functional handwriting and use of keyboard, in addition to planning and writing simple, clear texts for different purposes.

Hyland (2010:2) claims that theories on teaching writing should be considered as complementary. Hyland refers to different understandings of writing: what they tell about writing and how it can support teaching and in consequence how these different understandings can affect assessment of writing. One such understanding is *focus on language*, where the focus is on the form. Writing is viewed as a product of the pupils' grammatical and lexical knowledge. Another is *text functions*, where the purposes of writing are central. A third understanding of writing is *creative expression*, where the focus is on content. Pupils demonstrate an awareness of writing as more than simply being able to arrange different elements in the best order. A fourth understanding is *composing processes*, where the emphasis is also on the pupil as a composer of texts, but it also addresses the issue of how teachers can help pupils perform a writing task. This method stresses the need to develop pupils' ˙ability to plan, define a rhetorical problem, and propose and evaluate solutions˙ (Hyland 2010:10).

One commonly accepted model of writing processes is the planning-writing-reviewing framework established by Flower and Hayes (1981). The teachers' role is to guide the pupils through the writing process and to avoid over-emphasis on form. The primary idea is to help pupils develop strategies for generating, drafting and refining ideas, having the pupils' meta-cognitive awareness in mind, namely their ability to reflect on the strategies they use to write (Hyland 2010:12).

Response is central in a process approach and various means of providing feedback are used, including teacher-pupil conferences and peer response. There is no focus on error correction and grammar teaching when helping pupils to improve their writing.

A fifth understanding of writing is *content* which refers to *what* the pupils are expected to write about. Content can be adapted to pupils of different levels. Hyland (2010)

points out that content-oriented methods depend greatly on reading and making use of the close relationship between reading and writing. Reading may lead to new knowledge, but also provides knowledge of, for example, grammar and vocabulary (Hyland 2010:17).

A last understanding is *genre orientation*, where the writer has specific intentions and information to present, and where discourse and contextual aspects of language are used. According to Hyland (2010:21), this approach assumes that one learns best when engaging in tasks within the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD), where learning is a result of oral interaction and negotiating tasks with a more knowledgeable person, and the teacher has a central role in ˈscaffoldingˈ this development.

Different types of writing assessment

Whatever the approach to teaching writing, teachers need to assess the production of writing. The approach the teachers choose to assess writing is often influenced by their view on what teaching writing is. Traditionally a pupil's writing performance was judged in relation to the performance of others. However, this *norm-referenced* method has given way to *criterion-referenced* practices, where the quality of each piece of writing is judged in its own right in relation to pre-defined criteria. The criterion-referenced procedures take many forms and fall into three main categories: holistic, analytic and trait-based (Hyland 2010:226).

Holistic scoring methods

Holistic scoring gives a general impression of a piece of writing, where the aims is to rate a pupil's overall proficiency, which is done through an individual impression of the quality of a writing sample (Hyland 2010: 227). This approach emphasizes success rather than failure and therefore contrasts with the focus on errors in earlier assessment methods. Although this method is easy to use, Hyland (2010) claims that by reducing writing to a single score, the diagnostic information is lost and makes a washback effect on teaching difficult to provide. Moreover, it is of great importance that, since the approach requires a response to the text as a whole, readers are carefully trained to respond in the same way to the same features.

A positive side to this approach is that the focus is not on a single ability but a whole impression which emphasises pupils' achievement and not shortcomings. Other positive aspects are that one can choose to emphasize certain criteria, and last but not least it encourages discussion and agreement among teachers. Some of the disadvantages are that

teachers lack diagnostic information, that better scores may be given to longer essays, and that writing ability may be confused with language proficiency (Hyland 2010:227).

The reliability of a holistic scoring method improves when two or more trained teachers score each paper. It is important that teachers are given guidance or else it can be difficult to agree on the quality and specific characteristics of good writing (Hyland 2010: 227). White (1984) referred to in Weigle (2002:114), argues that holistic scoring is more valid than analytic scoring methods because it reflects the authentic and personal reaction of a reader, while with analytic scoring methods ˙too much attention to the parts is like to obscure the meaning of the whole˙ (White 1984:409).

Scoring rubrics are helpful in holistic scoring. They are designed to suit different contexts and seek to reflect the goals of the course and what is valued by teachers as ˙good writing˙ (Hyland 2010: 227).

Analytic scoring methods

Analytic scoring procedures are based on separate scales of overall writing features, namely sets of criteria considered as important for good writing. Teachers must give a score for each category, and therefore provides more information than a single holistic score. Analytic scoring separates individual components and therefore more clearly defines the features to be assessed. For this reason it is more effective in discriminating between weaker texts. Usually rubrics have separate scales for content, organisation and grammar, with vocabulary and mechanics sometimes added separately. Since analytic methods provide more detailed information they are also useful as diagnostic and teaching tools (Hyland 2010: 229).

The success criteria used in the rubrics can be introduced early in the course to show pupils how their writing will be assessed and which properties are valued in writing. The advantages of an analytic approach to writing assessment are that it encourages teachers to address the same features, and allows for a more diagnostic method of reporting. Another feature is that it aids reliability, because pupils are given several scores.

A disadvantage is that attention may be diverted from an overall essay effect. Other negative sides are that it is time-consuming compared to a holistic method, and writing is more than simply the sum of its parts (Hyland 2010: 229).

Trait-based scoring method

A trait-based scoring method judges performance traits in relation to particular tasks, and is also sensitive to the context. The main aim is to create criteria for writing that are unique to

each task and the writing produced in response to it, using either *primary-trait scoring* or *multiple-trait scoring*. Primary-trait scoring focuses on just one feature relevant to the task to rate a piece of writing. This makes it possible for teachers and pupils to concentrate on one essential feature of the task (Hyland 2010: 230). However, Hyland (2010) argues that teachers may find it difficult to respond to only specific traits and therefore unintentionally evaluate other traits. This scoring method is used in courses where the assessment of specific writing skills is in focus.

The multiple-trait scoring method relates to analytic scoring in that it requires separate scores for different writing features. These need to be relevant to the specific assessment task. Hyland (2010:230) claims that multi-trait scoring considers writing as a ˙multifaceted construct which is situated in particular contexts and purposesʾ. This method is flexible in that each task is related to its own scale with scoring adapted to the context, purpose, and genre of the writing. A negative side is that it is very time-consuming to arrange and administer. However, this burden can be minimized if teachers share the responsibility of writing new rubrics or modify basic content, structure, language analytic templates to accommodate the specific demands of new assignments (Hyland 2010:232).

The choice of what rating scale to use is not always obvious. Weigler (2002:120) proposes that the best solution is to find the best possible combination of the different qualities and decide on which qualities are most relevant in a given situation.

3.3.7 Oral assessment

The ability to express oneself orally is one of the five basic skills described in the current *LK06* curriculum. Having oral skills means being able to both listen and speak, and are described as basic to learning in school, work and social life. Oral skills relate to creating meaning through listening and speaking, being able to listen to and respond to others, and to be conscious of the interlocutor while speaking (*LK06,* English subject curriculum).

There are three subcategories identified in the *LK06* English subject curriculum concerning oral skills*: Understand and reflect*, *Communicate* and *Reflect and assess*. *Understand and reflect* includes the ability to listen attentively and to comprehend, interpret and assess oral texts. *Communicate* implicates that the pupils should be able to express opinions, discuss different topics and should also be capable of structuring and adapting their own oral texts according to who is listening, what they are talking about and the purpose.

Reflect and assess involves listening and responding to others and expressing one's own opinion in spontaneous as well as prepared conversations.

To master oral genres in complex listening and speaking situations requires active participation. According to the *LK06* English subject curriculum*,* in secondary education pupils should be able to express their opinions, discuss subject-related topics, understand different modes of expression and assess their own performance.

The assessment of oral production is challenging due to the nature of speaking itself. Luoma (2004:1) argues that it is especially challenging to assess speaking because of the many different factors that influence the way teachers evaluate oral proficiency. Elements that are typically considered important are accent, grammar, vocabulary, errors and the ability to use language appropriate for the purpose of speaking.

When designing speaking tasks for oral testing one needs to consider the purpose of the test and the practical situation the test will be given in (Luoma 2004:29). However, the most important factor in task design is what information the result of the test reveals about the pupils' speaking skills. The role of task design is closely linked to what kinds of knowledge or abilities the task designer wants the test to uncover.

 In task design it is common to focus on informational talk rather than social talk. Informational talk is usually divided into different types: description, instruction, storytelling and opinion expressing (Brown and Yule 1983), and factual-oriented talk: description, narration, instruction and comparison; evaluative talk: explanation, justification, prediction and decision (Bygate 1987). Luoma (2004:32) refers to both Brown and Yule (1983) and Bygate (1987), who claim that pupils' use of language is different in each of these categories, and therefore it is useful to test these different types of talk separately. Consequently, it is important for a test designer to be aware of the different types of talk and make a conscious decision about what they want to test.

Another decision the test designer has to make is how the test is to be organized. Luoma (2004:35) recognizes that the most common arrangement is to assess the pupils one by one. This is often done in an interview format, and by using this format one ensures a flexible test where questions can be adapted to each pupil at the same time as the examiners have the chance to be in control of what happens in the interaction.

Choosing the test type is another important part of test design. Luoma (2004:50) describes two categories: open-ended speaking tasks and structured speaking tasks. *Open-ended* speaking tasks aim at getting the pupils to use the language to show their language skills. Potential task types are to give a presentation, make a request, describe something, give

recommendations and role-play. It is also possible to combine a role-play task with the other tasks mentioned, for example by asking the pupil to give a speech or a presentation. The pupil then has to structure the talk according to conventions of the task type, while at the same time using the social conventions required by the role-play situation. Another task type is to make the pupil react in situations. The pupil reads or hears the situation he or she is supposed to imagine being in and is then asked to give a response. The pupil has to consider social conventions and what formulations to use.

The second category Luoma (2004:50) refers to is *structured speaking* tasks, which are the speaking equivalent of multiple-choice tasks. These tests quite precisely express what the pupils should say and give a list of acceptable answers. The weakness of such tests is that they cannot assess the unexpected and creative sides of speaking. However, the main strength is comparability, since they are the same for all pupils. Possible structured test types are reading aloud, sentence repetition, sentence completion, factual short-answer questions and reacting to phrases. These tests, however, often test one aspect of speaking at a time and might not give a complete picture of a pupil's speaking skills (Luoma 2004:51).

According to Luoma (2004), making rating scales is difficult and challenging. A rating scale has to be related to the purpose of the test, and the definition of the construct being tested. Luoma (2004:82) describes three methods of developing rating scales for speaking tests: intuitive methods, qualitative methods and quantitative methods. *Intuitive methods* of rating scale development are based on interpretation of experience rather than on data collection. It can either be one person or a group of people developing the scales. The developers are usually experienced and trained persons with teaching experience at the relevant levels. It is common to consult already developed rating scales, curriculum and teaching material when making these scales.

In *qualitative methods* of rating scale development, a group of experts are asked to analyze data related to the scale. This can be either samples of performances on different levels or scale level descriptors. If level descriptors are used, they can be given to the group of experts without revealing the level. The group is then asked to rank the descriptors according to difficulty and group them in a number of levels corresponding to the scale. If samples of performance are used, they can be analyzed by the group according to the rating scale, if one exists. Another possibility is that the group members bring with them performances that they feel represent the different levels well. Yet another possibility is to analyse performance and grade them numerically. Afterwards, the raters are asked to explain why they gave the grade they did. These explanations are then used to make level descriptors (Luoma 2004:84).

Q*uantitative methods* of rating scale development require statistical expertise. Luoma (2004:86) refers to Fulcher (2010), who used a quantitative method when developing a rating scale for fluency which involved a discourse analysis of a set of performances, and from these performances a range of fluency features were quantified. A multiple regression analysis was then applied to determine which features were significant in determining the test takers scores. The features identified were subsequently used to develop level descriptors.

Reliability is important in oral assessment because the results should be dependable. Luoma (2004:179) presents three types of reliability that are especially relevant to the assessment of speaking: intra-rate reliability, inter-rater reliability and parallel form reliability. *Intra-rater reliability* implies that teachers agree with themselves, over a period of time, about the ratings they give. *Inter-rate reliability* means that the different teachers rate performances similarly. This is helped with well-defined assessment criteria. *Parallel form reliability* is relevant if there are more than one test form that are supposed to be standardised. Pupils take more than one of these test forms, and the scores are then analysed for consistency. If the scores are not consistent, some of the tasks may need to be changed in the test forms to make them more consistent. As for validity, there is a fundamental difficulty in all assessment to highlight aspects of validity that are more relevant to speaking tests than other tests.

Chvala (2012:233) claims that the focus on oral skills in the English as a foreign language classroom has traditionally been on aspects such as pronunciation, intonation, use of appropriate grammar, vocabulary and formulaic expressions. Chvala (2012:234) argues for a broader understanding of basic oral skills in English. It is necessary to develop pupils' ability to use English in a variety of genres, and teach them to be able to speak with a variety of communicative goals in mind, performed in a variety of situations, to different audiences and interlocutors.

Chvala (2012:235) refers to Halliday's (1994) systematic functional theory of language in which the ˈbasic functions of language are identified as, firstly, to make sense of our experience and, secondly, to act out our social relationships, where these two are freely combined to create text or sequences of discourseˈ. Chvala (2012:235) refers Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2005) who explain that when applying this theory to second language learning, the primary aim of teaching and learning is for learners to become both competent and efficient users of the target language through development of their discourse competence, defining discourse as:

> …an instance of spoken language that has describable internal relationships of form
> and meaning that relate coherently to an external communicative function or purpose

and a given audience/interlocutor. Furthermore, the external function or purpose can only be determined if one takes into account the context and the participants (i.e. all the relevant situational, social and cultural factors in which the piece of discourse occurs) (Celce-Murcia and Olshtain 2005:729-30).

In this respect discourse could be described as the learner's ability ˈto know, understand and use the target language in a meaningful and appropriate way within the context of situation and cultureˈ (Chvala 2012:236). Halliday (1994) defines discourse as spoken ˈtextˈ.

What Chvala (2012:240) discovered in research on oral 10th grade exam tasks in Oslo was the most used exam format was informational presentations, from pupil to teacher in a classroom setting. The point made by Chvala (2012:235) is that presentations do not allow the pupils to show their ability to talk smoothly across turns, ˈhold the floorˈ in a discussion and cope with gaps in the misunderstanding (that of their own or of their interlocutor).In the general objectives of the subject of English, one of the main aims is to enable pupils to ˈinteract globally, in a *variety of contexts,* and use spoken English in *a number of different communicative situationsˈ. LK06* specifically states:

> To succeed in a world where English is used for international interpersonal communication, it is necessary to master the English language. Thus we need to develop our vocabulary and our skills in using the systems of the English language; its phonology, grammar and text structuring. We need these skills to listen, speak, read and write, and to adapt our language to an ever increasing number of topics, areas of interest and communication situations. We must be able to distinguish between spoken and written styles and informal and formal styles. Moreover, when using the language in communication, we must also be able to take cultural norms and conventions into consideration.

Teachers need to consider whether there is correspondence between the curriculum aims of *LK06* and their classroom practices and the needs of society in general. Chvala (2012:243) emphasises that if the teachers are to develop pupils' discourse competence, they need to help them to produce a variety of discourse(s) in various contexts. The teachers need to broaden the number and type of situations, purposes and conversational partners. This would be beneficiary in expanding the capability of pupils to produce language in a number of oral genres and situations.

Although Chvala's (2012) research concerns English exams in lower secondary school, the findings and conclusions also apply to upper secondary school. The oral exam format in upper secondary school is built up in the same way as in the lower secondary school and both lower and upper secondary school share many of the same competence aims.

3.3.8 Motivation and assessment

The skills of self-regulation and metacognition are only useful if pupils are motivated. Weiner (1984) argues that the most significant factor in determining learners' motivation is to what they attribute their success or failure. In essence Weiner's (1984) theory is based on the idea that there are three main dimensions to any of the attributions that people make. *Locus* refers to whether the responsibility is put on themselves or to outside factors; *constancy* to whether they see it as limited to one event or applying generally; and *responsibility* refers to whether the factors can be controlled or not, and whether they are perceived as internal (i.e. personal traits) or external. In all of these a distinction is made between stable and unstable factors, and the consequence of an attribution also depends on whether it is being made for a success or a failure (Torrance and Pryor 2002:83).

Dweck (1989) builds on the work of Weiner (1984), but has formulated a different theory that sees motivation in the light of the types of goals that pupils have. As Dweck (1989:88-89) points out:

> *Learning goals* in which pupils aim to enhance their competence, to understand or master something new, and *performance goals* in which pupils aim either to document, or gain favorable judgments of, their competence or to avoid negative judgments of their competence.

Dweck's (1989) findings show that pupils with *learning goals* choose challenging tasks irrespective of whether they think they have high or low ability in comparison to other pupils. *Learning goals* also increase their chances of success, and pupils with these goals work in a more pragmatic way in finding possible strategies for mastering the task. These pupils attribute difficulties to unstable factors, e.g. insufficient effort; they do not give up, and their self-esteem does not seem to be too affected by failure. They are often described as being ˙oriented˙ (Torrance and Pryor 2002:86).

On the other hand, Dweck (1989) describes those pupils with *performance goals* as ones who avoid challenges when they have doubts about their ability compared with others. These pupils tend to be ˙self-handicapping˙ so that they have an excuse for failure, and they also tend to see ability as something stable. These pupils channel much of their task analysis on determining the difficulty of the task and their chances of success. They attribute difficulty to low ability, and tend to give up or become upset when faced with difficult tasks or with failure (Torrance and Pryor 2002:85). Dweck (1989) claims that the most effective way to create confidence through success is to give pupils specific information about the cause of

their lack of success, and to create an emphasis on learning goals and personally challenging tasks (Torrance and Pryor 2002:86).

Two distinctions concerning motivation are when the motivation for doing something comes from the fact that it is interesting or enjoyable (intrinsic) and when motivation leads to some valued outcome (extrinsic). The term ˈflowˈ, introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (1990), describes the idea of being in a situation where one is completely engaged in an activity. This sense of flow can come about when one is very interested or enjoy a task, and one gets lost in what one's doing, but it can also arise when the challenge matches the pupil's capability (William 2011:150). William (2011) claims that this way of thinking about motivation is radical because it places the motivational aspect in the task, whether the match between challenge and capability is right, and not on the pupil or the teacher. If the pupil is unmotivated, it is a signal that the teacher and the learner need to try something different.

Pupils are more motivated to reach goals that are specific, are within reach, and offer some degree of challenge. William (2011:151) notes that while pupils' motivation and their belief in their ability to successfully execute their plans, ˈself-efficacyˈ, tend to decline as they go through school, what the teacher does can make a real difference. Pupils provided with positive constructive feedback by their teachers are more likely to focus on learning rather than performance.

Research has proved that assessment can improve instruction, but as William (2011:151-152) argues, it can also affect how willing, motivated and capable pupils are of learning. The existing research on cognition and motivation emphasizes that an essential component in assessment is activating pupils as owners of their own learning, self-regulated learning. William (2011:152) refers to Boekaerts's (1993) model, which suggests that to make the most of pupils' capability, teachers have to create a learning environment that encourages pupils to activate the ˈgrowth rather than the well-being pathwayˈ(Boerkaerts (1993) in William 2011:152). This model emphasizes the importance of sharing learning goals with pupils, promoting the belief that ability is not fixed, making it more difficult for pupils to compare themselves with others in terms of achievement, providing feedback that contains a recipe for further action and empowering pupils with learning to create autonomous learners. The fact that one knows what needs to be done is not the same as doing it. Therefore developing one's teaching is important.

3.4 Studies of assessment in Norway

The Norwegian national initiative ˙Assessment for learning˙ is generally founded on international research. However, the focus on pupil assessment and the implementing of assessment in the Norwegian law on education has also led to research in Norwegian schools. This section presents some of the more recent research in Norway in the field of pupil assessment.

There are several researchers connected to colleges and universities in Norway who focus on assessment. Jensen (2008) has conducted research into school-based assessment. In 2008 the results of the research project ˙Læring og Vurdering (LOV) / Learning and assessment˙ was published. The context of the study was to develop and try out a tool which aimed at contributing to increasing awareness about learning in schools and thus promoting learning. The study claims that when pupils are asked about learning strategies, they assess their use of different strategies as very satisfying. However, when the pupils' use of learning strategies is measured against more objective and concrete statements, the picture becomes more nuanced, and gives the indication that more weight should be put on pupils' development of and use of learning strategies. The study also shows that pupils experience learning as being important and they contribute to developing the learning community. However, more attention could be paid to co-operative learning and the meta-cognitive aspect of learning.

The teachers' assessment of their own practice shows that they are aware that they could improve on giving pupils more constructive feedback and teach them about learning strategies. However, when it comes to formative assessment, the study shows that peer-review and self-assessment is used to a great extent. The teachers focus mostly on helping the pupils progress and move forward.

One conclusion this study presents is that learning promoting qualities, e.g learning strategies, and the meta-cognitive aspects in instruction, can be improved, while learning promoting structures, e.g. self-assessment and peer review, are adequately addressed.

In another study, Sandvik (2011) completed a doctoral dissertation at the Norwegian University of Science and Technology, where the main aim was to contribute to a deeper understanding of the connection between assessment and writing in second language learning, and in particular assessment as a tool for pupils' progress in writing. The study has a teacher and pupil perspective, but reveals in particular the teacher's assessment competence and the impact on pupils' learning process. The context of the study is how the teacher chooses to

respond to pupils' texts and how these choices influence how the pupils experience creating meaning in a foreign language and how the relation between the teacher and pupil is experienced.

One of the main findings of the study was that formative assessment, which embraces completeness and not fragments, has an impact on pupils' writing process. As long as pupils have an understanding of the aim of the writing task and the purpose of the feedback they are given, they will work more thoroughly with their text in the next writing stage. At the same time, a common understanding of the aims of the writing tasks will contribute to a more transparent learning process and this again opens for better co-operation between the pupils in the writing process.

A second important finding was that the teacher's assessment competence seemed to be central to the pupils' progress in writing in German. Formative assessment became the teacher's main principle during the study. This resulted in a clearer and more understandable purpose and context for writing and learning a foreign language for the pupils.

At the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training's (UDIR) conference in November 2012 Sandvik (2012) presented a report on assessment in schools. This report is the first of three from the FIVIS project 'Research on individual assessment in schools' where the purpose is to study assessment practices in four curricular areas (Norwegian, English, Mathematics and Physical Education) in grades 1 to 8 in Norway. The project investigates how assessment affords learning and what characterizes different assessment practices when assessment is used as a foundation for learning. The main research question is: How do school owners, school leaders and teachers express their assessment competency through their interpretations, understandings and practices?

The report comprises analyses of key documents, spanning from national policy makers to local curriculum documents from schools. The primary reason put forward for analyzing these documents was to construct an understanding of the political intentions, processes and decisions which have contributed to the current framework for educational assessment in Norway. The report also investigates teachers', school leaders' and school owners' *understandings of assessment* and *conceptual vocabularies* through qualitative focus group interviews and quantitative questionnaires.

The results from the initial phase of the project show that teachers are predominantly positive to the national assessment policies. A majority of the teachers in the survey claim to have good knowledge of the regulations covering assessment practices. Participants who have

taken part in the national programmes for assessment for learning agree somewhat more that the national policy documents have contributed to a change in their teaching practices than those who have not taken official part in the national programme. An interesting finding is that while only half of the teachers claim to have extensive knowledge of the regulations, most of the teachers report on practices very similar to the intentions in the national policy documents.

The data shows that subject content knowledge is an important factor in teachers' assessment competency. Teachers feel that this is a prerequisite for making expectations clear and explicit for their pupils.

The report argues that a majority of the informants claim that local curriculum documents have clear and concrete objectives. A majority of the teachers express the view that clear objectives and criteria enhance student motivation. Assessment is understood as a practice where learning objectives are designed for relatively short periods of time. Many teachers are more concerned with developing assessment tools that work in a day-to-day situation than following up on learning processes through longer periods of time. Teachers point to a high number of pupils in the classroom and little time for planning as limiting factors.

The majority of respondents in this survey agree that continuous assessment improves the possibility to differentiate instruction in order to address the needs of individual pupils. Standardized tests are often used, but many teachers report that they are frustrated about the way they are used to compare and rank pupils.

The report claims that school owners seem to focus predominantly on issues of reliability. Their primary concern is to ensure that schools develop common assessment practices, and that all pupils are treated fairly in assessment situations. The development of strong interpretive communities, which is necessary for ensuring validity in assessment, is largely delegated to teachers at the individual schools. This means that school owners are not included in the interpretive community when it comes to assessment. Therefore, school owners play a less active role in developing assessment practices based on a strong understanding of validity and subject content knowledge.

A key element in assessment competency is the ability to participate in a community of practice where an extended discussion on assessment is maintained. This study shows that, although this practice is developing, there are fairly large differences between schools. A majority of the participants claim that school staffs discuss assessment fairly often, and that they collaborate to develop high quality assessment practices. However, there are fairly large

differences between the various kinds of schools in this respect. The report emphasizes the importance of creating spaces for the discussion of assessment in subject areas, which is important in order to ensure a more valid assessment practice in subject areas across whole schools.

At the University of Stavanger there are two doctoral research projects in progress concerning assessment and one important aspect of assessment for learning, namely the meta-cognitive aspect.

Gamblem (2012) is studying assessment, among other issues, and the thesis question is: *What happens in lower secondary school to meet the principle of adapted and differentiated education for all pupils, so that learning becomes possible?* This study is being conducted in lower secondary school, and it shows that pupil assessment and feedback are not experienced as precise enough, and that assessment gives little guidance in what to do next to progress and meet the appointed learning goals. Other questions the study seeks to answer are: what are the learning conditions like that pupils in the lower secondary school face, and how do these conditions support self-regulating learning and engagement in the pupils? How do the teachers plan and execute instruction that supports the individual pupil's opportunities for learning? What effect could an intervention have on the teacher's way of working with learning and engagement? How is assessment/feedback performed and practiced with regard to the individual pupil's learning? Finally, what effect could an intervention have on the teacher's way of giving feedback?

Bugge's (2013) doctoral dissertation is about constructing and testing out a model for instruction on meta-cognitive strategies, mainly for use in foreign language (Spanish, French, German) learning. However, the principles are also transferable to the learning of English. This study addresses the importance of meta-cognition in the process of language learning, and points out that the Norwegian curriculum on foreign language learning focuses on the importance of meta-cognition in learning foreign languages. The study defines meta-cognitive strategies as involving cognitive, social, affective and meta-cognitive learning strategies.

It is argued in the study that it is important to develop knowledge about one's own way of learning to be able to be successful in the learning of a new language. The study also emphasizes the connection between pupils taking the responsibility for their own learning and meta-cognition. Another issue addressed is what differentiates ˈthe good language learnerˈ from pupils who are not so competent in learning a new language.

These relatively recent research projects into assessment and their implications on schools, teachers and pupils, show the importance and necessity of investigating the effect of

new reforms. The different studies show that teaching pupils about meta-cognitive aspects of learning and learning strategies is important in developing self-regulated learners.

Studies show that many teachers are positive to national assessment policies and are relatively updated on what assessment for learning entails. One clear implication is that the teachers in schools which were officially involved in parts of the national programmes concerning assessment for learning are in more agreement about the new assessment documents and guidelines than those who have not participated in the official national programmes.

School owners are predominantly concerned with reliability and delegate the responsibility for ensuring validity to the individual schools and teachers. Consequently, studies point to the fact that there are large differences between various schools concerning the implementation of national assessment guidelines, the degree of discussions on assessment and the development of high quality assessment practices.

3.5 Summing up

Behaviourist, constructivist and sociocultural theoretical foundations of learning offer different views about what learning is and how it takes place, but they usually do not offer clear implications for assessment. The cognitive constructivist theories focus on how people construct meaning, and formative assessment is often associated with this theoretical foundation.

The purpose of assessment in education involves deciding, collecting and making judgments about evidence relating to the goals of the learning being assessed. This implies that teachers must understand and draw conclusions about pupils' learning processes, progress and outcome. The main aim is to gain information to identify the gap between the pupils current and targeted performance and to help them progress. Assessment can serve purposes such as identifying strengths and weaknesses, demonstrating progress and informing about pupils' overall ability.

Validity and reliability are important parts of assessing pupils' work. Consistency is a problematic area as assessment involves subjective judgments. While some researchers claim that indirect assessments are reliable measures, these are concerned with accuracy and not communicating texts written by pupils. However, absolute reliability is no longer a goal.

Validity, on the other hand, is of crucial importance to maintain fair and meaningful assessment. There are several types of validity which provide different viewpoints on collecting and interpreting data. Teachers need a basic understanding of validity and reliability principles to ensure that the assessment process is fair, useful and appropriate.

Summative and formative assessment in a learning context are often referred to as 'assessment of learning' and 'assessment for learning' respectively, and they contribute in different ways to the assessment process. Formative assessment is concerned with assessing in a way that elicits information that can be used to give constructive feedback and feedforward to ensure progress. Summative assessment is concerned with determining to what extent the instructional and learning goals have been met, and is typically evaluative, used to assign pupils a course grade. There is no washback effect on teaching, and the pupils play no role in the assessment. However, evidence gathered that serves a summative purpose can help learning, for example in a portfolio. Although tests and examinations can be helpful in identifying further learning, they can never be adequate to meet the claims of assessment for learning.

Formative assessment occurs during the learning process and the information gathered through assessment activities is used in teaching to aid the pupils' learning. There are five key strategies to formative assessment: clarifying, sharing and understanding learning objectives and success criteria; engineering effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning; providing feedback that moves learning forward; activating learners as instructional resources for one another; finally, activating learners as the owner of their own learning.

Writing is one of the basic skills described in the current National Curriculum, *LK06*. There are three main categories of criterion-referenced procedures to writing assessment. Holistic scoring gives a general impression of a piece of writing and aims to rate pupils' overall proficiency. An analytic scoring procedure is based on a set of criteria considered important for good writing. Trait-based scoring judges performance traits in relation to particular tasks.

Oral ability is another basic skill described in the current *LK06* curriculum. When designing tasks for oral testing, one has to consider the purpose of the test, the practical situation the test will be given in, information the result of the test reveals about the test takers' speaking skills, how the test is to be organised, and choosing the test type to be applied. When making rating scales for oral assessment, the challenge is to focus on reliability and validity. Oral ability should also include a broader understanding of oral skills, such as

the development of pupils' ability to use English in a variety of genres, with different communicative goals, in various situations and audiences in mind.

Motivation is essential to self-regulation and meta-cognition. There are different theories on motivation and learning, some focus on locus of control, others on pupils' goal orientation and yet others focus on flow, placing the motivational aspect in the task. The existing research on cognition and motivation emphasizes that an essential component in assessment is activating pupils as owners of their own self-regulated learning.

A number of studies have been carried out on assessment in Norway. One tendency is a high degree of variation as to how schools have implemented the national assessment guidelines.

4. Methodology

4.1 Introduction

The two main research questions of the thesis are how the two Norwegian upper secondary schools approach the assessment of English at the first year level and what attitudes to, beliefs and experiences of assessment the pupils and teachers have in these two schools. This chapter describes the methodology employed to answer the two research questions. First, there is a description of qualitative research in general. This is followed by a presentation of the main method used for the collection of data, namely focus groups. The subsequent sections describe the processes of planning the focus groups, sampling of subjects and piloting, and structuring and conducting the focus group interviews. There are also sections about the interviews with the head of the experimental school and the Rogaland County Director of Schools. Finally, there is a section on ethical considerations.

4.2 Qualitative research

Qualitative research generally aims at 'providing an in-depth description and understanding of the human experience', understood as the 'human phenomena, human interaction, or human discourse' (Lichtman 2010:12). In qualitative research there is the element of describing the results of a study, and interpreting this description, which allows the researcher to interpret the data several ways. For a study to be credible and legitimate, it is important that the data is collected, organised, analysed and presented in an appropriate manner (Lichtman 2010:12-14).

There is a risk of bias in qualitative research, which is often related to communication between interviewer and interview subjects (Lichtman 2010:13-16). Such bias may affect how questions are asked and how they are answered (Basit 2010:115). However, the flexible and dynamic nature of the interview is both its strength and weakness (Borg and Gall 1989:448).

Because the researcher has such a fundamental role in qualitative research, it may create chances for bias in the actual forming of the study. Such a bias occurs because it is often the researcher who controls the processes of selecting subjects for the study, who defines what information the study aims to achieve, and who decides which methods are

going to be used for the collection, analysis, and interpretation of the data (Lichtman 2010:16-20).

4.3 Focus groups

The qualitative method of data collection applied in this study is focus groups. According to Wilkinson (2011:168-169), focus group methodology may be interpreted as ˈdeceivingly simpleˈ. It involves inviting a small number of people to an informal group discussion ˈfocusedˈ around a particular topic or theme. The researcher's role in this discussion is to be a ˈmoderatorˈ for the group, where the moderator's main tasks are asking questions, keeping the discussion going, and enabling group members to fully participate. Another important task is to encourage group members to interact with each other. Morgan (1988:12) points out that the interaction between research participants, and how the interaction can be potentially analysed, is the ˈhallmarkˈ of focus group research.

The focus group method was applied to this study because it could provide more information from different groups of people in a shorter period of time than individual interviews could. However, a more interesting reason for applying the method was the opportunity it provided of obtaining information not only about what different groups and individual members think, but also of providing the researcher with the unique opportunity to understand why both the individual teachers and pupils think as they do about assessment. As Morgan (1988:25) puts it: ˈfocus groups are useful when it comes to investigating *what* participants think, but they excel at uncovering *why* participants think as they doˈ. The process becomes an important aspect of the study and as Barbour (2007:30) argues, focus groups ˈexcel at providing insight into process rather than outcomeˈ. In analyzing group interaction, Barbour (2007:31) stresses that it is important to listen for the individual voices within the discussions, because one does not want to miss out on the ˈadditional insights that such intra-group comparison might yieldˈ.

Another important reason for applying this method to the present study was that focus groups provide insights into how people perceive the information which they are given, and in addition it also excels at uncovering participants' misconceptions and how these can arise (Barbour 2007:33).

Other aspects are the contextual factors that may influence the teachers' choices of classroom practices when it comes to assessment in English, in this case the *Assessment for learning* regulation directed by the the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training.

Thus, interpreting to what extent teachers' choices were based on contextual versus cognitive factors may prove a challenge. This dimension is difficult to control for in a study such as the present one, though the choice of collecting data through focus groups will hopefully help shed light on whether it is contextual or cognitive factors that support the teachers' reported practices and choices. The stability that the structure of focus group discussions provides and the possibilities for investigating the topic given during the actual group discussions, makes this assumption appear credible.

Involving open-ended questions and stimulus materials, focus groups have the ability to reveal issues and concerns important to participants rather than closely following the researcher's agenda. This means that the resulting data can bring about surprises because the focus group members may take factors into account in their reflections that the researchers may not have thought about (Barbour 2007:32).

4.4 The subjects

The present study involves both teachers and pupils. The reason for using both teachers and pupils was that it provided grounds for the comparison of teachers' attitudes towards assessment, how the teachers believe good practice in assessment in English is supposed to be, and how they actually practise assessment; it also aimed to uncover how the pupils think good assessment should be performed and how they actually experience assessment in English. It provided the opportunity to find out whether there was a discrepancy between what teachers believe is good practice and how they actually practice it, and whether there was a gap between what the pupils see as useful assessment and what they experience in the classroom.

There is no blueprint answer when it comes to how many participants a group should consist of. Barbour (2007:59) claims that more is not necessarily better. However, the decision to hold two pupil focus group interviews and two teacher focus group interviews, with similar characteristics, is grounded in the argument that it may give the researcher stronger arguments in the analysis and presentation of the findings, since it would suggest that any differences found are not there by chance, but can be related to the different characteristics of the participants reflected in the group.

The present comparative study is based on two different schools in the same region, and contains four to five teachers and four to five pupils in each school. This might seem like

a small number of subjects in terms of stability of results over time and, due to the fact that it is not a longitudinal study, it limits itself to simply being a snapshot of assessment in English at the first year level (vg1) in upper secondary school. Consequently, the results may only be valid for a specific point in time and space. This aspect, on the other hand, is part of the nature of qualitative research, which 'does not seek duplication to claim reliability' (Basit 2010:70). All in all, there are nine teachers and nine pupils involved, which will hopefully prove a sufficient number for the purpose of the present study, namely to reveal certain trends about teachers' and pupils' beliefs, attitudes to, practices and experiences in connection with assessment in English at the first year level (vg1) upper secondary classroom.

Sampling strategies provide the solution to which comparison it will be possible to make, and they also give advice on how to put groups together, how to use pre-existing groups and how to take ethical issues into consideration. Barbour (2007:58) stresses that one of the key purposes of qualitative sampling is to reflect the range of diversity within the group rather than trying to create a representative group. This way of sampling will give room for integrating sub-groups rather than leaving them out.

The use of purposive sampling in qualitative research allows for the data to be analysed with intent, and it makes it possible to carry out systematic comparison. In this connection, preliminary fieldwork can make the researcher aware of the criteria that are relevant and that should have an impact on sampling decisions (Barbour 2001:58). Callaghan (2005), cited in Barbour (2007:39), explains that 'carefully selected focus groups, can access knowledge which embodies the "habitus" of the wider community'.

In the present study the two teacher focus groups and the two pupil focus groups were all based on purposive sampling to make use of the feature of providing knowledge that could prove to contain more generalized attitudes. Recruiting members for the study's pupil and teacher focus group interviews depended on the use of 'gatekeepers' to perform the purposive sampling. As Wilkinson (2007:53) states, gatekeepers can play a critically important role with regard to selecting participants for focus group studies. Gatekeepers know which subjects will suit the project, and by paying attention to the criteria given, they are able to construct groups which may maximize the outcome.

The headmaster of the experimental school selected the teacher who would be the link when planning and putting together both the pupil and teacher focus groups. The teacher was chosen because of this teacher's involvement in the school's *Assessment for learning* project. The appointed teacher asked four to five colleagues to participate, and they were then formally invited by the author. The criteria set up for selecting the teachers were that they

taught English at the first year (vg1) level and that they taught different courses available at the school. The teachers who would participate in the focus group then acted as gatekeepers in selecting the pupils who were considered suitable for the pupil focus group. The criteria for picking out pupils to participate were that they ranged from low/middle level to high level of achievement in English, that they consisted of both girls and boys and, finally, that they would likely to state their opinions and reflect on and discuss the topic in focus. In the control school, the gatekeeper selected was a teacher recommended by the author's supervisor; this teacher assumed the same functions as the teacher in the experimental school, and the same criteria for selection of both teachers and pupils were applied.

As Barbour (2007:52) points out, the recruiting of focus group participants is not an exact science as it involves making a number of practical and ethical decisions. The present study contains one pupil focus group and one teacher focus group in each school. The original intention was to have two pupil focus groups in each school, one from the academic program and one from the vocational program. However, in spite of multiple efforts from the author, it proved difficult to get all the initially panned focus groups to participate in the study. In both the schools the vocational groups did not participate for different reasons, even though they had agreed to do so. This shows how dependent the researcher is in educational research on the willingness of subjects to actually participate. The consequence is that the sample of pupils is smaller than anticipated and the comparison of the vocational English pupils contra the academic pupils has been possible.

The participants were formally invited by letter/email to participate and they had to sign a form of consent. The invitation stated what the project was about and what the participant's role would be in the project. It also stated that they would be treated anonymously, and that confidentiality was ensured.

4.5 Conducting the focus group interviews

The focus group interviews were held at the end of November and December 2012 so that the teachers had been given the opportunity to assess the pupils, and the pupils had been given the opportunity to experience being assessed. It was essential that the focus group discussions were held in the different schools at times convenient for both the pupils and the teachers. This was done to make the location a place where the participants felt ˈat homeˈ, and to make it easy for the members of the focus groups to participate. The interviews with both the

teachers and the pupils were originally conducted in Norwegian. No pressure on speaking English would make it easier to get pupils to participate, and for the teachers to concentrate on reflecting and discussing the topics at hand. The interviews were summarized in English by the author, and the direct quotes are translations from the original.

A topic guide was developed to make the interviews structured and to ensure that the same issues were addressed. The key to a good topic guide is to have thought through how the discussion might develop, imagine the possible responses and preferably to pilot topic guides or specific questions before using them in the focus groups (Barbour 2007:82). One can start with neutral questions, leading up to the more specific ones. In this study one teacher focus group interview and one pupil focus group interview were piloted to investigate the time frame of the interviews, but most importantly to check if the questions in the topic guide gave answers and reflections that would be useful in the analysis. The pilot interviews revealed that the topic guides worked well for reflection and discussion about the topic. Through the pilot interviews, follow-up questions where developed that proved useful in the later actual focus group interviews. It also became clear for the author that time had to be allowed for the participants to think and make responses.

Separate topic guides were used for the teachers and pupils. The teacher focus group interview explored what the intentions and attitudes behind the assessment practices are, how the different teachers work with assessment and feedback, what the pros and cons of that particular way of assessing are, and how the teachers believe their ways of assessing affect pupils' learning of English (see Appendix 1). Another interesting question was if there were any particular challenges connected to the chosen way of working with assessment in English. It was also considered important to find out if the teachers had experiences of or views on other methods of giving feedback and assessment, how the teachers worked with plans and learning objectives and, last but not least, what they thought contributes to pupils' learning.

With regard to the pupils, it was considered important to find out how they experienced assessment in English, and to encourage them to describe and comment on how they were being assessed and given feedback (see Appendix 2). Other important issues were how they experienced being assessed in particular ways, if they thought that specific kinds of feedback /assessment have helped them progress in English and enhanced their learning, and whether they know of and have experienced other ways of being assessed and given feedback. It was also of interest to identify whether the pupils knew what the learning objectives in English were, and whether they found these helpful in the learning process. A final question

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was whether the method of assessment the teacher used complied with the method pupils believed had most effect on the learning process in English.

Barbour (2007:76) emphasizes that good-quality recording equipment is important; the less complicated it is, the less there is to go wrong. The researcher must be familiar with the equipment. Note taking is also advised to be able to record immediate observations about the focus group discussion. This point was taken into consideration in the present study and the equipment was tried out in the two piloting sessions. A second recorder was brought along just in case anything happened to the first one, and the recordings were saved on the researcher's computer as well as on the recorder itself. Several note-taking methods were also tested to find the most effective one. Time was left after the focus group interviews to check that the interviews had been successfully recorded and recall the sessions with the help of the notes taken.

Distinguishing between the individual voices in a focus group interview can be challenging. However Barbour (2007:77) gives several pieces of good advice on this issue. The two pieces of advice applied to the study were introducing the participants to one another, which made it easier to combine voice and name, and the emphasis on encouraging the use of members' names during the discussion. The participants also had name badges on, which facilitated the use of names.

4.6 Analyzing the focus group interview data

Wilkinson (2011:168) describes two major approaches to analyzing data collected from focus group interviews: content analysis and ethnographic analysis. According to Wilkinson (2011:174), content analysis can be understood as providing a ˈmeans of access to something that lies behind or beyond itˈ. Some might criticize content analysis for not keeping the interactive quality of the data produced. However, Wilkinson (2011:171) argues that one can integrate illustrative quotations into the text to preserve this quality.

The present study applies a content analytic approach to analyzing the data collected on the grounds that the data outcome from the focus group interviews may provide richer information than one-to-one interviews would do. This kind of analysis should, according to Mellegård and Pettersen (2012:211), be able to process the comprehensive information provided in the interactional context of focus group interviews.

Mellegård and Pettersen (2012) refer to a debate in the field of interview analysis over whether what the respondents say should be seen as a ˈmirror of the worldˈ or as a ˈwindowˈ, providing a look into the real world. It is important to remember that the focus group interview is a ˈcontextual, interactional event, and what the members of the focus group express may differ from their actionsˈ (Mellegård and Pettersen 2012:211). The present study can be regarded as a window to the teachers' and pupils' worlds, but at some point also as a mirror reflecting real practice.

4.7 Interviews with the head of the experimental school

The first interview with the headmaster of the experimental school was an open one in which the headmaster presented and generally spoke about the project. The second interview was a semi-structured one where several questions were prepared in advance (Borg and Gall 1989). The questions asked were:

Why do you think this is an important project?

Why is it important that the project involves as many teachers as possible?

Is it important that the school has a common assessment practice?

What feedback have you received so far concerning the project?

What are the future plans for this project?

What kind of response have you had from the school owner concerning this project?

4.8 Interview with the Rogaland County Director of Schools

The Rogaland County Director of Education received and answered several questions via e-mail. He was sent the questions in Norwegian and the questions and answers were later translated into English. The Director was given the opportunity to read through the interview as it would appear in the thesis. The interview was approved. The Director was asked about, for example, his knowledge of assessment practices at upper secondary schools in the county, to what extent school leaders and teachers get feedback on the schools' assessment practices, to what extent the upper secondary schools have a uniform assessment practice and his opinions on how to approach an initiative such as ˈAssessment for learningˈ (see Appendix 3).

4.9 Ethical considerations

There are ethical issues involved in using focus groups interviews as a method of data collection. Barbour (2007:53) mentions the issue of payment as being quite controversial, and the issue of showing gratitude as being problematic. This study did not involve any gratitude artifacts, but a simple ˈthank you for participating noteˈ was sent to the persons involved after the interviews were finished.

Barbour (2007:53) also points out that one needs to be aware of the time spent taking part in research projects. Taking this into consideration in this study, it was stressed in the invitation to both pupils and teachers that there would be no other ˈworkˈ involved than taking part in the focus group meeting, which would last for about one to one and a half hours. However, it was not so much the time they would have to spend in the focus group interviews which proved to be the most difficult point, but actually getting pupils to participate and getting the teachers to allow the pupils to use English classes to participate in the interview. In the control school it ended up with the pupils having to use their free study period to participate in the interviews.

Barbour (2007:67) problematizes the ethical issues with regard to confidentiality that the use of pre-existing groups raises. Researchers need to be attentive to the fact that the participants have a life after they have spoken their minds in a focus group setting. The researcher needs to emphasize the importance of confidentiality, and time should be allowed at the end of the focus group session for possible concerns from the participants to be addressed. Some teachers or pupils may find themselves in a situation where they feel they are misunderstood during the discussion and need to clarify.

Practical and ethical issues are intertwined and one has to take this into consideration when making decisions concerning research design, and it should be paid attention to during the whole process of carrying out good-quality research. The Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD) has approved of the project, its method of data collection, information to the teachers and pupils participating, and how the data will be processed.

5. Findings

5.1 Introduction

The present chapter presents the data collection. First, in section 5.2 a summary of the interview on assessment with the Rogaland County Director of Schools is presented. Subsequently, the main part of the chapter presents the data from the focus group interviews.. Section 5.3 describes the experimental school's project, partly through interviews with the headmaster, followed by summaries of the teacher and pupil focus group interviews. Section 5.4 presents the summaries from the control school focus group interviews. The teacher focus group interviews are categorized in two groups: firstly, experiences and practices of assessment, and secondly, attitudes and beliefs about assessment.

By using qualitative content analysis, the results are presented as a summary of the discussion in the different groups, and quotations are added to illustrate certain parts of the interviews. The interview summaries and the illustrative quotes used in the analysis are the author's translations from the original Norwegian.

5.2 Interview with the Rogaland County Director of Schools

The Rogaland County Director of Schools reported that he was familiar with the assessment practices at the different upper secondary schools in the county. Each school's assessment practice is a topic discussed in a conversation with each headmaster, and assessment practice is a topic at the yearly headmaster conference. In his conversations with the headmasters, the schools are given motivational feedback on their assessment practice.

The Director emphasized that it was not his aim to have a uniform assessment practice for all the schools in the district. The schools are diverse, both when it comes to the pupils' prerequisites and in educational programmes. Consequently the assessment practices are different. He believes in locally-adapted assessment profiles within the state rules and regulations and the county's guidelines for assessment.

The Director is convinced that the focus on assessment during the learning process through the ˙Assessment for learning˙ strategy has enhanced the different schools' quality of assessment, and that this will consequently have a positive impact on pupils' learning. When

asked about how the schools can best apply an initiative such as ˙Assessment for learning˙, he stresses that, as the Director of schools in the county, he expects all schools to work with assessment, and that his responsibility is to supervise and follow-up each school. He has a positive view on initiatives such as the project in the experimental school: 'Such an initiative is very important because it contributes to the school's ownership of the national initiative ˙Assessment for learning˙ and it also contributes to the schools pedagogical profile.'

5.3 The experimental school

5.3.1 The 'Assessment for learning 2012/2013' project

In this section the experimental school's ˙Assessment for learning 2012/2013˙ project is described. Information about the project was collected through one open and one semi-structured interview with the headmaster and written documentation provided by him. The ˙Assessment for learning, 2012/2013˙ project was organized as a selection of five sub-projects within the school for which whole teams or individual teachers could sign up for one or more they wished to try out. The teachers who participated could be rewarded with funding from the state[9] for research and development. The five different sub-projects are described as follows:

1. *Reduced use of traditional grading work*. The goal is to move parts of the assessment work closer to the pupils, ˙from the teacher's desk to the pupil's desk˙. This implies that the teacher gives feedback and 'feedforward', a term which explains what activities need to be undertaken to make better progress in class during the writing process.

2. *Put in systematic feedback sessions during all assessment situations*. The proposal for accomplishing this principle is that during the writing process the teacher moves from pupil to pupil and gives feedback and feedforward, in two or more sequences. Alternatively, instead of the teacher moving around, the pupils make their way to a room, one by one, where the teacher gives them individual feedback and feedforward. The pupils have to stay for the whole writing session to make sure they are given feedback/feedforward. There is no use of grades or points, and only oral feedback and feedforward with regard to competence aims and learning objectives is given.

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[9] Innovasjon Norge.

The main intention of this particular sub-project is that the teacher easily gets an impression of each pupil's level of competence and can give individual feedback and feedforward directly to the pupil. The teacher also gets an impression of the whole class's challenges and where the focus of the work needs to be aimed. The teacher can go home without any grading work to do.

3. *Assessment by the help of rubrics*. The aim is to avoid the use of points and estimated scores through the use of rubrics. These rubrics can be used in single assessment situations, in work demands, or as a continually updated picture of performance criteria. The learning objectives are put in the rubric in cooperation with the pupils. The teacher gives reasons and explanations and the pupil reflects. This ought to happen at the beginning of the school year, and at the start of assessing projects. By marking off the pupil's level and achievements in each subject in the rubric, it will be fairly easy to draw a profile of the pupil's level of competence at any given moment.

4. *Develop tasks, work demands or assessments which visualize competence on different levels*. Every assessment situation, work demand or task should have a taxonomic structure which visualizes the level of competence in an easy and concrete way.

5. *Further development of assessment without the use of grades or scoring in the first half of the school year*. The sub-project is explained and discussed with the pupils so that they understand the purpose and the advantages of such a ˈtraining periodˈ. Learning objectives are worked out on different levels in each subject in cooperation with the pupils, and in a language they understand. These learning objectives are put into a rubric which is used in connection with work assignments throughout the year. The rubrics should be used for feedback and feedforward.

At the end of the first term, the pupils select some of their written assignments and use the rubrics and feedback/feedforward to improve their work before they hand it in for final assessment and grading. The assessments in the first term should focus on learning and emphasize understanding, and for these reasons there should be a feedback/feedforward session included during the period in which the pupils have the opportunity to assess their own work and their achievements. All feedback is given without the use of grades or scores.

The last section of the ˈAssessment for learning 2012/2013ˈ project describes what the teachers involved have to do in the evaluation of each sub-project. All teachers are expected to write a report which contains information about what works, what works even better, eventual difficulties, the pupils' understanding of and opinions about the project, reactions

from parents, and if learning in new ways is experienced as being difficult or easy. The teachers are also expected to comment on whether a particular sub-project's focus should be common practice for the whole school and, if so, if anything in it should be changed. The project description also states that all five sub-projects can be redefined, that is changed and adapted to meet each team/teacher's needs and situation.

During the interviews, the headmaster emphasized that the project is under development and stressed that participation in the different sub-projects was voluntary. The headmaster had a strong belief that formative assessment methods would contribute to learning and that such approaches would benefit the pupils at his upper secondary school. He also emphasized that the pupils needed to be made conscious about how to learn and made responsible for their own learning process. Formative assessment was seen as contributing to these goals. The project is important since it turns the focus towards the subject and understanding the subject content instead of just ˙getting a grade˙. It engages the pupils in a completely new way by having them self-assess and reflect on their own learning.

The project involves every teaching-team and thus every teacher, which was considered important to the headmaster, whose philosophy is that a school's developing projects contribute to cultivating a common language for speaking about learning and assessment. Consequently, it was seen as fundamental that the school has a common assessment practice for the same reason that all the teachers have a common language when talking about learning and a common practice on how to assess.

The headmaster reported that the feedback given by the teachers involved so far is positive. Most of them want to continue the project because they see the benefits of implementing formative assessment. The experiences become a part of the teachers' instruction practice. Although the teachers want to continue the work, they do not think that this project should be an official common school practice yet. There is still work to be done and experiences to be gained before one can develop a common practice for the whole school. The headmaster explained that one reason why the teachers are so positive could be because the project has not been a set of directives from the school's team of leaders, but one including choices and funding for research and development for the different teams and teachers involved.

The headmaster reported that the ˙Assessment for learning 2012/2013˙ project will continue next year. However, a new element is being brought into the project. The headmaster strongly believes that the social competence component needs to be integrated into the project as an important piece in the assessment for learning puzzle.

5.3.2 The experimental school teacher focus group interview

At the experimental school five teachers participated in the focus group interview. Their experience as English teachers varied from two to 15 years. All of them had completed the one year Postgraduate Certificate of Education, but the level of competence in English differed from being a translator/interpreter, to having one year of English studies or to having a BA or MA in English. The teachers are referred to as T1, T2, T3, T4 and T5.

Experiences and practices of assessment

To set the scene, the teachers were first asked how their school worked with assessment in English. The teachers were unanimous that the school had developed a project which focused on assessment for learning. All five teachers were involved in one or more sub-project. Since this was a project in its early phase, they were gaining experiences as they went along. What they had found helpful was the theoretical background material about what formative assessment is, which was provided in each of the sub-projects. They reported that having the theoretical backdrop made them more confident about what to do, how to do it and why to do it. One teacher summed in the following way up how the school has worked with assessment:

> The school project focuses on formative assessment, assessment during the learning process, compared to summative assessment. There is also emphasis on teachers acting as guides or coaches, if you like, something which leads to fruitful cooperation with the pupils. You notice that the pupils do better in English because of the feedback and feedforward they are given. (T3)

The teachers used different approaches when assessing written English. However, they all agreed that the typical ˈold fashionedˈ way of carrying out writing sessions in class, pupils sitting at their desks writing for three to six hours, without speaking or asking for help, was not considered as producing any learning. Three of the teachers organized their assessment in written English according to different ˈwork requirementsˈ, writing tasks/assignments done in class, which are labeled ˈapprovedˈ or ˈnot approvedˈ, throughout the first term. These work requirements qualified the pupils for a final summative assessment at the end of the term. The work requirements were to be done in writing sessions in class and finished at home if necessary. At the end of the term the pupils selected two of their work requirements, revised them and handed them in for grading. Another teacher practised portfolio assessment, where the pupils selected what they wanted to include in their portfolio. The pupils also had to practise self-assessment and a description of the writing process. Several of the teachers used both oral and written self-assessment to promote awareness around the issue of learning.

All of the teachers had a ˙feedback-during-the-writing-process˙ approach, where they allowed the pupils to write in class, get feedback immediately, or after handing in a first draft. The pupils were then given the opportunity to revise their work before handing it in for final assessment/grading. Some of the teachers gave the pupils oral feedback, others gave written feedback, and some gave a written response which they used as a starting point for a conversation with the pupil about their written work. Irrespective of the method, the teachers' focus when giving feedback was on how to make progress. They all had the same view that starting the writing process in class instead of making the pupils write the whole text at home is a better solution. One teacher summed it up as follows:

> The writing session in class is much more appropriate. The pupils are more concentrated about the task at hand, and we can easily give feedback there and then, which most pupils find constructive. (T2)

At least two of the teachers had experiences from the sub-project focusing on not giving grades the first term. Two of the teachers' experience was that when not giving grades it was easier for the pupil to focus on how to reach the next level of competence.

> T1: I'm in the sub-project of not giving grades the first term, and I see that it works. Earlier the focus was on ˙what grade did you get?˙ Now, they concentrate on what they have to do to move forward and be better.
> T3: I totally agree because to many of our pupils it is difficult to understand the grades and what they say about the level of competence and what is needed to be better. Many of them don't understand what the specific grade implies, but with the use of rubrics, where the level low/medium/high level of competence combined with criteria of success are visually presented, it becomes more concrete and obvious to them where they are and where they are heading.

Rubrics were used by all of the teachers to make the assessment visual and explanatory to the pupils. However, just one of them worked out different rubrics for each assignment. The teacher who tried this reported:

> I experienced that the different rubrics made for different assignments ended up looking more or less the same. So now I've worked out one general rubric for written and one for oral assignments, where I put in specific learning objectives and performance criteria if necessary. (T4)

Only two of the five teachers employed typical content, grammar and comprehension questions to the text tests. One of the teachers claimed that these tests were good for testing the competence aims stated in the English subject curriculum. However, it was emphasized that this was a very small part of the assessment process.

In terms of oral assessment, all of the teachers assessed their pupils on the basis of both presentations and one-to-one conversations with the teacher. Three of the teachers made their pupils do their presentations in groups in class, while the other two allowed individual presentations. They all emphasized that the conversation after the presentation was the most important contribution to assessing oral assignments. One-to-one conversations with the teacher about a specific topic was the format the teachers saw as the most valuable in assessing oral English, summed up in the following exchange:

> T3: I'm tired of presentations, where the pupils read what they have copied from the Internet and are not able to answer questions or discuss the topic afterwards, but it's the current exam format, so… I like conversations about a topic much better, and it covers a larger portion of the learning objectives in English.
> T5: Yes, having an authentic conversation with a pupil shows what level they're at… it's really time consuming, but well worth it.

Two of the teachers used peer feedback in oral presentations. However, all of them applied individual feedback, in which they got the pupils to assess themselves first, rooted in the idea that self-assessment leads to insight and reflection.

> The pupils learn to assess their own presentation, which leads to insight, and the ability of seeing what they need to work on for next time. (T5)

The teachers acknowledged a few challenges in the way they assess the pupils.

> The challenging part is how I can continue assessing written English the way I find most useful and still prepare the pupils for what is coming, the exam. (T1)

This view reflects many of the teachers' worries that feedback during the writing process approach does not reflect the exam format, where the pupils are not allowed any guidance or feedback from the teacher during the exam.

Three of the teachers had not been teaching for very long, only two to three years. Therefore, they did not have much experience with other ways of assessing. However, two of the more experienced teachers had practised a more summative approach to assessment earlier on. They had used grammar testing, multiple choice and question-answer tests to test knowledge in particular areas. They had added up points and converted these into a grade. They agreed that this way of testing and assessing the abilities of written English was not satisfactory.

When asked about how the pupils reacted to the ways they were being assessed, the following exchange occurred:

> T1: I hear a sigh of relief when I tell them that they're not going to have a whole day writing test in my class.
> T2: Yes, not many pupils like the whole day writing test, but my experience is that the pupils want to be assessed. They want to know where they are at.
> T4: Oh yes, and the best pupils want to have grades and not low, middle, high level of achievement.
> T5: Well, I've never had pupils complain about the way they are being assessed, only when it comes to presenting oral assignments in class. A few are not able to do this and ask to present only to me.

Another challenge put forward was the number of curriculum competence aims that have to be met. These aims are experienced as being vague and in broad categories. To address the challenge, all the teachers spent time breaking down the competence aims into clear learning objectives. This was considered as important in that the clear learning objectives give a good indication to the pupils about what they are expected to learn. However, some of the teachers saw this task as difficult and only did it because they had to. A few of them expressed the view that it would make the job easier if they worked with breaking down the competence aims into learning objectives together in the English team and not on their own:

> T3: I usually break the competence aims into learning objectives with all assessments. It makes assessment more understandable to the pupil. Learning objectives are like any other instructions. To solve a task you need to know what and how to do it.
> T5: I see your point, but we haven't really worked with this in the English team so it's up to each of us how we practise this. Some of us do it because we have to, hahah…at the same time I totally see the necessity for some of the pupils.

Concerning success criteria, most of the teachers had one general rubric for written assignments and one for oral assignments since there are some standard features one focuses on in all written assessments and in oral assessments. Making one rubric for each individual assignment would then not make much sense. Some of the teachers added specific details to the general rubrics for each assignment if necessary.

Beliefs and attitudes
The teachers had reflections on why they assess the way they do:

> T1: I use the methods I see work. I try to be practical and ask myself what is the purpose of this task/assignment? How can I use this to give the pupil useful feedback?

T4: I agree, one has to be practical. I assess the way I do because it is practical and efficient. I use approaches that cover a lot of the competence aims in one go. I try to make smart choices when it comes to what texts and literature to use.

T3: Earlier in my career as a teacher there was a more summative approach to assessment, now I see learning a language as a process, which has made me reconsider my practice. I now think that assessment is a part of the instruction.

All of the teachers agreed that learning a foreign language is a process and that is why they all saw the need to change or at least make some alterations in their practice to comply with the idea that assessment is a part of instruction, and instruction is a process. They had all adopted the idea about the teacher being a coach or a supervisor, whose main objective is to give feedback and feedforward leading to progress and development. All of the teachers agreed that the best method for assessing written English is through feedback during the writing process in small classes, during which the teacher can have close contact with the pupil and give immediate feedback. In oral assessment the best way to assess is through one-to-one conversations with the pupil about topics related to the competence aims.

What they believed was the worst way of assessing was actually the same for the teachers as it was for the pupils, namely the ˈwhole day testˈ, where the pupil sits at a desk for six hours, and is expected to write a long essay which they have not prepared for in advance.

The issue of whether assessment affects learning was commented on by one of the teachers as follows:

The aim is to assess in a way that leads to learning. (T1)

All of the teachers had come to an understanding that feedback during the writing process leads to learning, but three of the teachers argued that this was only true for the pupils who were conscious of the feedback and used it appropriately. Immediate feedback was perceived as leading to a greater learning outcome, but it was emphasized that with a class consisting of up to thirty pupils, this approach is almost impossible to carry out.

In terms of whether teachers should work on their own assessment practice, one of the teachers answered:

I think it is important to keep oneself updated on new ways of doing things in general... especially when it comes to ways of making one's own practice and instruction better, because it can have such a great impact on pupils' learning. (T4)

The factors most of the teachers commented on as being important in deciding what assessment methods to apply were time, organizational frameworks and experience. Many of them experienced that they had too little time to spend on using the methods they were

convinced were most effective in assessing English. The second concern was the organizational frameworks they are given. Up to thirty pupils in a class restricts the methods one is able to apply. It is simply too much work to execute a process writing assignment with a first draft, feedback and then assessing and grading, or to give immediate feedback to all the pupils, when they are writing in class. The third factor which influences the choice of assessment methods was experience. The more experienced teachers all agreed that time and organizational frameworks are important factors, but some of them were flexible in that they tried to apply the method they found most effective and adjusted it to comply with the time and organizational frameworks they had at their disposal.

They all saw their main role as being that of a supervisor or coach, whose aim is to give the best possible instruction and assess the pupils in a way that leads to progress and development.

5.3.3 The experimental school pupil focus group interview

At the experimental school five pupils (P1, P2, P3, P4 and P5) participated in the focus group interview. What became obvious quite early in the interview was that none of the participants was very talkative. The interviewer had to use many follow up questions to get the conversation going, or to get answers to the topic guide questions.

All of the pupils agreed that English was more or less 'alright' as a subject, and two of them admitted to liking English. When assessment in English was mentioned, the immediate response was tests, oral presentations and writing essays. The pupils pointed out that the assessment of English was done without the use of grades:

> P2: We get an indication of low, medium or high level of competence, which is converted into the grades 1-2, 3-4 and 5-6 in my head.
> P3: Yes, we are so used to grades that it is natural that we think in terms of grades and not levels…yet.

All of the pupils converted the level of competence into grades because they were so used to thinking in those terms. Asked if they know which performance criteria are used in teacher assessment, they answered:

> We are presented with a rubric which visually explains the level we're on, and the teacher also says something about what we need to do to be better and we get feedback on content, language and structure. (P3)

But first, we are given a similar rubric for self-assessment. We have to cross out different check points on the rubric, and the self-assessment is the starting point for the feedback conversation. (P5)

All of the pupils agreed that it was fairly easy to self-assess, and that after a feedback conversation with the teacher, they all tried to use the feedforward to improve on the next assignment.

The pupils further explained that they do all writing assignments in class and that they can get help if they need it. All of the pupils were aware that they could ask the teacher for help on what to write, words and phrases, what one should include in the task and even if the teacher had favorable comments on what they had written. However, only P2 made use of this feedback during the writing session. Another way of being assessed was the testing of grammatical elements, such as *who/which*, *there is* and *it is*.

When it came to oral assessment, the pupils presented topics either in groups in class or individually with the teacher. They were happy with this arrangement:

P4: We decide if we want to be in a group and present in front of the class or if we want to be alone and present only for the teacher and that is good. We get individual feedback even if we've had a group presentation.
P3: I agree, because some pupils are more nervous than others when they have to present things in class and this can affect the level of achievement, so it's a good thing that we can choose to present just for the teacher.

The pupils were all satisfied with the way they were being assessed. However, when confronted with the fact that only one of them made use of the offer of getting feedback during the writing session, one of the pupils pointed out:

We have to do the assignment on our own. If I'm given a task to do I have to find a way to solve it. (P5)

During the interview it became gradually more difficult for the pupils to comment on whether the particular ways of being assessed both in oral and written English had helped or motivated them to work more to improve in English. The pupils needed several prompts from the interviewer, and after many following up questions the following exchange of opinions occurred:

P4: There is not much difference in the way we are assessed now and how we were assessed in secondary school. We could just get the grades. I don't think there is much difference at all.

P3: Well… I think there is a difference because in the feedback conversations with the teacher we get to know what was good and what we need to continue working on. That motivates me to do something about the things the teacher has commented on. Just getting a grade and comments on a piece of paper is not that motivating.

After this exchange all of the pupils agreed that getting very concrete feedback was in fact more motivating and helped them in their progress because they knew exactly what to focus on to be better.

Writing assignments were highlighted by P5 as being among the best ways of assessing written English. The pupils needed prompts from the interviewer to elaborate. After the interviewer had talked about different ways of assessing English and given examples, it became evident that the pupils had experience of writing a first draft and getting feedback before revising and handing it in for a final assessment.

I like this way a lot. You get a second chance, and I think that you learn more because you pay attention to what is commented on and you revise immediately. (P3)

The other pupils agreed. The worst way of being assessed in writing was expressed by one of the pupils as follows and all the others consented:

Whole day writing tests, like we did in secondary school. (P5)

The pupils did not have many comments on better ways of being assessed in oral English. They all agreed that presentations and being questioned afterwards about the topic was a good way of being assessed. Mini-talks and conversations alone with the teacher about chosen topics were considered by the pupils as being more difficult, the worst way of being assessed, because you really had to be able to think and speak in a more authentic conversation setting. This situation was experienced by three of the pupils as being too intimate and they felt really uncomfortable about it. Although they all agreed that this was a method where you really got to show your English abilities, they did not prefer this way of being assessed.

When asked if they thought assessment and feedback could lead to learning, they became silent and thoughtful. It was obviously a question that they found difficult to answer, so the interviewer had to try and talk them through what they had discussed earlier and get

them to sum up and draw some conclusions. After a while P2 concluded that assessment including very concrete feedback could definitely lead to learning, but only if you were given a few things to focus on. P5 admitted that it was almost always the same things the teacher gave feedback on. This pupil pointed out that it was the pupil's responsibility to learn to take the feedback into consideration and work with the things they were given feedback on. It was difficult for the pupils to make any comments on whether they thought feedback made them more conscious as learners and on whether they had any reflections on how feedback should be carried out to have the best effect.

All of the pupils had heard about competence aims. They had been mentioned at the beginning of the school year, but they could not remember if the competence aims were used regularly in English instruction. Only one pupil commented on whether competence aims could be useful in the learning process:

> Competence aims are useful when you are being tested both in oral and written English because it is important to know what you are being tested in and what you are expected to know something about. (P3)

The term 'success criteria' was unfamiliar to them. However, after the interviewer explained what it meant, all the pupils realized that these criteria were regularly

used by the teacher in the rubrics used for feedback. When it became evident to them what success criteria meant, one pupil explained:

> Success criteria are important because then we know what is being assessed in each assignment. (P1)

However, it was difficult for the pupils to comment on whether success criteria had any effect on learning.

As for the most important aspect about learning English, they all agreed that using the language and talking in class were of great importance and that there should be an emphasis on pronunciation as well.

The pupils emphasized that the teacher's main task was to make them as proficient as possible in English, but the teacher also had to be a motivator, who made English fun and interesting. The pupils' main task was to make it easy for the teacher to teach them, but also to show what you had learned and show interest in English.

5.4 The control school

At the control school four teachers participated in the focus group interview. This school had not engaged in a specific project in connection with the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training initiative ˈAssessment for learningˈ. Therefore it was not considered necessary to interview the headmaster as the expectation was that the focus group interviews would provide the necessary information about the practices and attitudes to assessment in the school.

5.4.1 The control school teacher focus group interview

The four teachers' experience of teaching varied from being completely new as a teacher to having 21 years of experience as an English teacher. All of the teachers had the one year Postgraduate Certificate of Education integrated into their education. Three of them had a BA degree and one had an MA degree in English. As in the experimental school, the teachers are referred to as T1,T2, T3 and T4 .

Experiences and practices of assessment

When the teachers were asked to comment on how their school worked with assessment, they responded as follows:

> No comment, I just started this autumn so I have no idea about how the school works with assessment. (T1)
>
> Well… I've been here for quite a few years now and it is a bit up and down, but the focus now is on assessment during the learning process. We sat in groups a few years ago and developed common assessment criteria, but if anyone uses them. I don't know. (T2)
>
> We also did some work on concretization of competence aims in the English team a while ago. We chose one or two competence aims to work on. I suppose we were meant to continue this work on our own. (T3)

T2 explained that they work more informally with assessment. They corrected and graded each other's pupils' work and shared thoughts on grade levels.

When it came to assessment assignments, they usually decided in the English team when to arrange the ˈwhole dayˈ writing test, otherwise the teachers arranged writing assignments and tests on their own. All of the teachers arranged the ˈwhole dayˈ writing tests,

one at the end of the first term and one before the end of the second term. The teachers agreed that this method of assessing the pupils was good exam practice and a good way of summative assessment, basing the term's continuous assessment grade on the result. However, T3 stressed that the summative testing should be left to the end of the second term, because then the pupils would have gone through the process of learning what is expected in the English subject.

The teachers applied different assessment methods in their English classes. All of them based the first term grade on two written assignments, one written assignment which each of the teachers arranged on their own, and the other the coordinated ´whole day´ writing test. The teachers had different approaches as to how they worked in class before testing the pupils. Two of them considered the written assignments as summative testing to establish a grade. The two others had a more feedback-during-the-writing- process approach, at least on one of the written assignments. Two of the teachers described their approach as follows:

> In my class we work on the writing tasks together. They usually get the task in advance, and I help them make an outline. They are then allowed to work on the assignment before the actual writing session in school. They are also encouraged to work together. The more prepared they are, the better they do. (T3)

> I also work together with my pupils. We plan, make an outline together and I also talk about learning strategies in this process. Then we construct a text in collaboration. We discuss the introduction, paragraphs and conclusion and then we write the text in class. Afterwards the pupils are given an assessment assignment that is very similar to what we have done in class. However, now they have to do it on their own without any help. (T4)

All of the teachers agreed that having the pupils co-operate and help each other when working with writing tasks was very fruitful. Two of the teachers made use of this approach regularly in written as well as oral assignments, while the other two used this approach more in oral assignments. They all argued for the view that this approach helps the pupil develop and make progress.

Two of the teachers had tested out giving feedback during the writing process, where they had the pupils write a first draft and then revise before handing in the final product. One of the teachers explained that the pupils usually got feedback on their work in progress while writing in class. The teacher moved around the class and gave comments to individual pupils. T1 emphasized that the pupil subject conference, which was conducted at least once a term,

was essential in being a forum for giving feedback and feedforward both in written and oral English.

Oral assessment assignments were conducted as presentations in different sized groups in class and individual conversations with the teacher about certain topics or texts. T2 argued that oral activity in class should contribute to the continuous assessment grade, in order to benefit the pupils who are active in class. T4 had a portfolio-based approach to oral assessment when the class was reading a novel. The pupils had to do some written tasks as well as oral assignments in connection with the book they were reading. T2 had a very structured approach to novel reading, where the pupils were expected to work with detailed questions on the text and then be examined. Half the class would be in the classroom with the teacher talking about and being examined about the novel, while the other half would be reading on their own.

> T2: All the pupils have to contribute to this conversation. I make notes about their level of achievement and this is summed up into a grade at the end of the book project.
> T3: Oh…so then you grade pupils on the basis of only a few sentences.
> T2: Yes, but we have many examining situations during the book project and in the end I have a fairly good grasp of each pupil's level of competence.

What the teachers found challenging about the way they assessed their pupils was providing feedback during the writing process because this approach could be really time-consuming and difficult to perform in a class with up to thirty pupils. The same applied for individual oral assessment with the teacher. Time is of essence, and all of the teachers found it challenging to carry out individual conversations with the pupils, although they found this method really effective. Two of the teachers found the oral presentation of assignments challenging because of the amount of cheating involved. Pupils just read facts they had copied from the Internet.

> T4: If they just read from a manuscript they fail in my class!
> T1: Oh….in my class they get a low grade if they read from a manuscript, but they have the opportunity to compensate if they are able to answer questions after the presentation.
> T2: I'm not as strict as you, because I know some of the psychology behind presenting before an audience and needing a manuscript to lean on. I think the most important part is if the pupils are able to answer questions relating to the topic presented. That is when they show their English abilities.

All of the teachers agreed that the oral presentation and answering questions afterwards was the best exam-related training. When it comes to experience of other

assessment methods in written English, T2 made tests for the pupils on ˙It's learning˙, containing a multiple choice part and a question-answer part related to a text they had read. T4 had arranged many smaller assessment assignments, such as multiple choice tests, questions and answers to texts and storyline, but had found that getting pupils to write a longer text covers many competence aims at the same time. This teacher argued that it is better for the pupils to have fewer assessment assignments.

The teachers reported that the pupils usually did not react to the way they were assessed, although some always complained about the grade. Many pupils wanted more oral assessments and more oral activity in general.

The teachers commented as follows about how they worked with competence aims:

I have very little experience of teaching English, so I use the English book as my guide. I have the competence aims as a starting point and I make supplements to the book if I find it necessary. (T1)

I also have the competence aims as a starting point, but I know that if I stick to the English book we use at this school, all the competence aims will be met…but when I hear myself say this I realize that I also use other stuff to supplement the book. T2)

I think the pupils learn more if the competence aims are really specific. They need abstract concepts to be made concrete. (T3)

My starting point is the competence aims, but I must admit that I use the book as well. (T4)

None of the teachers made the competence aims into more concrete learning objectives.

A rubric with the success criteria was something all the teachers used to assess the pupils both in written and oral assignments. Although the teachers showed these rubrics to the pupils so that they were familiar with the criteria with which they were assessed, only a few of them made specific rubrics for each assignment. The most common approach was to apply one general rubric for written and one for oral assignments. The teachers problematized the concept of rubrics and success criteria. They all concluded that for really interested pupils these rubrics are really useful tools, but for most pupils, detailed and very specific rubrics would be too much for them to deal with. T3 pointed out that the teachers need to explain the criteria to the pupils thoroughly and only then would they be of use to them.

Beliefs and attitudes

When asked why they assess the way they do, the following exchange illustrates some of the teachers' beliefs:

> T2: To be able to assess most of the competence aims in an effective way.
> T3: I think it is important to distinguish between final, summative assessment and assessment during the process of learning. The latter focuses on feedback and feedforward and I believe that most attention should be paid to this approach. I don't think that the last big ˙whole day˙ test should be the one that sums up the grade. There should be several to cover the whole specter.
> T2: Yes, of course one has to look at the development, but the last big one is of most importance, I think.
> T4: I agree. The ˙whole day˙ test is usually an 'old exam' so I think that counts a bit more, but one should glance at the other assignments as well.

Two of the teachers commented on the best way of assessing written English and challenged the interviewer by asking whether it was:

> To get an assessment, a grade, or for the learning progress to be at its best? (T2)

> For the teacher or the pupils? Hahaha! (T4)

Being able to have the time to go through a written assignment together with the individual pupil, giving feedback and feedforward was considered by all the teachers as being the best way to assess. T3 also argued that feedback during the writing process is the most fruitful way of assessing written English, which led to the following exchange:

> T3: Getting feedback and feedforward while you still have the opportunity to do something about it is rewarding to the pupils and it motivates them - not those long comments together with the grade.
> T4: I agree to a certain extent, but it is impossible to work like that in a class where you have up to thirty pupils. It is too much work giving all this feedback, and in the end many of the pupils don't make any use of it. They just hand in the first draft without revising it at all.

Three of the teachers agreed that though it is a very constructive way of assessing written English, it is almost impossible to provide feedback during the writing process in a class with thirty pupils. T4 explained that in year 2 and 3, the English classes are organized in ˙subject days˙, where one regularly uses a whole day to work on English projects, which makes it possible to apply a more process oriented approach to writing.

When it comes to oral assessment, they all agreed that individual conversations with the pupils about relevant topics was the most productive way of oral assessment. Although, this was considered to be the best way, they all commented on it being too time-consuming.

There were no particular comments as to what would be the worst ways of assessing oral or written English. In terms of using assessment for learning one teacher exclaimed:

> That is my focus - to use assessment for learning…but still there is always the thought lurking at the back of my mind of having to get enough assessments to establish a grade, which makes you sometimes apply a more summative approach. (T2)

The teachers all explained that they tried to give constructive feedback to the pupils, preferably on an individual basis with the pupil, in order to explain what was good and what needed to be worked on to be better. They all agreed that this way of assessing led to learning if the pupil was capable of using the feedback and feedforward in a constructive way.

The teachers reflected as follows over the issue of the importance of working with their own assessment practice:

We can always be better. (T1)

State rules and regulations change over time so we have to stay updated. (T4)

I think we should have a more unified approach so that it becomes as standardized as possible and thus predictable for the pupils. (T3)

Concerning whether assessment affects learning, two of the teachers agreed that the thought of an exam in the horizon affects the way a teacher works with the English curriculum and competence aims. The instruction is aimed at the exam, at least in the second term, where the pupils are drilled in answering exam-related tasks both in written and in oral English.

The factors that affect the choice of assessment methods the most are time, organizational frameworks and resources. Other factors are whether one gets to measure all the competence aims, and what previous methods have shown to be effective in helping the pupils to progress. T2 saw the teacher's main role as being that of an organizer, making sure enough assessment assignments were carried out to be able to set a grade at the end of the term, but also to give constructive feedback and feedforward. T3 emphasized that being a supervisor and assessing for learning is the main role. It is important for pupils to understand what they need to do to improve their English.

5.4.2 The control school pupil focus group interview

Four pupils participated in the control school pupil focus group interview. The pupils are referred to as P1, P2, P3 and P4.

All the pupils liked English as a subject, though P1 pointed out that oral English was preferred to written English. P3 had ambitions about studying English further after finishing upper secondary school. They all agreed that the teacher was an important factor for whether one liked English or not.

ˈGradesˈ was the first thing that came to mind when the pupils were asked about assessment in English. They agreed that feedback could be seen as assessment as well because one then got to know what one was good at and what one needed to improve on. One pupil stressed:

> I really appreciate when the teacher finds the time to give me feedback and tell me what to do to be better. (P3)

In written English the pupils were assessed by writing essays and then being given a grade and a comment on their work. Before starting the written assignment they usually got a rubric describing different success criteria needed to meet the different levels of achievement: low, medium and high. This made it easier to know what to focus on in order to achieve one's aims in the subject. The same rubric was used in the written feedback comments from the teacher, which made it easier to see what was good and what needed to be worked on for next time. It also made it easier to understand the grade and what it said about achievement. Two of the pupils commented as follows on whether they used these comments and feedback constructively in the next writing assignment:

> Well…no, but I realise that I've had the same comments year after year…so maybe I should use the feedback more constructively. (P1)

> I definitely could be better, but I usually just see the grade and maybe read through the comments. (P3)

As for oral assessment, the pupils were familiar with the success criteria the teacher used to assess. They started out in the beginning of the school year presenting topics in front of the whole class, first in groups of four, then in pairs and after a couple of months they presented individually. There was no conversation after the presentations, but the peers and the teacher could ask questions if there was anything they wondered about. However, if there were several questions after the presentation, this was considered negative by the pupils because it meant that the presentation had not been clear enough. P2 saw the questioning afterwards as a way of getting one to explain and show one's English ability, which was considered positive. The feedback and grade were given individually by the teacher.

One of the pupils summed up the experience of being assessed in written English as follows:

Ok, since we get the rubrics beforehand it is up to us what we want to make of it. We get the opportunity to know what is expected at the different levels of achievement. (P3)

They all agreed that the present way of being assessed by their teachers was satisfactory. However, when considering oral assessment, two of the pupils said they would prefer fewer but more elaborate presentations, and not so many small presentations. They were not given enough time to go into depth.

Considering the motivational factors in assessment, the pupils found comments from the teacher on what had been successful in their writing, constructive feedback and feedforward, as being helpful and motivating, especially for those pupils who had the experience of getting a better grade after taking the feedback and feedforward seriously and working with the areas commented on by the teacher. The trade-offs in the way the pupils were assessed were a sense of control and responsibility. One pupil summed it up as follows:

The teacher gives you the facts about where you are at and then gives you a recipe on how to progress. (P3)

The pupils all approved of the ways in which they were assessed in written English now but, in an ideal world, as one of the pupils put it, getting the feedback and feedforward in an individual conversation with the teacher would be best as you could then ask questions and the teacher could elaborate on the comments made. Another good way of being assessed in written English, described by one of the pupils, led to the following exchange:

P3: In a previous school the English teacher made us write a first draft which we got feedback on before we revised and handed it in. We also got feedback while writing in class. I like that way a lot because then you get the opportunity to do your very best and you learn at the same time.
P2: That seems like too much work to me. I like to do the work myself with no help from the teacher.
P3: Well…to me this is a really motivating method, because you get the feedback immediately and you are able to do something about it.

In terms of oral assessment, the pupils emphasized that they were quite happy with the present arrangement of presentations in class, though they agreed that the presentations should allow for more time. However, when the group had discussed this issue for a while, they all ended up agreeing that having a conversation with the teacher after their presentation

would be ideal because then they could really show that they knew their topic and that they were able to have an authentic conversation. They argued for a more exam-related format of oral assessment.

Views on the worst possible ways of being assessed in written English were:

Get the feedback in writing only. (P4)

Glossary tests. (P1)

To have unprepared writing sessions, without getting success criteria, and not being able to prepare the topic. It is quite logical that you do your best if you are prepared. (P3)

The pupils also reflected on the worst ways of oral assessment, but had no real worst case scenarios. They were all comfortable with the present assessment method used in class. After talking about best and worst ways of being assessed, the topic moved on to whether assessment and feedback can lead to learning. The pupils had many opinions about what kinds of assessment lead to learning. They were very conscious about this issue:

I think very specific feedback on a few things that tell you what you need to do to get better makes you better if you take it seriously. (P2)

I agree, but the most important thing here is that you only get feedback on a couple of things and not everything, because then it becomes overwhelming and you don't know where to start. (P4)

When the assessment assignment, oral or written, only assesses specific criteria, maybe pronunciation in oral language or irregular verbs in written assignments, you get more focused and you bring with you what you've learned more easily. (P2)

I believe that the prepared subject conferences the teacher has with each pupil is an arena where you get the opportunity to discuss your status in English and get information that leads to learning. (P3)

As for competence aims and learning objectives, the pupils acknowledged that they had been told about them at some point, but they were not a part of the everyday English classroom work. P1 and P2 saw competence aims as being limiting. Their experience was that you were told what to focus on and this gave you the feeling of not being allowed to go deeper into the material. P3 argued that competence aims are useful as indicators of what to concentrate on in each subject and thus are of help in the process of learning, but agreed with the other two pupils that they could be quite limiting.

Rubrics with success criteria were familiar to the pupils. They were usually handed out prior to oral or written assignments so that the pupils had the opportunity to prepare in accordance with the level they wanted to aim at. P3 and P4 saw this as a useful tool in the learning process, while P1 and P2 did not see the point:

> P3: I usually bring the rubric with the success criteria so that I can control for the elements I need to have in my text or my presentation to achieve the grade I want. I use it very consciously.
> P2: I don't quite see the point. It is not necessary, I think.
> P3: But rubrics give you the opportunity to see what is needed to do your best.
> P2: Well…you get the assignment and you write what you write, that is how you show what you are capable of.

Despite disagreeing about the usefulness of competence aims, the pupils agreed that the most important part of learning English was using the language, which should be the focus of language teaching. Oral communication was seen as the key to learning a foreign language, and all the pupils wanted more oral activity in class. Being able to read English was also emphasized as an important skill, with writing considered as being less important than reading.

The pupils agreed that the teacher's main tasks are to be a supervisor or coach, to be inspirational and to make English interesting and fun. The pupils emphasized that it is easier to learn when you are interested in what is going on in the classroom and enjoying the subject. Another point mentioned was that the teacher's engagement and interest in English was of great importance. The pupils noticed when the teacher was not particularly preoccupied with the subject, which could easily rub off on the pupils. The pupils' main tasks were showing interest and making a serious effort in working with English.

6. Discussion

6.1 Introduction

The present chapter discusses the findings of the teacher and pupil interviews in the experimental school and the control school. Comparisons are made between the pupils and teachers within each school and the pupils and teachers across the schools. At the end of the chapter there are sections on implications, recommendations and limitations of the study.

6.2 The teachers and pupils within each school

6.2.1 The teachers and pupils in the experimental school

Overall understanding of assessment

In the experimental school seemed to be a discrepancy between the teachers' interpretation of 'assessment' and how the pupils understood the concept. The teachers had a firm belief in a theoretical framework which formed the starting point for their instruction and methods of assessing the pupils. However, most of the pupils did not seem to have a clear understanding of why the teachers applied the assessment methods they did. To the pupils, assessment meant tests: writing assignments and oral presentations. To the teachers, on the other hand, assessment was connected to the process of learning rather than the assessing products.

The teachers believed that having the theoretical background information on ˙Assessment for learning˙ and formative methods of assessment had made them more confident about what to do, why to do it and how to do it. In contrast, the pupils did not seem to have been given the same introduction into formative assessment: what it is, how it affects instruction and assessment and what impact it can have on learning. Almost all of the pupils had difficulties reflecting over formative terms, for example competence aims, learning objectives, success criteria, feedback during the writing process and feedforward. Most of the teachers had realized that the pupils most likely did not actually understand the idea of formative assessment methods, but still decided to apply them. The teachers had no clear thoughts on how to compensate for the pupils' lack of knowledge about learning, other than that they would understand and realize the learning potential when they had been exposed to it for a while.

A huge challenge was therefore to get the pupils to understand why formative assessment methods are useful and what their advantages are. If what the teachers do in class does not make sense or is not perceived as being meaningful to the pupils, there is a risk that they will lose their motivation to learn. The teachers saw the need to activate pupils' ability to become owners of their own learning in order to promote motivation; in the process of becoming self-regulated, the pupils need to have insights into assessment for learning (William 2011:152). However, the teachers did not seem to have a good tool for explaining to the pupils why formative methods are useful in a learning perspective. One could argue that more focus on the meta-cognitive aspects would have made the pupils more aware of how they could best learn a second language and how they could appropriately use the formative methods made available to them to make the best possible progress (William 2011:147-148).

The *LK06* English curriculum states that pupils should be able to describe their own progress in language acquisition. Bugge (2013) found that by introducing strategy-based instruction (SBI) which promotes meta-cognitive aspects of foreign language learning, the pupils showed the ability to reflect over their own learning strategies. To obtain this effect it has to be worked with systematically. What differentiates the higher-achieving language learners from the less proficient ones is that the higher level pupils already have well developed meta-cognitive abilities (Bugge 2013). This makes a strong argument for implementing a structured lesson plan for working with the meta-cognitive aspects of learning in English and would help even out the gap between the teachers' knowledge about learning and formative assessment and the pupils' lack of this information.

Writing assessment

Although all of the teachers considered giving feedback during the writing process as the best way of assessing the pupils in writing (William 2011:11-113), the pupils did not quite see it in the same way. One pupil viewed getting feedback during the writing process as cheating, because you got help and that did not make it entirely your product. Another pupil expressed that getting feedback and having to revise was just more work doing the same assignment twice. These attitudes show that these pupils do not appreciate the teachers' efforts in trying to apply the method they think is the best way of assessing English, because they do not entirely see the point in it. It seemed as if receiving feedback during writing in class was optional, and thus many pupils chose not to ask for help or feedback on their writing. If feedback during the writing process is to be an assessment method in written English, it is

firstly necessary that the pupils know what it implies, and that secondly, it is not optional to get feedback, but something that the teachers give to all pupils systematically.

Both the teachers and pupils agreed that writing in class was the best way of being assessed in written English, although perhaps for different reasons. The teachers saw this as the best way because they could easily provide feedback during the writing process. However, the pupils' motives were somewhat unclear since only one pupil took advantage of this opportunity of getting feedback while writing in class. One could suspect that writing in class means not writing at home and therefore it is preferred by the pupils.

Oral assessment

With regard to oral assessment, both the teachers and pupils agreed that the best way of being assessed orally was through conversations with the teacher about different topics, but this was also the assessment method the pupils appreciated the least. The pupils felt it was too intimate and made them uncomfortable. Nevertheless, they agreed that an oral presentation with questions or a conversation afterwards was good exam practice and that conversations with the teacher was the ultimate way of showing your English abilities. Teachers and pupils seemed to have the same focus that practising for an oral exam was essential, and therefore the informative presentation format was the most applied assessment method (Chvala 2012: 242). However, several of the teachers confessed to being ˈtiredˈ of this format, and would rather have abandoned the method all together.

The current oral exam format is under revision to create guidelines for the locally generated oral exams which would result in a more unified approach to executing oral exams. However, if this revision will actually result in a different exam format is left to be seen. If the informative presentation format were to be abandoned, it would perhaps open up for a more varied form of oral assessment, where the focus would be on developing the pupils' discourse competence, the ability of the pupils to produce language for a range of oral genres and situations (Chvala 2013: 236).

Competence aims

With regard to competence aims, although the pupils were familiar with what these aims were, and the teachers spent time breaking the competence aims into learning objectives, only one pupil could explain why competence aims could be useful in a learning context. The teachers saw competence aims and learning objectives as being essential in the process of learning English. However, this was not the pupils' experience. To them competence aims

were something mentioned at the start of the year and not something mentioned continuously during the term. The pupils who consciously use the competence aims and learning objectives will have a more targeted approach to learning. They are able to understand what is expected and can use this information to actively achieve their goals. For those pupils who do not see the point in competence aims or learning objectives, there are not likely to be clear signals about what to focus on and for many pupils this can lead to an overwhelming feeling of not having control, and thus to lack of motivation.

All of the teachers used rubrics to explain levels of achievement on different assessment assignments, and they argued that this made the pupils focus more on what to do to improve, and not so much on the grade. However, the pupils still converted the levels of achievement into grades to make them into something understandable to them. All of the pupils but one expressed that they did not see the point of not being given grades. However, all pupils expressed that the rubrics used for self-assessment were useful (William 2011:147).

6.2.2 The teachers and pupils in the control school

Overall understanding of assessment

In the control school, there was general agreement between the teachers' practice of assessment and the pupils' experience of it. There were no great discrepancies and the pupils were sympathetic to the teachers by understanding the time framework they had to work within and how that affected the choice of assessment methods. However, that understanding did not influence how the pupils saw an ideal learning situation both in oral and written English. In contrast to the experimental school, the control school pupils' focus group interview was a constructive dialogue between the interviewer and the pupils. The pupils had no problems expressing their views and came across as very reflected and serious about learning and assessment. Although, the teachers in the control school did not have a structured way of talking about meta-cognitive aspects of learning, it was clear that these pupils had developed a self-regulating skill that allowed them to reflect and adopt a meta-perspective on their own learning. This could imply that these pupils were ambitious and good language learners (Bugge 2013).

Both the pupils and teachers in the control school associated assessment with grades and testing. There was an obvious focus on evidence of assessment and results, and exam practice. The pupils were used to tests, writing assignments and oral presentations and they accepted this way of organizing assessment, although both pupils and teachers agreed that the

best way of being assessed in English writing would be to be given feedback during the writing process, and for oral assessment to incorporate one-to-one conversations with the teacher after a presentation. However, the teachers did not apply these methods to their instruction on a regular basis since it was too time consuming. The pupils were sympathetic to the teachers' choices of assessment methods and understood the reasons for not applying individual conversations with the teacher or feedback-during-the-writing-process writing assignments.

This implies that the teachers have taken the time to instruct the pupils about their assessment methods, and explained why these methods are chosen, or that the pupils are reflected and know about assessment in general. Either way the pupils seemed to have a predictable and understandable assessment routine.

Writing assessment

In connection with writing, the pupils usually received written feedback in the form of a grade and post-product comments on what to focus on to progress (Hattie and Timperley 2007, in William 2011:109). However, both the teachers and pupils recognized that this way of giving feedback was not the most productive one. The pupils even characterized it as being the worst way of getting feedback, and ideally wanted feedback in a conversation with the teacher instead, where they could have the opportunity to ask questions. The teachers' experience was that many pupils did not follow up the comments they had written and that the teachers' work correcting and commenting on writing assignments was not effective. They argued, however, that the subject conference, arranged at least once a term, was a good arena for giving constructive feedback and feedforward, though this would be more general and not task specific. Both the teachers and pupils agreed that feedback and feedforward had to be concentrated on a few items to lead to learning.

Oral assessment

Concerning oral activity, the pupils were satisfied with presenting orally in class, but wanted a more exam-related format, with a conversation after the presentation. Oral activity was considered by the pupils as being very important in learning a new language and they ideally wanted to spend more time talking English in class. Although the teachers agreed, the time aspect and organizational frames played a role here. The teachers saw oral assessment as being linked to practical problems and therefore difficult to carry out. However, some of the teachers tried to arrange different oral activities. One teacher had conversations with

individual pupils about a prepared topic, another carried out question-answer sessions in connection to reading a novel with half the class at a time. A third teacher had the pupils work with oral assignments in groups and then circulating in class listening and asking questions. All these activities were mentioned as useful and effective ways of oral assessment.

Competence aims

The teachers had the competence aims in mind when organizing instruction and assessment, but according to the pupils these were not a part of everyday English lessons. The teachers seemed not to realise how effective it can be for most pupils to have the competence aims broken into learning objectives (William 2011:51). Instead, rubrics with performance criteria were used in connection with both oral and written assessment, and the pupils considered these to be useful, at least the most ambitious ones. The teachers argued that detailed, specific rubrics would be too much for most of the pupils to deal with and therefore applied general ones, both in oral and written assessment.

6.3 The teachers in the two schools

Overall understanding of assessment

The teachers from the experimental school had a very clear sense of how the school worked with assessment because of the project ˙Assessment for learning 2012/2013˙, which they were all involved in. The teachers had all profited from being given a theoretical foundation on formative assessment which had made them more secure about how and why to assess the pupils in a formative way. Experiences shared about their assessment practices and instruction showed how the formative aspect was applied and formed part of their way of thinking about instruction, assessment and learning a language in general. The teachers admitted to having to change their way of thinking about assessment practices and their beliefs about learning (William 2012:188). This change, brought about through the school's 'Assessment for learning project', had established a common language for talking about assessment and learning, which had resulted in a common practice of assessment as well.

In contrast, the control school teachers indicated that the school had no common practice for assessing the pupils. Although they had been informed about the national ˙Assessment for learning˙ initiative a couple of years ago, and had done some work in the English teams to break down competence aims into learning objectives, it was left up to the

individual teachers to figure out how to apply the *LK06* guidelines concerning assessment into their teaching. The teachers saw working with assessment as something left up to each individual teacher. Although they co-operated when planning assessment assignments, and with inter-grading of assignments, the teachers did not have a common theoretical platform to discuss assessment as the teachers in the experimental school had. This lack of a common theoretical platform resulted in a discussion about the main purposes of assessment and what the teachers' role is (Hyland 2010:213): Is it as a ˙collector˙ of summative evidence to set a grade or as a supervisor/coach to assist pupils in the learning process? Where the experimental school's teachers had an established view of the teachers being coaches, supervisors and their main task as giving feedforward, the control school teachers' focus seemed to be primarily concerned with gathering enough assessment information to be able to give the pupils a grade, both a midterm and a final grade.

However, it became apparent that in the process of awarding grades, all of the teachers in the control school, in one way or another, applied different formative methods of assessment. The teachers had different opinions about ˙Assessment for learning˙ and formative assessment; some of them were struggling to implement formative methods into a system that might be viewed as focusing on a more summative approach.

The teachers in the experimental school had different approaches to assessing English in a formative way, but one assessment situation they all agreed on as being outdated and old fashioned, since they believed it did not contribute to learning, was the *whole day test*. The teachers' focus was on applying assessment methods which enhance learning; therefore, summative tests were only used at the end of the second term to provide a grade or as exam practice. The argument was that holding a *whole day test* in November, giving a grade and post-product comments would not contribute to learning because grades stop learning (William 2011:109). One teacher argued that believing in formative methods of assessment and having to prepare the pupils for the existing written exam format was contradictory.

In the control school, teachers used the *whole day test* as a summative test, in November/December and April/May, to award grades, but they also used it in a formative way to give feedback. Although, the teachers knew that giving grades and post-product comments was not necessarily a good way of giving feedback, they still did it through lack of an alternative method. To compensate, they used the English *subject conference* to give feedback and feedforward to the pupils. However, such sessions would necessarily have to be of a more general kind because the focus would not be on a specific task. Consequently, in view of the fact that feedback and feedforward are important for learning and improving on

their work (William 2011:111-113), the subject conference loses much of its learning potential. It can easily just become a summing up of where the pupils are at and what is needed to progress. However, such general information utterances will be difficult for many pupils to transfer to their own writing.

Writing assessment

All of the teachers at the experimental school had a ˈfeedback-during-the-writing-processˈ approach, which supports a formative view on assessment as a part of instruction. Though the teachers saw ˈfeedback-during-the-writing-processˈ approach as a time-consuming method, they nevertheless tried to apply this approach because they realized its learning potential (Hattie and Timperley 2007). Some gave immediate feedback in writing sessions in class, while others had the pupils hand in a first draft. Although, the teachers had different approaches to when the feedback was given, they all saw the importance of giving the feedback and feedforward on every piece of work the pupil had done. In that process they all saw the point in using rubrics for the purpose of giving feedback, which reduces the gap between the pupil's current understandings and performance and a goal (Hattie and Timperly 2007:86). The experimental school used rubrics instead of grades to make the assessments visual and explanatory to the pupils, to give feedback and feedforward to the pupils about the current state of affairs, and to point to what needs to be worked on in order to progress.

The control school teachers also agreed that a ˈfeedback-during-the-writing-processˈ approach was the best method for learning and they shared the same concern as the experimental school teachers, namely that it is difficult to give such feedback in a class with 30 pupils. All of the teachers had a clear view that the ˈfeedback-during-the-writing-processˈ approach enhances learning, but for some of them the focus was also on being efficient in testing their pupils to form the basis of setting a mid-term and a final grade at the end of the term. One teacher strongly advocated the ˈfeedback-during-the-writing-processˈ approach, claiming that it was important to give feedback on every product the pupils produced. This resulted in a discussion in which the argument against giving pupils feedback/feedforward on every piece of work was that it was too time-consuming. Consequently, they applied assessment methods which made it possible to set a grade, and thus did not strive to apply the assessment method they all thought of as being the best for pupil learning.

What was similar between the two teacher groups was that formative methods were considered the best way of assessing English when focusing on assessment for learning. The major difference in this respect was that that the experimental school teachers had committed

to a project where they were expected, from the leaders of the school, to apply formative assessment methods in their teaching. Thus, it was implied that in doing so, the leaders of the school wanted to be informed about how this system of assessment had worked out. Such an evaluation may result in a constructive dialogue about how the structures and frames the teachers have to work within can be adjusted to fit this ˙new˙ way of thinking about assessment, teaching and learning.

The control school teachers had a good deal of knowledge about ˙Assessment for learning˙ and formative assessment and what it implies, but the impression was that they struggled to incorporate these methods into the existing ˙old˙ system of organizing and thinking about assessment, teaching and learning. To go from an ˙old˙ way of thinking to a ˙new˙ model demands a change in teacher beliefs about instruction and assessment, but also a change in how the school leaders view new ideas and how they should be implemented. If the school leaders do not consider this as a 'whole school' task, it becomes difficult for the teachers to apply the methods they see as the most valuable when it comes to learning and pupil progress because they are not in a position to make an impact on the practical implications of these new methods.

However, one can also argue that it is easier for teachers to carry on with the same practices. Furthermore it is a known fact that many experienced teachers have a ˙laid back˙ attitude toward reforms, not immediately accepting the new guidelines (Larssen and Drew 2012). This attitude can be both productive and negative for a school. It can be productive because there will be a discussion about the implications of new reforms and negative because too critical teachers will have a restraining effect on the implementation.

The most prominent difference between the two schools was the control school teachers' focus on ˙getting hold of grades˙ and the experimental school teachers' focus on learning as a process and implementing formative methods. However, it would not be completely fair to draw the conclusion that the control school teachers did not have the pupils learning in mind. Although the teachers mostly applied assessment methods throughout the school year that would result in a grade, they individually tried to implement formative elements which they believed would benefit the pupils. Nevertheless, the main focus was on the end result, the exam, which was ˙lurking at the back of my mind˙, as one of the teachers expressed. The experimental school teachers also had their minds on the exam, but their main concern was that the way they assessed written English did not fit the current exam form, implying perhaps that it was time to change the existing exam format to comply with a more formative method of assessment.

Oral assessment

Concerning oral assessment both teacher groups agreed that individual conversations with the pupils show their oral abilities best. Many of the teachers in both schools explained their use of different oral assessment methods, and it appeared that the more experienced teachers practised more varied assessment methods. Although the teachers in both schools held conversations with pupils to be the most effective method of assessing oral English, there was a great focus on pupil presentations. The main argument was that it is the best exam practice. However, the focus on presentations as formative monologues limits the assessment of oral English and does not comply with the general objectives in the subject of English (Chvala 2012:235).

Some of the teachers in both schools asked questions about the presentation afterwards. Some did this to reveal if the pupils had just read out something printed from the Internet, while others did this to get the pupils to speak more freely. Either way, one can argue that such a model of assessing English deprives the pupils of the opportunities to, for example, show their abilities to take turns talking, keep a discussion going, cope with misunderstandings (Hasselgreen 2003). The present oral exam format is not representative of the current English subject curriculum, which emphasizes that pupils should produce a variety of discourses in a variety of situational contexts (Chvala 2012:243).

Applying oral presentations with general rating scales as the main assessment method is not a sufficient method of assessing pupils' oral skills. One should rather use rating scales with specific success criteria in oral assessment because they should be related to the purpose of the test (Luoma 2004:82), and one should create oral assignments which challenge the pupils to use a variety of discourses in a variety of situational contexts.

Competence aims

Both teacher groups had the competence aims as a starting point when planning their instruction and assessment. However, the experimental school teachers had very conscious relation to competence aims and learning objectives since they used rubrics with levels of competence instead of grades to give the pupils feedback on different tasks. A few of the teachers admitted that it was difficult to break competence aims into learning objectives, but they realised that it was valuable for the pupils since the rubrics indicated what was expected of the pupils at different achievement levels. These rubrics were also considered to be an excellent starting point for pupil self-assessment both in relation to oral and written assignments. Self-assessment was considered by the experimental school teachers as being

important in that it promoted insight and reflection, which would hopefully result in self-regulating pupils (William 2011:147-148). Whether these ideal ways of applying competence aims, learning objectives and self-assessment to the assessment of English would really have the wanted effect is yet to be seen since the project at the experimental school is still in its early stages. It shows that the teachers have adopted thought patterns that comply with formative assessment methods. However, what will be interesting to see is whether these ideas about self-assessment will rub off on the pupils.

The control school teachers, on the other hand, did not break the competence aims into learning objectives. They usually operated with general rubrics with performance criteria in both oral and written assessment. Although there were two teachers who made specific rubrics for each assignment and argued that rubrics were useful to all pupils if they were thoroughly explained, the overall view was that rubrics were only useful to pupils who were really ambitious. Consequently, this view resulted in an attitude towards competence aims as being nothing more than guidelines for what to teach the pupils, a tool for the teachers only. In this respect, structured pupil self-assessment was not something that was emphasised.

6.4 The pupils in the two schools

Overall understanding of assessment

The main difference between the two pupil groups was that the control school pupils were much more reflective and ambitious. They had opinions about learning and how assessment could contribute to progress. Although they were very conscious about what they thought would lead to progress and learning, they also saw the obstacles the teachers had to deal with concerning some of the formative assessment methods mentioned in the interview. In contrast to the experimental school pupils, the pupils in the control school did not need prompts or explanations to any of the terms used, were not afraid to state their opinions, and could easily defend or explain their views. There was a clear and obvious difference in how these two groups viewed English as a subject. It may be that pupils with ambitions understand what is implied in competence aims, learning objectives and different rubrics. They see the point of getting feedback during the writing process and having conversations with the teacher.

When comparing the two groups, the first impression was that the control school pupils were more enthusiastic about English as a subject than those in the experimental school. One would expect that the experimental school pupils, who had been exposed to

formative assessment from teachers, would be more reflected and have a more informed attitude toward assessment. However, what became evident was that the experimental school pupils came across as not being very informed about the implication of formative assessment at all. This may be because this was a completely new experience to them all and that they had only been exposed to it for about four months. It is interesting to explain why the control school pupils came across as being quite reflected and with a meta-cognitive perspective on assessment and learning. One explanation could be that ambitious pupils are self-regulated learners and that they approach learning in a way that makes them seek information about how to improve. Consequently, they have reflected over these issues independent of what the teachers say or do.

Writing assessment

The concept of writing in class was familiar to both groups of pupils. The experimental school pupils got feedback/feedforward during the writing process but they did not seem to take advantage of this opportunity. They did not quite see the learning potential in this approach, which shows that they may not have been thoroughly informed about the advantages of such an approach. The experimental school pupils experienced getting concrete feedback and feedforward in a conversation with the teacher, focusing on a few things at a time, as being very helpful and motivating. However, when the control school pupils reflected over the possibility of such approaches, almost all of them understood the learning potential of getting feedback when the learners still had the opportunity to revise texts and the advantages of having feedback conversations with the teacher. Although they would approve of such ways of being assessed, the pupils defended why their teachers did not implement them. Their attitude is in accordance with the control school teachers, namely that the main aim of assessment is to get hold of grades and make sure the pupils gets through all the competence aims. Assessments need to be effective in giving results.

Oral assessment

The experimental school pupils were used to oral presentations and questions afterwards, an exam related method of oral assessment. The control school pupils were only used to presentations and questions on clarity of the presentation and elaboration and they missed a more exam-related assessment method. They also wanted conversations with the teacher and saw this as the optimal way of showing off their English abilities. Although the experimental school pupils experienced these kinds of conversations with the teacher, and agreed that it

was a good way of showing oral capabilities, they did not appreciate it because speaking individually with the teacher was considered too intimate. It was quite challenging to them. These pupils could be characterized as being pupils with performance goals (Dweck 1989), which would influence the way they approach learning situations. They see ability as something stable and this can result in not viewing learning as a process where progress is gained according to how much work you put into a task but to ability. In contrast, the control school pupils all saw the potential in conversations with the teacher. They strongly advocated a stronger focus on oral activity in general, arguing that speaking is what learning a language is all about.

Competence aims

Whether competence aims could be useful in the learning process was commented on by only one pupil at the experimental school. The pupils from the control school, however, had many reflections and opinions, which included statements expressing opinions about these aims being useful indicators of what to focus on, to expressing opinions about these aims being very limiting in that it was impossible to go in depth if the competence aims were not broad enough. In essence then, although, competence aims were focused on in the experimental school, this did not show in the pupils. It seemed that the teachers' efforts in introducing competence aims and learning objectives did not reach through to the pupils.

Although the experimental school pupils were not given grades, they nevertheless transformed the 'levels of achievement' into grades. All of the pupils but one could technically describe what these levels entailed, yet they did not seem to understand the point of not getting grades. However, the pupils at the control school, who were also given rubrics which indicated levels of achievement, reported that these were very useful in understanding what the different grades implied and what had to be worked on to improve, which implies a basic understanding of formative principles.

Although, it is difficult to interpret why the control school pupils seemed to be more informed about rubrics and levels of achievement and saw the point in them, one could argue that these pupils were more ambitious and thus more interested in learning strategies that could help them improve. Meta-cognitive abilities might be what distinguishes the pupils from the experimental school form the control school pupils, who seemingly had developed the ability to know what they need to do to learn a new language, and take responsibility for their own learning.

6.5 Implications and recommendations

When new national school reforms or directives are introduced, there is automatically pressure on schools, both politically and from directors of schools, to implement what is new. Usually there is no recipe for doing this and the responsibility of implementation is left up to each school, and in most cases to the individual teacher. Educational innovations are often very demanding, especially if there is a gap between the former way of thinking and practising the ˈnewˈ (Kirkgöz 2008, in Larssen and Drew 2012:233). According to research, top-down approaches to reform work are not effective in schools, although explorative projects are (Irgens 2012).

This study has investigated the implications of the experimental school's project ˈAssessment for learning 2012-2013ˈ. The project could be classified as an explorative one where the school as a whole is exploring different sub-projects with the intention of developing their assessment practice. It is essential that the leaders of a school are in support of programs for the improvement of learning and teaching, if such programs are to lead to sustained change in the school's work (Black et al. 2003:113). The headmaster or the team of leaders in a school who have an understanding of the content and process of change will often be more motivated and use more powerful and persistent approaches to change and to maintain a strategic focus (Black et al. 2003:114). This again will lead to a more systematic and organized plan of action for implementing a reform such as ˈAssessment for learningˈ. The obvious goal for the authorities is to have the national reforms implemented in all schools, but when directors of schools leave this work up to each school and the schools leave it up to the individual teachers, the success rate is likely to be diminished for a sustained change in the school's practice.

The Rogaland Director of Schools appreciates such an initiative as the ˈAssessment for learningˈ project at the experimental school, and that this school in the process develops its own profile. However, he also underlines that it is not a goal that all schools in the district should have the same approach to assessment. The experimental school is attempting to focus on formative assessment as stipulated in the guidelines and should be given credit for taking such a whole school-initiative. One could ask whether all schools should apply the guidelines in a systematic way. Is delegating the responsibility of implementing new reforms to each school the best way to see to it that the national assessment guidelines are followed?

It is essential that the teachers who are exposed to reforms or directives are given the prerequisites to understand and find meaning in the principles behind an innovation if the

reform work is to be successful (Carless 1998; Orafi and Borg 2009, in Larssen and Drew 2012:233). One could argue that the experimental school has developed a project that has in theory all the elements in place which should result in the successful implementation of the ˈAssessment for learningˈ reform. However, one important implication that has perhaps not been taken enough into account is the fact that the pupils also need to be thoroughly informed about such a project and its benefits. It is a problem if the pupils do not understand the concept of formative assessment. They will simply experience new ways of being assessed, but not see the value in what the teachers are doing. Another implication is that innovations need time to become effective.

In the control school, where there was no whole school policy on how to implement ˈAssessment for learningˈ principles, one implication was that the teachers applied assessment methods that they knew were not the optimal assessment tools for learning. This choice was based on experiences of a practical nature, organizational and structural. Most of them conveyed a sincere fascination with formative assessment, but perhaps lacked the willingness to change and organize their practices in a different way.

In this light, one could argue that the experimental school's project is a praiseworthy initiative, especially since it puts the pupils' learning in focus and not grading. On the one hand teachers need autonomy, but on the other hand, they also need to recognize a structured and serious attitude from leaders to support them in the implementation of new national guidelines. The top-down approach proposed by the experimental school was favorable to the teachers because they seemed to accept its underlying principles: it is also a project where they are given choices and therefore a certain degree of freedom and where evaluations of the project are being taken seriously into consideration when organizing further exploration of the project.

Another implication is that more weight seemed to be placed on writing assessment than oral assessment in both schools. Since the final grade in English at the first year level is merged into one, there should be a balance between the two. Oral presentations as a method of oral assessment seem to be overrepresented and the pupils in both schools expressed a desire for more oral activities in class.

The focus on pupil learning is a continuous discussion and in that respect one may recommend that self-regulated learning must be more in focus in language learning.

According to the English subject curriculum, pupils should be able to apply meta-cognitive strategies to their own learning. The main area of Language learning focuses on:

> …knowledge about the language, language usage and insight into one's own language learning. Being able to assess one's own language use, define one's own needs and select strategies and ways of working are requirements for attaining this. The main focus is on seeing what is involved in learning a new language and seeing relationships between English, one's native language and other languages (*LK06* English curriculum).

Although Bugge (2013) shows that good language learners already apply meta-cognitive insights to learning, this is something that has to be taught to pupils. Metacognition is a good tool for getting pupils to realise what they need to be able to learn, and thus to realise what their potential. Such an emphasis should be focused on throughout the different levels in the Norwegian school system, not just the upper secondary level, to generate pupils who own their own learning.

6.6 Limitations of the study

The study is limited to being a case study of two schools. The small number of subjects that were interviewed in the study does not produce a basis for generalizations to be made about the entire population of teachers and pupils. Moreover, the teachers in both schools represented a variety of courses available, while the pupils only represented the academic courses in English and not the vocational ones. All efforts on the part of the author to interview vocational pupils failed. Had the sample been larger, the picture could have become more complex, or the trends could have appeared clearer.

The focus group interview was furthermore the main research tool employed to obtain data. It is likely that additional methods, such as observing lessons, could have supplemented data collected from the focus group interviews. However, time constraints prevented inclusion of both a larger sample of subjects and employment of other methods to collect data. Nevertheless, the focus group interviews provided sufficient data to show certain trends in the two schools.

7. Conclusion

This study aimed at comparing how two Norwegian upper secondary schools approached assessment of English at the first year level and the experiences of, beliefs and attitudes to assessment among the pupils and teachers in the two schools. The national ˙Assessment for learning˙ initiative was the background for the study. Attention was given to how the teachers practised assessing English in class and the pupils˙ experience of this assessment. It was also considered important to establish how the teachers viewed their school's effort in implementing ˙Assessment for learning˙, and how the teachers adapted these guidelines into their assessment practices. Attention was also given to the teachers˙ and pupils˙ attitudes towards and beliefs about assessment. In this respect it was interesting to investigate whether the teachers assessed their pupils in accordance with their beliefs or if there were any discrepancies between beliefs and practices.

Two teacher and two pupil focus group interviews in each school constituted the primary data collected for the thesis, in addition to interviews with the experimental school's headmaster and an interview with the Rogaland County Director of Schools. The experimental school's headmaster was a firm believer in assessment for learning and had implemented a whole school project for this purpose. The Rogaland County Director of Schools believed it was up to each school as to how they approached assessment, and he did not want to impose a standardized approach.

The teachers across the schools approached assessment in a somewhat different way. The experimental school applied formative methods because of their involvement in the school's ˙Assessment for learning˙ project. However, elements of formative assessment where also found in the control school. Teachers in both schools had an informed attitude towards assessment and they all had strong opinions about how to assess and why do it in that particular way. They all knew about ˙Assessment for learning˙ and could discuss the implications of a formative approach to assessment.

It became evident that the teachers and the pupils in the experimental school did not have the same reference frames when it came to assessment. Most of the pupils did not fully understand the basic principles behind the teachers˙ assessment methods and thus could not fully take advantage of the learning potential involved in formative approaches to assessment. This resulted in discrepancies between what the teachers were trying to achieve and what the pupils experienced. In contrast, there was general agreement between the teachers˙ practices of assessment and the pupils˙ experience of it in the control school.

The two pupil groups differed in the way they came across as learners. The control school pupils had a more reflective ability and seemed to be more aware of their own learning strategies, which made them capable of discussing issues about learning the subject in a way that the control school pupils were unable to do. This may have been because they came across as being more ambitious learners.

The teachers in both schools had been informed about ˙Assessment for learning˙. However, the experimental school teachers had been given a more structured and thorough introduction to the theoretical background to formative assessment than those in the control school. The experimental school's ˙Assessment for learning 2012/2013˙ project, with its different sub-projects, had made the teachers more aware of how to apply formative methods of assessment into their instruction and assessment. The experimental school's teachers put the pupils' learning in the centre of its assessment practices. The control school teachers understood the implications of a formative approach to assessment, but had not implemented these methods in full for different reasons. This resulted in the paradox that the teachers in this school to a certain extent applied assessment methods which they knew where not optimal when having the pupils' learning in mind.

This thesis has contributed to the limited research on assessment in foreign language education in Norway. Research is not conducted by the Ministry of Education, but left to educational institutions and individual researchers to follow up the Ministry's reforms and directives. As a case study, it has provided insight into how two upper secondary schools approach assessment in English. It gives a glimpse into the everyday life of assessment at English at this level and touches upon the issues of teacher and pupil experiences, attitudes and beliefs. It also puts the spotlight on the challenges of implementing new directives for assessment, both when a whole school approach is involved and when implementation is left up to individual teachers.

What would be important to investigate further is if a project like ˙Assessment for learning˙ at the experimental school will show improved learning over time. Will a whole school approach to implementing formative assessment methods, such as the one implemented by the experimental school, show improvements in pupils' oral and written performances and exam results? It would thus be interesting to carry out a longitudinal study where one could follow pupils introduced to the formative way of being assessed and to what extent this approach actually affects their learning and progress in English compared to control groups.

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Appendix 1

Topic guide for the teacher focus group interviews.

(My translation from the original Norwegian)

How long have you taught English? What is your background for teaching English?

How does your school work with assessment in English?

How do you work with assessment in written English?

How do you work with assessment in oral English?

Why do you do it that particular way?

What is good and what is challenging about the way you assess?

Do you have any experience of other ways of assessing written and oral English?

Which are the best ways of assessing written English?

Which are the best ways of assessing oral English?

Which are the worst ways of assessing written and oral English?

How do the pupils react to the ways you assess them?

How do you work with the English curriculum and competence aims?

Why do you do it that way?

How do you work with breaking competence aims into learning objectives, with success criteria and rubrics in general?

Why do you do it in that particular way?

Why work with one's one assessment practice?

Does assessment affect learning? What type of assessment has the most effect? Why?

What affects a teacher's choice of assessment methods?

What would you say is your main role as an assessor in English?

Appendix 2

Topic guide for the pupil focus group interviews.

(My translation from the original Norwegian)

What do you think about English as a subject, and about learning English?

What comes to mind when I say assessment in English?

How are you assessed in written English? Give examples, and describe how this is done.

How are you assessed in oral English? Give examples, and describe how this is done

How do you experience being assessed in written English?

How do you experience being assessed in oral English?

Has this particular way of being assessed helped/motivated you to work more with the subject?

What trade-offs are there in the way you are assessed?

Which are the best ways to be assessed in written and oral English?

Which are the worst ways of being assessed in written and oral English?

In what way can assessment and feedback lead to learning?

How should assessment and feedback be carried out to have the most effect?

What do you know about competence aims and learning objectives?

How have you come to know about this?

How can competence aims and learning objectives be of help in the process of learning?

Are you familiar with the term success criteria? Do you think this can have any effect on the learning process?

What do you think is the most important thing when learning English? What is the teacher's and the pupil's main task?

Appendix 3

Interview guide for the interview with the Rogaland County Director of Schools.

(My translation from the original Norwegian)

How good do you as the school owner know of the assessment practice at your upper secondary schools?

To what extent do both school leaders and teachers get feedback on the schools assessment practice which motivates them for further development?

To what degree do the upper secondary schools have a uniform assessment practice?

To what degree do the school owner and the upper secondary schools discuss different results (from e. g. surveys or coworker conferences) to systematically be able to develop the schools practice?

To what extent do you as a school owner think that the different schools' approach to assessment effect pupils' success and progression in learning?

Do you have any opinions about how one can best, as a school owner and upper secondary school, approach an initiative like ˙Assessment for learning˙?

What is your view on projects initiated by upper secondary schools, e. g. the experimental school's project ˙Assessment for learning 2012/2013˙?

To what degree is it important that the different upper secondary schools have a common assessment practice?