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Norwegian ESL-Teachers' Experiences With Differentiated Instruction in Differentiated Groups

A Qualitative Study in the ESL Classroom

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Norwegian University of
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Content

Abstract

This study explores the topic of differentiated groups; more specifically, it is a qualitative research study looking at the question: *How do Norwegian ESL-teachers experience the implementation of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in the ESL-classroom.* The project was done in a Norwegian lower secondary school, with three ESL-teachers as participants. This is a case study that seeks to answer the research question while its participants do research of their own. The research material was gathered using observation and interviews. The interview material provided most of the findings, supported by some of the observation material, therefore the interviews are emphasised in this thesis. The findings reveal that the teachers have had a variety of experiences related to implementing differentiated instruction in differentiated groups. Both teamwork, the opinions people outside of the project and their experience of their own findings have had an impact on how the teachers have experienced implementing differentiate groups.

Preface

The process of writing this master's thesis has been long, challenging, exciting and educational. Unexpected obstacles have occurred and last minute changes were necessary. It has required an immense determination and stamina to finish and has awoken a surprisingly wide variety of feelings in me. From frustration and anger, to joy and excitement. It has surprised me how, engaging and consuming such an undertaking can be. That being said, it has been a wonderful experience that has challenged me to consider my own approach to classroom instruction. It has taught me the value of collaboration within the teacher profession and the challenges teachers face in their endeavour to differentiate their instruction according to their pupils' individuality. Moreover, it has enhanced my understanding of how important it is to be able to see each pupil for his or her individual capabilities.

This study would not have been possible were it not for the many people that have contributed to its fruition. I would like to thank the teachers who opened their classrooms to me and allowed me to take part in their wonderful and inspiring project. I hope that my contribution can be useful in your continued research.

Secondly, I would like to thank the people surrounding me on a day to day basis, my wonderful friends and family who have been nothing but understanding and patient during this process. Most especially, my mom and dad, who have met with open arms and comforting words when this undertaking has overwhelmed me, and who have acted as a sounding boards whenever the need has arisen. You are the best!

Lastly, I would especially like to thank my supervisor, Karen Bauer, who at several occasions has been forced to act as a firefighter and put out whatever fires have occurred. Your support, positive reinforcement, experience from the German school system and continued belief that I would reach the finish line has been priceless in the form of inspiring feedback and conversations. My secondary supervisor, Anita Normann, also deserves a thank you. It was your immediate and positive response, when told of my desire to look into this topic, which encouraged me to dive in. Your perspective and feedback has been invaluable in the development of the project. If it were not for the both of you and your support up until the very end, this project would not have been finished.

Lisa Halle Dragsten

Trondheim, May 2019

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background for the study

Over the course of a few decades, the Norwegian society has seen an increase in its social diversity, in turn; this will have an effect on the diversity in Norwegian schools and may lead to an increased variation of learning needs among the pupils. Events such as the refugee crisis in 2015, has only served to intensify this diversity, with pupils who lack any knowledge of the Norwegian or English language being placed in Norwegian schools. The Norwegian school system is influenced by the idea that every pupil should be treated equally, regardless of his or her social or academic background. Therefore, the pupils are divided into classes in a manner that encourages this social diversity. This method of organisation creates classes with a group of individuals that vary in both needs and skills. According to the Norwegian Education Act § 8-2 *Organisation of pupils in groups,* teachers are not allowed to organise their students into groups based in any way on level of ability. However, the Education Act also states, "Education shall be adapted to the abilities and aptitudes of the individual pupil, apprentice and training candidate" (Education Act, 1998, § 1-3).

Because the teachers are required to adapt the classroom instruction according to the pupils' individual abilities and aptitudes while at the same time keeping the pupils in a diverse class, this manner of organisation can prove to be challenging for the teachers. Adapting the classroom instruction to fit the needs of the individual pupil is a challenge in itself, and organising pupils in groups according to ability is an approach that could make the adaption of instruction to pupil ability easier. Norwegian teachers are limited in their ability to adapt their instruction, due to not being allowed to organise their pupils in a way that is at odds with the goal for social diversity. In addition, it is interesting to consider the paradox of being expected to adapt or differentiate the classroom instruction to fit the learning needs and abilities of their students, while being denied the use of an approach that could be helpful in achieving that.

The Norwegian school system's view on ability grouping sets it apart from the rest of the world, for instance, Germany has a tiered school system where they separate between three levels of ability (Schofield, 2010, pp. 1497-1498) and both the United States and the United Kingdom have a tradition in using ability grouping. The United Kingdom has seen an increased focus on implementing structured ability grouping in the form of setting (Wilkinson, Penny & Allin, 2016, p. 337). In comparison, there has not been a big tradition for such a practice in Norway. Educators and researchers point to four negative aspects that can influence students in ability differentiation. Teachers who dislike teaching lower ability groups, lack of teaching experience and competence in teachers who teach lower ability groups, teachers who lack the ability to connect the instruction to pupil interests, decline in positive friendship structures in lower ability groups (Ogden, 2013, p. 36).

A variety of research has been done on how ability grouping affects pupils' attainment, social environment and motivation, yet in a Norwegian context, there has been little to no focus on how the teachers view the implementation of ability grouping in their classes. The lack of teacher perspective in the recent research is interesting to consider, especially

because the teachers are the ones who will potentially practice the instruction in ability groups. They have the best opportunity to assess the use of ability grouping, due to their unique position as the implementer and the closest in relation to the pupils. Who better to reflect on the success of ability grouping than the person who implements it and has the best opportunity to see each pupils' personal and academic development?

1.2 The Research Question

Because of the lack of research done on the teacher perspective in an ability group setting, I thought it would be interesting to take a closer look at how the teachers experienced this approach. The research question this thesis seeks to answer is therefore: *how do Norwegian ESL-teachers experience the use of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in the English classroom.* Because this research study is done in a Norwegian context and due to the nature of the pupil groupings where they are not permanently placed in groups according to their level of ability, I have deliberately moved away from the term ability grouping. Instead, I have chosen to use *differentiated groups a*s a more fitting terminology in this context.

I chose to look into this topic, because of the large focus that exists in the Norwegian school system to adapt the instruction to consider the abilities and needs of each pupil. Differentiation is one of the approaches teachers can turn to, in order to make this adaption a reality. However, the use of differentiated instruction does not mean it becomes easier to adapt the instruction to fit the learners' abilities, considering the focus on pupils' individual learning needs (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 1). Because of this, I chose to look at differentiated instruction in relation to differentiated groups, in an attempt to discover how this would affect the teachers' experience with differentiating instruction and providing pupils with help suited to their individual needs. This is especially relevant in a society where teachers are continually faced with more diversity in their classes, where an increase in immigration over the last decade (Statistisk Sentralbyrå, 2019) has contributed to this diversity.

 My own experiences with differentiation in the Norwegian ESL classroom had me questioning whether any approach could make the differentiation easier to carry out. In my period of practice, while I was studying to become a teacher, I experienced a helplessness in having a pupil with little to no knowledge of English, in an Upper Secondary class where pupils had been studying English since 2ⁿᵈ grade. This challenge of providing sufficient instruction to the low-level pupil while at the same time instructing more advanced pupils, who also varied in level of ability, awoke my interest in differentiated groups as a solution to this problem. Moreover, I was curious to see whether any other teachers had the same experiences as me, or if this was a problem related to my inexperience as an educator.

1.3 The purpose and limitations of the study

The purpose of this study was to discover how teachers work with and experience the use of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups. It looks into the possibilities of

implementing differentiated groups in a Norwegian context, focusing on how the teachers experience this, both in a practical sense and in regards to critical voices from others on the outside. By using qualitative methods, such as observation and individual interviews, I have gained an understanding of how the teachers have experienced implementing a practice that has little tradition in the Norwegian school system. Moreover, I have gained insight into their background and what foundation they have for doing a study that requires an explicit understanding of what differentiated instruction is.

Differentiated instruction in differentiated groups as a topic, has the potential to cover a variety of perspectives, such as the pupils perspective and what results, in the form of attainment, such an approach could produce. I would have liked to look at several other factors during the course of this study, including the impact on pupils and the social effect of differentiated groups. However, it is necessary to limit the scope of the project in order to maintain a focused research question that can be answered in the amount of time available to doing this study. Because of this, I chose to focus on the teacher perspective, looking at how the teachers have experienced implementing differentiated groups, what thoughts they have around the subject and how they have worked to implement it. Considering the focus of the study, it is limited in the sense that it only looks at the teacher perspective. It cannot be considered representative of how differentiated instruction in differentiated groups have affected the pupils. Moreover, it is also limited in its scope, as it only looks at the perspective of three ESL-teachers located in one school, and is therefore not representative of other ESL-teachers in Norway. However, because I believe the teacher has an important role in the education and development of the younger generation, it is necessary to understand their practices and to research approaches that can lighten their load, so to speak.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Perspectives

One of the biggest challenges presented to some Norwegian teachers is the need for individualisation in their classrooms. Adapting the teaching methods and the materials to suit each students' need is a task that is challenging and problematic to do because of the time and resources it requires. In fact, the mere prospect of the amount of time and effort a teacher needs to put in to achieve this adaption, can be thought as difficult and exhausting in itself, keeping teachers from even attempting to do it, which is often the case in the Norwegian context. The amount of pupils Norwegian ESL-teachers deal with in a week as well as their time constraints, can make differentiation difficult to achieve in the Norwegian ESL-classroom. As such, it would be sensible to introduce more time efficient methods that strive to differentiate the education of each pupil, while at the same time giving them this differentiation in groups. In this chapter, I will be introducing you to a variety of theoretical approaches that focuses on the need for differentiation in the classroom, as well as some of the factors that can have an impact on differentiation. These theories lay the foundation for my own thesis and consists of terms of a rather general nature. As such, it is necessary to provide a clear definition of my understanding of these terms in the context of this project. Moreover, some of the theories included in this chapter are used to create a context for understanding some of the findings presented later on.

2.1 Differentiated instruction

Differentiated instruction is a general term that encompasses an assortment of teaching methods and approaches that seek to explore pupils and their individual ways of learning (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 1). Differentiated instruction is a theoretical approach that attempts to adapt the learning situation according to the manner in which the pupil learns best. In other words, differentiated instruction is an approach that maps out the most effective path to reach a curriculum goal in the national curriculum. With this understanding of the term, it is important to point out that differentiated instruction is not an approach where the students are given an individual learning plan or that they are instructed in individual lessons (Blaz, 2016, p. 5). In fact, they are seen as an individual part of a whole class of individuals that need to work together despite their academic differences. This means that while the teacher attempts to provide some element of differentiation for the students, the learning community that the whole class provides is also beneficial to the individual students' academic development (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 5).

  According to Tomlinson (2001), a researcher and educator known for her work in differentiating education, a differentiated classroom is a place where "commonalities are acknowledged and built upon, and student differences become important elements in teaching and learning as well" (Tomlinson, 2001, p. 1). A differentiated classroom creates various opportunities for the students to attain knowledge, and to reflect upon and further develop this knowledge. It is a diverse space created so that each student, no matter their outset and way of learning, can grow and gain a greater understanding of the subjects they are studying. Even though differentiated instruction sees the students as individuals with different 'learning profiles', Tomlinson points out that differentiated instruction is not the same as individualized learning where the focus is turned to adapting the learning situation to do something different to suit the learning need of each student in a class. In other words, Tomlinson acknowledges the previously mentioned challenge that occurs

when a teacher has too many students and too little time. While Tomlinson's theory on differentiated instruction acknowledges that each student has a different way of learning, it also points out the necessity of looking at the class as a whole and recognises that differentiated instruction might be more comparable to the traditional 'one-room-schoolhouse' than of any form of individualisation.

In order to achieve the maximum effect of differentiated instruction there has to be a certain co-operation between both teachers and students, fellow students, as well as between colleagues. This collaboration lays the foundation for a learning environment where the students and teachers can discuss progress and how to develop the students' potential and knowledge even further. According to Blaz (2016), three of the elements needed to achieve a good, differentiated classroom are "choice, communication and multiple learning modes" (Blaz, 2016, pp. 3-4).

 Students need to be a part of the decision-making, deciding for themselves what they learn, how they learn and how they portray the things they have learned. Enforcing learning methods on them can have a negative effect. "They are less likely to learn well if the teacher makes all the decisions" (Blaz, 2016, p. 3). In other words, you cannot achieve a positive, differentiated classroom without allowing the students some influence over the activities occurring in said classroom. Because of this, communication is especially important in a differentiated instruction environment, more so due to the form of individualisation that is implemented there (Blaz, 2016, p.4). Due to the mixed nature of differentiated instruction, it is necessary to communicate to avoid misunderstandings and chaos, especially when this approach is introduced to pupils who have no experience with it. The teacher has to communicate their expectations to the students, properly informing them of what is expected and what factors they are judged by, while the students have to be honest about what they struggle with or whether the learning situation is unsuited to their needs. Predictability and flexibility is necessary in a differentiated classroom (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 5). Communication is necessary for the implementation of differentiated instruction (Blaz, 2016, p. 5). For differentiation to happen in the classroom, teachers should also have knowledge of what multiple learning modes are. Understanding that there exist multiple ways of learning and that the learning mode of each student is individual is essential for differentiated instruction (Blaz, 2016, p. 4). This understanding of multiple learning modes in a differentiated classroom contributes to opening the communication between the teacher and student, giving them the opportunity to learn new learning methods from each other (Blaz, 2016, p. 4).

Tomlinson (2014) points out that teachers who work in differentiated classrooms, often work with the understanding that their instruction must engage pupils through a variety of instruction methods that appeal to an assortment of pupil interests (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 3). Moreover, an element of competition is also introduced to the learning process, as teachers who implement differentiated instruction, makes sure that pupils compete against themselves through growth and development (Tomlinson, 2014, p. 4). Because of the complicated nature of differentiated instruction, Blaz (2016, p. 5) has created the following compare/contrast table to clearly illuminate what differentiated instruction is and what it is not:

What differentiated instruction *is:*	What differentiated instruction *is not:*
◆ Student-centered	◆ Class-centered
◆ For all students	◆ Mainly for students with learning problems
◆ For heterogeneous groups	◆ A tracking system by abilities
◆ A change in philosophy about how learning should take place	◆ A recipe for learning: it is how to teach, not what to teach
◆ Multiple approaches/options for Content, Process, and Product	◆ A different lesson plan for every student (individualized instruction)
◆ A mix of whole-class, group, and independent learning	◆ Whole-group drill and practice or any single structure or activity
◆ More about quality than quantity	◆ Fact-based learning alone
◆ Flexible and varied	◆ Unmanageable or undisciplined
◆ Student-centered and proactive in the planning stage	◆ Modifying the instruction up or down in difficulty
◆ "Rooted" in assessment	◆ A method that you will need all new materials for
◆ Based on continual reflection and adjustment to help students learn well	◆ Cost-free
◆ A belief system that says all learners come to the classroom with potential ready to be accessed	◆ Just about learning styles
	◆ Just a set of strategies and activities

Figure 1.Differentiated instruction compare/contrast table (Blaz, 2016, p. 5)

It is clear, from this table, that differentiated instruction is an approach that is complex in its diversity and does not limit itself to the differentiation for pupils with learning problems, but differentiates for all pupils. Because of this, it is necessary to establish an effective classroom management, especially when organising the pupils into groups for the intstruction (Blaz, 2016, p. 7).

The need for differentiated instruction is also evident in Norwegian research, where researchers such as Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) point out the need for differentiated instruction in order to even out the social and academic differences between the students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 196). A lack of differentiation in the classroom can lead to a bigger focus on comparison between the students (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 196). Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014, p. 196) draw attention to the fact that ego orientation is especially significant in classroom environments where students work individually on the same tasks without any form of differentiation. In such an environment, the results of their assignments are more easily visible, and the students focus more on the achievement rather than the learning process itself (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 196). In consequence, the absence of differentiation tends to promote a focus on both the students' individual egos and social comparison, paving the way for an increased stigmatisation in the classroom (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 196). This view on differentiated instruction emphasizes how differentiation can affect several factors in a learning situation and Skaalvik and Skaalvik (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 194) uses the following model to show the significance of differentiation in any learning situation.
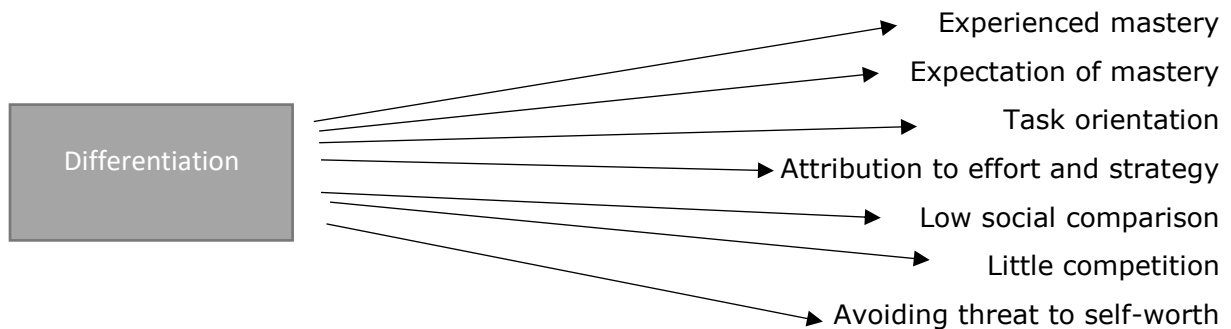
Differentiation
→ Experienced mastery
→ Expectation of mastery
→ Task orientation
→ Attribution to effort and strategy
→ Low social comparison
→ Little competition
→ Avoiding threat to self-worth

Figure 2. Significance of differentiation (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 194)

According to Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014, p. 194), all of the factors listed in the figure above have a close link and any change occurring in the students' experience of mastery will always affect their expectation of mastery. Moreover, by reducing the social comparison and element of competition from the classroom, the teacher can strengthen the students' ability of task orientation, and because task oriented students often attribute their results to their own efforts, the risk of anything threatening their self-worth is decreased (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 194). Differentiated instruction can influence these factors positively in its application and negatively in its absence. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) support this statement by pointing out how both lower achieving and higher achieving students benefit from a differentiated classroom (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, pp. 196-197).

Students who struggle in the English classroom will experience an enhanced feeling of performing poorly in a classroom environment where there is no form of differentiation in either the tasks or the instruction (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 197). Naturally, students experiencing a constant feeling of poor performance and defeat will also have a lower sense of self-worth, which in turn will affect the effort they put into their work (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 197). Why should they put any effort into doing their tasks if they only end up with poor results as a reward? Moreover, these students also experience a higher degree of ego orientation, where they are more focused on how they are perceived rather than the learning process itself (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 197). In order to avoid this focus, the teacher should organise the instruction to concentrate on apprehension and improvement of skills, while at the same time explain their choice of learning material to the pupils (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 196).

Due to the lack of challenges presented to them, high achieving students also show some level of frustration when in a non-differentiating classroom. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014, p. 197) points to the task orientation of these students and how it is difficult to develop their ability to overcome difficult tasks through effort when they are not given enough challenging tasks in the first place. In turn, the lack of challenging material results in their attributing their results and performance to skill rather than effort and they never achieve the same sense of mastery, as they would have in a differentiated classroom(Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 197).

From my understanding, Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2014) provides knowledge of how differentiated instruction is understood in the Norwegian Educational System, and emphasizes the importance of its presence in order to create an inclusive classroom environment.

2.2 Teacher experience with differentiated instruction: what does research say?

As mentioned in the previous subsection, there is no denying that the implementation of differentiated instruction can be a challenge to a teacher with a diverse class. The whole world has become more global and this is reflected in the classrooms in the form of more cultural diversity and varying backgrounds (Suprayogi *et al*, 2017, p. 291). Because of this, the teacher has to adjust their teaching approach in such a way that they consider the different developmental needs and the large degree of varying level of ability amongst pupils (Suprayogi *et al*, 2017, p. 291). This idea is consistent with the Norwegian Education Act, which emphasises the need to adapt the instruction according to every pupils' abilities and aptitudes (Education Act, 1998, § 1-3). The idea of differentiated instruction seems ideal on paper, but what happens when teachers try to implement it in real life?

According to Suprayogi *et al* (2017), there are several factors that might influence the teachers' implementation, or lack thereof, of differentiated instruction. Teacher self-efficacy and teacher beliefs are brought up as elements that can have an effect on whether teachers choose to implement differentiation in their classrooms, as well as how they choose to do so (Suprayogi *et al,* 2017, p. 293). One of the major reasons for not implementing differentiation is because the teachers fail to realise that there is a need for it in the first place (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012, p. 310). Another reason for the lack of differentiation is the teacher's self-efficacy, their belief in being able to handle a situation where differentiated instruction is implemented (Suprayogi *et al*, 2017, p. 293). In fact, a teacher with a higher self-efficacy is more likely to have success in the implementation of differentiated instruction, compared to a teacher with a low self-efficacy (Wertheim & Leyser, 2002, in Suprayogi *et al*, 2017, p. 293). This is in accordance with Bandura's (1977) view on self-efficacy, where he differentiates between self-efficacy and outcome expectations. While it is possible for teachers to believe that differentiated instruction will produce a certain outcome, it does not mean that this belief will change their behaviour into implementing differentiated instruction because they might doubt their own ability to implement it (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). In other words, even though a teacher has a positive attitude towards differentiated instruction that does not mean they feel comfortable or confident enough to use it in their own classroom. Moreover, self-efficacy expectations can also influence how much effort the teachers spend in their attempt at using differentiation, as well as how long they persevere when faced with challenges and complications in its implementation (Bandura, 1977, p. 194). Interestingly enough, Goddard and Kim (2018) are of the opinion that differentiate instruction can, in turn, have an effect on teachers' self-efficacy, in the sense that experiences where teachers feel they master differentiation can have a positive effect on their teaching efficacy (Goddard & Kim, 2018, p. 7)

As previously mentioned, teaching beliefs can also have an effect on teachers' application of differentiated instruction. Teaching beliefs can be seen as a deciding factor in the

teaching approaches teachers choose to use in their instruction practice (Hermans et al, 2008, in Suprayogi et al, 2017, p. 293). Moreover, the teachers' teaching beliefs can also affect the teachers' willingness to implement differentiation, especially considering the major shift this signifies in their classroom practice (Hertberg & Brighton, 2005, p. 43). However, it is important to consider that the notion of teaching beliefs in relation to teaching practice is complicated; studies have shown that teaching beliefs does not have to correlate or affect teaching practices (Ertmer, Gopalakrishnan & Ross, 2000, in Suprayogi et al, 2917, p. 294).

Another element that is interesting to look at in regards to teachers' experience with differentiated instruction, is whether they receive any form of training in it. Santangelo and Tomlinson's (2012) study on teacher educators' use and perceptions of differentiated instruction, seeks to uncover how teacher educators implement differentiation in the education of future teachers. This is an interesting topic to consider, as the teacher education is the primary form of producing and preparing future educators. According to Cochran-Smith (2003) teaching quality has a major impact on student attainment and school effectiveness (Cochran-Smith, 2003, p. 95), as such, the education of teachers plays an important part in securing good teaching practices in schools. Considering this, it is natural to discuss to what degree teacher educators implement differentiation in their own teaching, as an example for teacher students. How do they encourage differentiation amongst their students?

 In Santangelo and Tomlinson's (2012) study, it is clear that a level of inconsistency occurs in the teacher educators' practice, where they encourage their teacher students to practice differentiation, yet do not lead by example in applying these approaches in their own instruction (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012, p. 311). In fact, teacher education is characterised by traditional teaching approaches that target the class as an entity rather than a set of individuals (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012, p. 311). That being said, the study did find evidence of the teacher educators using elements of differentiation in their instruction. Namely, differentiating content, process and product, for instance, they presented the course contents in various ways, while at the same time using feedback from the students to improve the content and activities (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012, p. 322).

2.3 Challenges with differentiated instruction

While differentiated instruction might seem ideal on paper, it is a challenging teaching approach to implement, especially considering how the Norwegian schools organise their classes. According to the Norwegian Education Act, students are organised into groups on the following grounds: "The organisation shall safeguard the pupils' need for social belonging. Pupils shall not normally be organised according to level of ability, gender or ethnic affiliation" (Education Act, 1998, §8-2). Norwegian students are organised into groups with a wide variety in personalities, social needs and learning needs. With such a diversity in each class, the challenge of providing differentiation for each student grows even bigger and daunting.

Differentiated instruction requires a certain amount of time and effort from the teachers. In order to practice differentiated instruction, the teachers are often required to provide several activities for the students to choose from, the teachers having several classes of around 30 students each further complicates this. Considering this, a potential change in practices to a more differentiated classroom could be intimidating, especially if the teacher is of the opinion that these changes will be on the larger scale. According to Bacher e*t al* (2012) it is important to make differentiated instruction manageable for the teachers. When transitioning from a more traditional classroom to a differentiated classroom, there should be emphasis on making smaller changes to already familiar activities. Through such a soft transition, the likeliness of differentiation becoming an everyday routine rather than an occasional activity increase (Bacher e*t al*, 2012, p. 17). Birnie (2015) supports this notion, commenting on how teachers can be intimidated and daunted by differentiated instruction, he emphasises the need for teachers to get started with differentiation by taking small steps (Birnie, 2015, p. 64).

As previously mentioned, another challenge that presents itself in the implementation of differentiated instruction is the lack of training teachers have in it as a teaching approach. In order to use differentiated instruction in the classroom correctly, teachers need to improve their practice through adequate training in differentiation and professional development (Turner & Solis, 2017, p. 72). Teachers need to develop a deep understanding of what differentiated instruction is, understanding its principles and how to implement its strategies (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2009, in Turner & Solis, 2017, p. 72).

2.3 Ability grouping

Ability grouping is the practice of placing students in groups according to their abilities, where high ability students are placed in one group and low ability students in another. It is a practice that exists due to the difference in knowledge, ability and learning rate that exists between the students (Kim, 2012, p. 290). By placing the students into homogenous groups with those of a similar level of ability to themselves, the differences between the students are evened out. The teacher can focus on providing instruction and tasks designed to meet the students at their level, instead of attempting to find the middle ground in a mixed-ability group. In this manner, ability grouping increases the quality of the classroom instruction, enabling each student, both high- and low-ability, to reach their full potential through challenges and appropriately differentiated instruction.

According to Hallam, Davies and Ireson (2013) ability grouping must occur in such a way that the placement of the students is based on a true understanding of their level of ability and attainment, additionally there should also be a certain level of flexibility where the students has the opportunity to move to another group (Hallam, Davies & Ireson, 2013, p.77). In other words, ability grouping should not occur with fixed or set groups, but should reflect the students' level of progress. This means that low ability students can move on to a higher ability group, but it also means that high ability students can move to a lower group should their progress falter. This flexibility between the groups should be considered a natural element in the learning process; after all, some students might be high achievers when the classroom instruction focuses on oral activities, yet low or average achievers in writing.

Hallam, Davies and Ireson (2013) also emphasises the importance of correctly allocating the students according to their prior academic achievements. This allocation should be based on consistent and objective measures such as test results, and while observations made by the teacher in the classroom could play some part, the students' allocation should in no way be determined by that alone (Hallam, Davies & Ireson, 2013, p. 77). A lack of proper basis for the student allocation can easily result in a discrepancy between the students' placement and their actual ability and level of attainment. Hallam *et al* (2013, p. 77) also points out that while there is usually some agreement between the students' test results and the teacher's perception of the students, in the instances where this consensus is lacking, the teacher usually relies on their own perception in the allocation of students. Additionally, they take into account factors such as students' previous performances in class, the performance of any family members, what kind of groups they formerly were allocated in and they are even influenced by the students' appearance (Hallam, Davies & Ireson, 2013, p.77). As such, it is natural to assume that some form of discrimination and bias will always occur if the allocation is based solely on the teacher's perception of students.

The need for objective allocation when dealing with ability grouping is further illuminated when Hallam e*t al* (2013) points out that the students' opportunities for learning are, in many ways, determined by their group allocation. Generally, the students in the high ability groups receive greater learning opportunities than those in the low ability groups (Hallam, Davies & Ireson, 2013, p. 77). As such, being wrongly allocated in a low ability group might have an effect on the rest of the students' academic career. After all, it is considered unlikely that a student in a low ability group should rise to a high ability group, even if that student's allocation was incorrect (Hallam, Davies & IReson 2013, p. 77).

2.4 Teachers Working in Teams

Teachers' co-operation in teams in the Norwegian schools can occur on several levels, it is not only limited to working in interdisciplinary teams when their pupils have projects, but can occur while working on understanding the curriculum, or in planning lessons (Riksaasen, 2010, p. 184). It does not necessarily have to occur in larger groups, but can also arise in the co-operation between two co-workers. Because teachers often work in teams when doing development work, it is often an essential element of enabling the schools to do School Development (Riksaasen, 2010, p. 184). According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2016), schools that construct co-operation based Subject Departments with a strong professional community, perform better than schools with weaker Subject Departments (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016, p. 131). Therefore, it is necessary to establish a co-operative culture within the schools, not only to improve the instruction, but to achieve a greater feeling of confidence and safety within the teachers (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016, pp.130-131). In fact, teamwork, or problems with teamwork, have been listed as some of the typical factors of stress for teachers in their workday, along with time pressure, lack of resources and uncertainty related to the teacher role (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 270). Issues related to working in teams can be linked to a reduced sense of belonging and motivation for teachers (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p. 270). In other words, a positive work environment that enables teachers to work in functional teams is necessary in order to strengthen the teachers' motivation for instruction.

According to Goddard and Kim (2018), collaboration between teachers can contribute to improving the morale and efficacy of the teachers, this can especially occur when teachers collaborate on instructional practices (Goddard & Kim, 2018, p. 2). This is also relevant in regards to differentiation, as research has shown that because differentiation requires such a major shift in teachers' practice, it is unlikely that they will make this change and continue using differentiated instruction without support (Goddard & Kim, 2018, p. 6).

Chapter 3: Method

In this chapter, I will be presenting the methods used in the data gathering process of this research project. To begin with, I will provide a short description of the study and its design, before moving on to present the various methods used to gather information. The choice of method will be justified and tied to the study design. Furthermore, I will be presenting the project participants, explaining why I have chosen to use this selection of participants, as well as commenting on some of the benefits and challenges to the participants I have chosen to use. I will give a brief description of how the interview guide was formed, and I will include a description of the analysis process in this chapter.

3.1 Study description

The theme of this study is differentiated instruction in differentiated groups done in a Norwegian context. I have chosen to focus on the teacher perspective of this theme, exploring how the teachers implement differentiated instruction, how they understand the term differentiated instruction, their motivation for implementing differentiation as well as looking into their previous experience with the topic. The purpose of the study is to answer the research question: *How do Norwegian ESL-teachers experience the use of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in the English classroom?* The data used to answer this research question, was gathered using observation and individual, semi-structured interviews with three, Norwegian teachers from the same school. These teachers were involved in a research project of their own, where they sought to explore the use of dynamic groups in English, and I came in as an outsider to observe their practice. I will go further into the specific considerations of both the participant selection and how the observation and the interviews were done in subsection 3.2 and 3.3.

3.1.1 Case study

The research design of this study is based on a *case design*, also referred to as a *case study*. The term *case study* is a collective term for a series of research designs with some variations (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 63). The common denominator between them is the fact that they all seek to gather information on a case or phenomenon through a longer or shorter period. In these studies, the focus of the researcher can be concentrated on a single individual, several individuals or even groups. Although, the case study method is open for interpretation, it always needs to occur in a clearly defined context (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 63). This clearly defined context is especially necessary because of the limitations the case study has as a method.

According to the Australian researcher, Gerard Guthrie, the case study as a method has its limitations in validity and representativeness because of its usually low amount of samples or subjects (Guthrie, 2010, p. 67). In this case, that limitation is particularly relevant because the research is done with only three teachers as subjects, moreover these teachers are from the same school, which in turn, decreases the representativeness of the results as well as making it impossible to generalise. Being systematic when choosing the

case and its subjects, as well as providing a clearly defined context, however, can increase the representativeness of the study (Guthrie, 2010, p. 67). To increase the representativeness and validity of this study, I believe it is important to be specific in the presentation of the samples, explaining that the results found in this study are not representative of Norwegian schools as a whole, but are instead a representation of these specific teachers in this specific school.

3.1.2 Qualitative method

According to Postholm and Jacobsen (2018), two Norwegian researchers within pedagogy, qualitative research methods are used to understand and describe the experience of specific human beings in their everyday life, delving into what meaning these experiences have for these individuals (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p.97). Considering the research question this study is seeking to answer, it is natural to apply qualitative methods in the data gathering process. I am seeking to uncover how the teachers experience the use of differentiated groups, specifically, trying to understand how they think and feel about these experiences. The only way to achieve this understanding is through methods that focus on the research subjects as individuals, and using methods designed to gather thoughts and information on a deeper and more personal level.

Another consideration I made in choosing to do a qualitative study was the amount of participants I was likely to find. As I have already mentioned, the selection of participants in this study consists of three, Norwegian ESL-teachers at a Lower Secondary school. It is unrealistic to consider that a quantitative study would be necessary with such a small selection. A quantitative research approach would not give me the deep insight into the participants I am seeking either.

3.2 Observation and interview

In the following subsection, the observation and interview methods used to gather information for this study is presented; moreover, the development of the interview guide will also be explained. When it comes to choosing methods, it is important for a researcher to choose what role they want to have in the project (Postholm, 2010, p. 142). This is especially important considering that the data gathering process within a case study is extensive and it is essential to gather enough data so that important aspects of the data can be explored and interpreted (Postholm, 2010, p. 53). There is no specific way to go about this in a case study, however, according to Postholm (2010, p. 53) it is usual to use approaches and methods that are appropriate and practical. Observation is beneficial to use in the sense that it observes behaviour, enabling the researcher to establish and understanding of the participants' surroundings and how they act in it. It can act as a context for interviews (Angrosino & Pérez, 2000, in Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 115), which is, particularly relevant for this study, as the observation to form some of the interview questions. Interviews, as a research method, is beneficial in the sense that it seeks to gain in-depth knowledge about a subject (Johnston, 2010, p. 189), which is a

particularly relevant method to use in this study, because it is only through interviews that one can really gain knowledge about the teachers' perspective and experience.

3.2.1 Observation

Observation as a qualitative research method is one of many methods to gather data with). Observation in qualitative research is often practiced in order to observe behaviour, seeking to discover how and why that behaviour occurs, and can be used to check the validity of a subject, exploring whether the people in the sample groups really do what they say (Guthrie, 2010, p. 109). Because the observations often occur in a natural setting, in order to observe as natural behaviour as possible, qualitative research methods are described as naturalistic (Angrosino & Pérez, 2000, in Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 113). Naturalistic observation, which focuses on observing the subjects in a natural setting with little to no interference from the researcher, are frequently used in case studies (Guthrie, 2010, p.108). Because this study was done as a case study, it was natural to use naturalistic observation when gathering information from the classroom.

When dealing with observation as a method in qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to consider their role as an observer, as a researcher's role has a major impact on the results of the observation (Guthrie, 2010, p. 109). Gold (1958) has categorised the various observation roles a researcher can choose from, dividing them into four categories, ranging from *complete observer, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and complete participant* (Gold, 1958, p. 217). I have chosen to use this view on the observer's role as a basis to explain my own role as an observer in the classroom, with the understanding that the researcher is not limited to one category, but can act, not only as a *complete observer*, but also as a *participant-as-observer*. In order to make this transition from one role to another possible, it was necessary to use an unstructured observation method, which enables that researcher to take on several different roles while observing (Mulhall, 2003, p. 307).

Because of the necessity of establishing an understanding of the social environment in the groups being observed, I decided that the data gathering process would have to begin with a period of observation. What kind of work environment did the classes have in their regular lessons? How did the teachers relate to each other? How did they relate to the teachers? What kind of methods and instructions did the teachers use in the non-differentiated lessons? How did the pupils respond to these methods? In other words, it was necessary to establish a norm on which to compare the differentiated instruction periods to. To form a status quo that made it easier to see whether there were any difference between the classroom practice in the non-differentiated lessons and the differentiated lessons. Because of this, the observation period occurred over a period of 4 months.

In order to gain the most objective view possible on the classroom setting and environment, it was necessary to use a non-participant observation role that required me to be present in the classroom, while at the same time not participating in the activities occurring in the classroom (Guthrie, 2010, p. 109). I chose to utilize this complete observer (Gold, 1958, p. 221) role in an attempt to draw as little attention to myself as possible, by remaining in the background of the lessons as a "complete outsider" (Jorgensen, 1989, in Postholm, 2010, p. 64). Additionally, in accordance with Gold's (1958) definition of a

complete observer, I refrained from explaining to the pupils what I was observing and why I was observing it, and while the teachers were aware of the topic of my study, they were unaware that my focus was on them and not the pupils. This was in order to achieve a natural context, which is supported by Postholm (2010), who claims that qualitative observations should focus on actions in their natural context (Postholm, 2010, p. 64).

Because of the nature of this study and some of the opinions that might exist on the topic in a Norwegian context, the importance of maintaining a natural context is important to establish validity. As such, I determined that my role as a researcher in this study was to remain as objective as possible, to allow the results to speak for themselves and to achieve these results in as valid and natural a manner as possible. To achieve this objectivity, I remained at the edge of the classroom, making hand-written notes on what I observed. In hindsight, it occurs to me that my role as a *complete observer* (Gold, 1958, p. 221), might have been compromised and viewed as a more participating role by both the teacher and pupils in the classes. It is difficult to foresee to what degree the observer will participate while observing (Pretzlik, 1994, in Turnock & Gibson, 2001, p. 473), as was proved in my own process of observation. Several instances occurred where the teacher left the classroom and the pupils to themselves, and while she was never gone for long, it cannot be ignored that the teachers' behaviour in those moments might be affected by my presence in the classroom.

In preparation before each session, I alerted the teachers of my coming to observe two days in advance. I made this decision because of the unpredictable nature a lesson can have, and in alerting the teachers to the coming session of observation, they had the opportunity to warn me, should an unexpected event take place. Moreover, this way the teachers would not be taken by surprise with my suddenly turning up. This was especially important because I usually observed two of the groups in one session, beginning in one group at the beginning of their lesson and moving onto another after the break. With this practice, it was not always possible to meet the teachers beforehand, and I was of the opinion that they would be more comfortable with being observed when they were aware that they would be. This decision was made in an attempt at maintaining the trust I had begun building with the teachers.

I decided on which specific behaviours or themes to look out for in each session before arriving, but remained very open to any potential behaviour that might occur during the observation session. This is in accordance to the theory of unstructured observation that points out that while the researcher might have a perception of what they should observe, it is not necessary to establish specific, preconceived ideas regarding the behaviour they will be observing (Mulhall, 2003, p. 307). I noted the teachers' behaviour in my notebook and looked over these notes after. However, I did not perform any sort of analysis of these notes until I had finished with the entire round of observation.

Of course, this type of observational method has its limitations in regards to the distance that exists between the researcher and the participants. It was impossible for me to know what the teachers were thinking and on what they based their decision making. Moreover, the distance also appeared as an obstacle in regards to actually observing what they were working on, and how the interaction between the teachers and pupils occurred. In order to make such an observation, I had to move away from the sideline (Postholm, 2010, p. 64) and move about the room, drawing attention from the teacher who seemed to move in the opposite direction of me at times. I was careful to avoid this in the beginning of the

observation period, as I judged the need to gain an objective observation foundation to be more important than understanding the interaction. However, when that foundation was established, I moved on to take on a more participating role, moving into an *observer-as-participant role* (Gold, 1958, p. 221). This enabled me to move around the classroom, observing what the teacher was doing, how she assisted the students and, most importantly, whether she practiced differentiation in her instruction. Of course, it should be mentioned that such a method of observation might have an effect on the behaviour observed, as may have happened when Teacher 1 left the classroom.

As previously stated, I chose to use observation as a research method because it enabled me to gain an understanding of the social environment of the groups that the teachers instructed. This was so I could discover potential differences between said environment when compared to periods of differentiation in differentiated groups. Moreover, the field notes and observations made during the observation period, were used to understand what some of the themes in the interview guide would have to be and to support some of the findings that occurred in the interview process.

3.2.2 Interviews

In a research interview, the intention is to develop knowledge tied to a specific theme, where the researcher achieves a deeper knowledge within a set theme than one can achieve in the spontaneous conversation in everyday life (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 117). One can apply various methods in order to gain this knowledge, and there are especially three forms of interviews commonly used. Namely, the *structured interview, the unstructured interview and the semi-structured interview* (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 62). In the *structured interview*, there is no way for the participant to influence the interview; the researcher gives the same set of questions to each participant, leaving no room for improvisation (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 120). This requires the researcher, or the interviewer, to make these questions beforehand with a limited set of response categories. Moreover, the researcher is required to control the speed at which the interview takes place and remain neutral in their treatment of the participant (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 120). The *unstructured interview*, is often used when the researcher wishes to understand a behaviour or perspective without presenting any form of prior categorisation that could have a hand in limiting the line of inquiry (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 75). This kind of interview, does not require the researcher to form specific questions beforehand, but opens up for conversation between the researcher and participant while observation occurs (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 120).

When planning the interviews, it was decided that the most beneficial form of interview to use in this study, would be a s*emi-structured interview* that made it possible for the participants to contribute with opinions and themes that I had not previously considered (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 121). Moreover, because the semi-structured interview seeks to understand the participants' perspective (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015, in Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 121) it is a particularly relevant method to use, considering that my research question seeks to understand the perspectives and experiences of the teachers involved in the study. However, it is important to consider that because the answers gained in the interviews are subjective opinions that represent the teachers' individual perspectives, they are not representative of other teachers.

Another reason for choosing a semi-structured interview was the potential of the teachers moving on to aspects of the topic that was unrelated to the study. It was deemed necessary to focus purely on how the teachers experienced the use of homogenous groups in their classrooms. The fact that the semi-structured interview requires the researcher to have some themes and questions ready beforehand was also contributing to my managing to keep the teachers from focusing on the pupils rather than themselves throughout the interview. In my opinion, this was especially important because I was dealing with teachers who were doing research of their own on the topic, although with a much greater focus on the pupils and their results rather than their own experiences. It is important to mention that this could have an effect on the validity of the study, as the answers given by the teachers could be influenced by their knowledge of the project and their desire to give the "proper" answer.

Before each interview, I informed the teachers of how the data material would be processed, making sure that they were aware of the opportunity to refuse answering questions they were uncomfortable with and that everything would be anonymised. I usually arrived in good time before the interview was to take place, which gave me the opportunity to make some light small talk before beginning the interview. This small talk usually involved other teachers, that were not participating in the study, and did not involve any topics of conversation to do with the interview itself. I discovered that this was very useful, because it contributed to a more relaxed and informal atmosphere.

Because I wanted to establish the teachers' individual perspectives and experiences surrounding the research question, I chose to do three, individual interviews. Individual interviews allow the researcher to look further into more personal and social matters and makes room for questions outside of the interview guide, in fact, these digressions are considered productive. (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, pp. 315-316). This decision was made in consideration of the different personalities of the teachers participating in the study; it would be more beneficial to interview them individually in order to allow each teacher to express their individual perspective. Additionally, this made room for any potential disagreements to come to light, which, as you will see in chapter 4, they did.

3.2.3 Interview guide

Based on the understanding of a semi-structured interview as a qualitative method presented in the previous subsection, it is natural to present the interview guide as method used in this study. The interview guide is formed before the interview takes place, and the purpose of the questions therein is to make sure that the interview covers the main thesis and research questions of the study (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 122). Additionally, it is important to ask question that invites the interviewee to reflect on the question, this might lead to more complementary and good responses (Thagaard, 2013, p. 100). In order to encourage this form of reflection and thought process from the interviewee it is necessary to use probes and ask follow up questions to receive an explanation on the themes and issues the participant has brought up (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 129). The interview guide was subject to several rounds of editing, both in regards to the theme of the questions as well as their formulation. It was necessary to formulate them in such a way that the questions were not leading or in any way representative of what I, as a researcher, wanted to hear. Moreover, according to DiCiccio-Bloom and Crabtree (2006),

it is necessary to begin the interview with broad and open-ended questions in order to get the participant talking. This is a step in making an unusual situation more comfortable for the participant (DiCicio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p.316). In order to do so, I chose to ask the teachers to *give a brief summary of your education.* This question had the advantage of giving the teachers a soft start, with a question they definitely knew the answer to, while at the same time giving me an idea of what kind of background they had. I chose to follow up this question with *how many years have you worked as a teacher* in order to discover how much experience they have in general with teaching.

3.3 Selection of Participants

As previously mentioned, the selection for this study consists of three ESL-teachers at a lower secondary school in Norway. The selection of participants consists of three teachers with varying degrees of experience and education, where one of them has been working as a teacher for 10 years, another 13 years and the last teacher has been working for 17 years. Teacher 1 has an education consisting of English, Spanish and Pedagogy. Teacher 2 has a master in English as well as education in Special Education. Teacher 3 took a bachelor in English and got her degree in teaching through 1 year in Post graduate teacher training, she has also spent some time teaching in higher education universities. The common denominator between all three teachers is a distinct lack of training in how to differentiate instruction. Although teacher 2 has experience from Special Education, all three of them admit, in the interviews, that they have had little to no training in how to differentiate and adapt the instruction to fit the pupils' needs, and the experience they do have with it was acquired through practice and self-instruction. In other words, their experience with differentiated instruction is a result of trial and error, and does not originate from any form of professional instruction. Some of this experience might come from previous research they have done on the subject in the form of a pilot research and development project.

Contact was established with the teachers through my secondary supervisor, who already had contact with the teachers as the supervisor on their Research and Development project. I believe it is important to point out that she is not my primary supervisor, due to the issue of incapacity that might arise from her ties with the selection of participants. It was in connection with their research and development project, which looks at the use of dynamic groups in the English classroom, that I got a foot in the door as an outside observer.

 Because these teachers are also doing their own research on differentiated instruction in dynamic groups, the possibility of their objectivity as participants being affected by their own research is an aspect that must be considered in accordance with this study's findings. The statements given in the interviews could be influenced by their project. However, considering the fact that I am seeking to study the teachers' subjective perspectives and experiences, I have concluded that they should still be included in the study and considered reliable participants.

3.4 Analysis

According to Postholm and Jacobsen (2018) a qualitative analysis of data often consists of searching for a pattern, enabling the material to be gathered in categories or under various themes (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 139). While processing the data material gathered through the interviews I was inspired by the *constant comparative analysis method* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, pp. 101-116, in Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 141), which includes three stages in it analysis process: *open coding, axial coding and selective coding.* In the open coding phase, the researcher should focus on getting to know their material, gaining a detailed understanding of what they have gathered as well as naming it. There are various methods in which to do this process. For instance, the researcher can perform the analysis on a micro level, analysing the interview while focusing on each individual line, or the researcher can focus on whole sentences or paragraphs to make the material more manageable and less time consuming (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 146). Axial coding consists of making a connection between your material, creating categories and subcategories (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 148). Selective coding, on the other hand, involves gathering all the categories to develop the core category. (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 150).

To have something physical to work with in the coding and analysis process, it was necessary to transcribe all three of the interviews, the first interview lasted 31 minutes, the second 21 minutes and the last interview lasted around 32 minutes. While it is possible to do this in the form of a summary, I chose to write a detailed transcription in order to get an accurate representation of the interviews, writing down the interview as it occurred, word by word, including pauses, emphasis on certain words and laughter, even though that would not be included in the coding process. This was to make it easier for me to see where the teachers were uncertain, and what they put special emphasis on. The analysis of the data material began already during the transcription process, as I began reflecting and comparing the teachers' statements while writing them down. This confirms that the analysis process does not begin after transcription, but is a continual process that occurs even when the researcher is gathering the material (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 139).

Because the teachers participating in the study were already involved in a project of their own,where, as previously mentioned, they were looking into the use of dynamic (what I call differentiated) groups. They were used to talking about the topic in a Norwegian context, with Norwegian terminology. Because of this, it was deemed necessary to hold the interviews in Norwegian, so as not to complicate the interview situation with possible misunderstandings concerning translated terminology. As such, it was also natural for me to transcribe the interviews in Norwegian as well, coming to the conclusion that it would only be necessary to translate the statements included in the text, while adding the Norwegian transcriptions as an attachment in this document. It could be argued that something might have been lost in translation, but I judged the situation in such a way that no important information would be lost, and that the original transcription would be an insurance, in case any uncertainties should occur.

When the transcription of the three interviews was finished, I moved on to do a detailed analysis of the texts, reading through them and marking any sentences I thought important and relevant to the research question. Having done this, it was necessary to read through the texts once more, focusing on the marked sentences and writing down keywords to indicate what these sentences really implied (Postholm, 2010, p. 88). This resulted in many keywords to consider and I thought it necessary to organize the contents of the interviews in some way. In order to achieve a simpler basis for comparison, all of the answers given by the teachers were gathered into one document, placing them under their respective questions. This way it became easier to compare the teachers' answer. Having done that, the focus was turned to the keywords that were a result of the open coding, consequently discovering that some keywords occurred more frequently than others did. As a part of the second coding process, or the *axial coding (*Saldaña, 2013, p. 218)*, the keywords that occurred less frequently were discarded and reorganized to form a category. The following figure is an example of how the category *motivation* occurred:
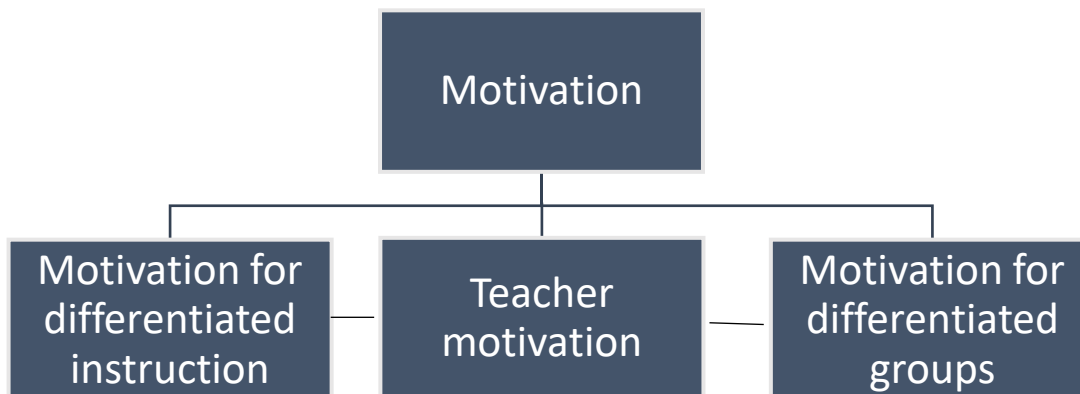
Figure 3. Example of Axial coding

Following the axial coding process, I established the three categories: *motivation*, *differentiated instruction* and *teacher perspective* and their respective subcategories. I also discovered a connection between *teacher motivation* and the two other groups. Despite this, the three categories were kept separate, as I considered it to be natural that there would be some connection between them because of the central role a teacher plays in *motivation for differentiated instruction a*nd *motivation for differentiated groups.* After all, the teacher is the implementer and their motivation will have a natural effect on the motivation for the two other categories. Having established these categories, I moved on to the selective coding process, by dividing the categories and their subcategories into a hierarchy, looking at the common denominator between the categories and establishing the core category (Postholm, 2010, p. 90).

Figure 4. Selective coding and the resulting hierarchy

As a result of the selective coding I concluded that the core category was *differentiation*, which is relatable to the research question because the theme of this master's thesis is differentiation, in the sense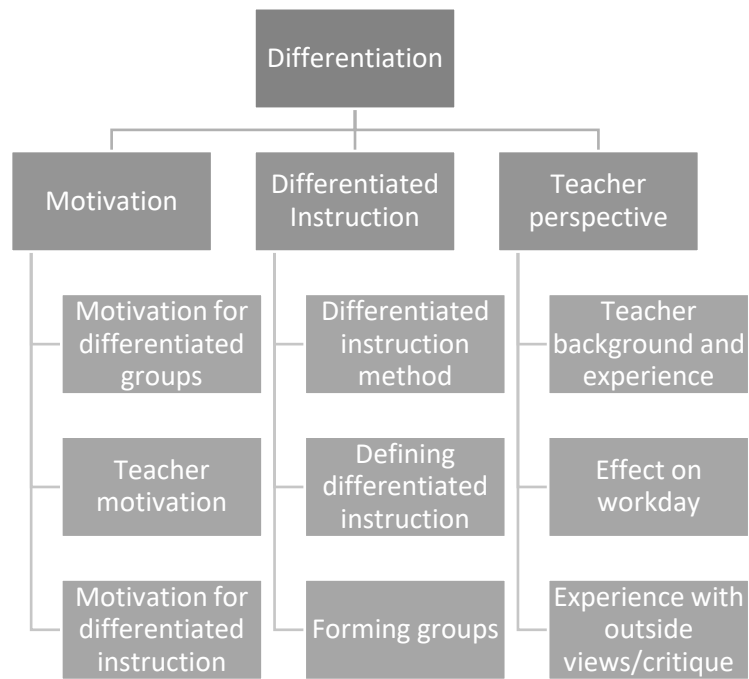 that it looks at teachers' experience of differentiation. The three previously mentioned categories are related to how teachers experience differentiation, what motivation they have for differentiation, as well as how they practice differentiation.

3.5 Quality of the study and Ethical Considerations

It is necessary to consider several aspects when discussing the quality of this study. In the following chapter, I will provide an understanding, supported by relevant theory, of how the researcher should go about securing the quality of their study, before clarifying and discussing the reliability, validity and ethical considerations of this study. As reliability, validity and ethical considerations are three very different categories; I have chosen to divide them into subsection 3.5.1, 3.5.2 and 3.5.3.

The concept of quality in a qualitative research project is essential to enable the researcher to conduct good work that answers the research question in a way where the decision making is based on an awareness of what is a good and what is a bad approach (Larsson, 2005, p. 16). At the same time, the quality of a research study cannot be tied to the findings presented by the researcher, because we do this research in a society that constantly changes. Findings that are considered true and valid today might be rendered invalid and outdated in the future, a consequence of new research that focuses on new perspectives and uses new methods or approaches (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 219).

Because of this, it is not possible to claim that this study is relevant and of good quality because of the findings presented, instead the quality of the study should be determined by how the information has been produced (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 219). It is important to be aware when choosing what, how and where to research, as you should be able to justify and tie these choices to the aims of the study (Lawson & Philpott, 2008, p. 71).

The researcher in a qualitative study plays an essential role, because the information that is presented in any study is a presentation of how the researcher understands the phenomenon investigated (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 220). Moreover, the findings presented are already contextualised and limited to fit the frames of the project's research question. Because the researcher determines these frames, it is important to be aware of the potential for subjectivity, especially in the analysis of the findings. For instance, the objectivity of the findings presented in this study, could be influenced by my own perception of the teachers involved and the approach they have chosen to use in their classroom instruction. The researcher must be aware of this subjectivity in order to present it to the reader, enabling them to understand the analysis and interpretations in light of the researcher's subjectivity (Postholm, 2010, p. 128).

3.5.1 Reliability

The question of reliability is related to the question of whether or not the findings in the study can be confirmed by any other form of research, in other words, its testability. The basis for this confirmation by other research, is an objective and stable reality that is measurable (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 223). As previously mentioned, there is an inevitable subjectivity related to qualitative studies due to the interpretive nature of the qualitative analysis. Because of this, the reliability of a qualitative study is dependent on the confirmation from other, similar studies in order to be considered reliable. This is problematic, especially in regards to behavioural- and social-science, where the researcher often looks at a phenomenon or situation that is susceptible to change (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 223).

Little to no research has been done on how Norwegian ESL-teachers experience the use of differentiated groups in the English classroom. Similar research that can be found on it in a Norwegian context is often related to the subject of mathematics or science, or is done while in a heterogeneous environment where the students are organised according to the Norwegian Education Act. The students are sorted into diverse groups with a variety of social backgrounds and prerequisites for learning. In other words, the teacher has to adapt his or her classroom to a myriad of different needs within one group, and repeat this adaption to each individual in every group they teach. The research done in the English classroom is often situated in a British or American context. Due to the changeable nature of qualitative studies such as this one, it is difficult to replicate the study in such a way that you can measure findings in an identical platform. The fact that researchers also bring with them their individual and subjective ideas into the research further complicates the establishment of reliability (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 224).

It is impossible for any researcher to recreate this study to be representative of the participating teachers' educational background, their experience and the social

environment in which they work. Therefore, this study cannot be proved reliable through testability alone. Instead, it is important to present the manner in which the data has been created in the research process, as well as discussing it in such a way that the reader is convinced of the study's reliability (Thagaard, 2009, p. 198). In other words, the reproduction of this study has nothing to do with its reliability; instead, reliability can be tied to how the method of research and the researcher can have an effect on the findings (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p. 224).

Considering this, the reliability of this study is shown through the presentation and discussion of the methods used in the data gathering process. By remaining transparent and being reflective about the reasoning behind the choices made during this study, the reliability is enhanced. Moreover, because I made contact with the participants several months before beginning the process of gathering data, I managed to create a relation to the participants. An advantage when observing and holding interviews, as this played a part in establishing trust between the participants and myself. I believe the teachers provided honest answers in the interviews, and these honest answers were easier to obtain because of my choice in holding individual interviews rather than group interviews. That way, it was easier for the participants to express their own opinions, unaffected by what their fellow teachers' answers were. In turn, this made it easier for the teachers to express differing opinions.

Something can always be done differently in a research project, and the reflection on the potential for modification plays a part in establishing reliability. In hindsight, I could have done several things differently in the implementation of this study. While I consider both individual interviews and observation to be useful methods of gathering data, I would have adjusted the way I prepared for the observation. As mentioned in chapter 3, I alerted the teachers of my intent to observe two days in advance to allow them to prepare. Looking back on it, this could have had an effect on the behaviour displayed in the classroom and I wonder if it would have been better to alert them the same day instead. And even though I did write down a focus for the observation before each session, I would have liked to do this more detailed to get an even more focused observation session. Moreover, I believe I should have been quicker to analyse the observation notes, to make it easier to remember what I meant and which situation the individual notes were related to. In waiting until the next day to analyse the observation notes, important information or ideas could have been lost.

3.5.2 Validity

In qualitative research, it is important for the researcher to reflect upon the possible limitations tied to their research, looking at what conclusion a researcher, in truth, can draw from his or her data material (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, p.222). In other words, validity relates to questioning whether the researcher's interpretations and reflections can be considered valid and connected to what they are researching (Thagaard, 2009, p. 201). In this study, the topic I am researching is the experiences of Norwegian ESL-teachers with differentiated groups in the English Classroom.

Considering the Norwegian context, I would say that the validity of this study is strengthened by the selection of participants because I have included three teachers who have several years' worth of experience teaching English in Norwegian schools. Moreover, their backgrounds all involve being educated as teachers in Norwegian universities, thus

providing an understanding of the Norwegian school system and Educational Act. Their experience as teachers, which varies from 10 to 17 years, suggests that they have a solid foundation on which they base their instruction on. This is also beneficial in regards to the validity of this study, as I believe that this experience suggests a level of knowledge and competence in their work that enables the teachers to give informed answers. In turn, this made it possible for me to retrieve good and necessary information from the teachers in the interviews.

In my opinion, the information in this study is of a valid quality that is relevant to the research question. Furthermore, the interview questions all served a purpose in relation to the objective of the study, and although some questions were more focused on how the teachers perceived the pupils' experiences they are still relevant in the sense that they deal with how the teachers experience the pupils. Of course, the relevance of these questions, could be discussed, however, I am of the opinion that the material I have gathered with these question, sufficiently answers the research question.

3.5.3 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are present, in qualitative research, from the outset and throughout; the researcher has to consider ethical dilemmas both before, during and after the data gathering process (Postholm, 2010, p. 142). In other words, the researcher has to consider the ethical aspects in their choice of where the research should take place, what participants to include, how the research should be conducted and how the data gathered should be processed in an ethical manner (Postholm, 2010, pp. 143-151).

 Several ethical considerations had to be kept in mind for the duration of this study. To begin with, I had to consider how the research should be conducted and whether it had to be reported to NSD (Norwegian centre for research data). Because of my decision to tape the interviews with a recorder, I decided it was necessary to report the project and apply for approval by the NSD. This was granted. Having received the approval it was also necessary to apply for permission to the administration of the school, this was given by the principal after informing him of the details surrounding the project.

 The teachers in the study also gave their approval, though this was given in oral form after having been informed of all the project particulars and having been a part of planning some of the specifics in the project. I considered this oral consent to be enough, due to the teachers' close involvement in the project, and because we had several meetings where they got detailed information on it beforehand. I also thought it necessary to apply for consent (See attachment 1) from the pupils' parents as well, because in the beginning of the project; I considered the possibility of interviewing the pupils as well. In the end, interviews of the pupils were not included in this study; however, because the pupils were still present during the observation, I believe the consent forms were still necessary. I informed the participants of the study, that any consent they gave could be withdrawn at any time, without need for explanation. It was also necessary to inform the participants that any information given by them will be treated confidential, and nothing that nothing can tie said information to them (Postholm, 2010, p. 145).

Before each interview, I was careful to repeat this information to the teachers, pointing out that they did not have to answer any question they were uncomfortable with, that

everything would be anonymised and that the recording would be kept safely on an encrypted memory stick and erased by the end of the project.

It is not merely the ethical considerations of consent and data processing that must be kept in mind in such a study, however. The participants also have a demand for privacy, and in any research project, the researcher must consider how sensitive the information they are gathering is. The more sensitive the information is and the further you encroach upon the participants' private life, the necessity of securing the participants' anonymity increases (Postholm & Jacobsen, 2018, pp. 249-250). This study, did not gather any sensitive information that dealt with the participants' private lives. However, for some, revealing their thoughts and reflections can be sensitive, and because of that, I believe it is important to make sure that the information cannot be traced back to them by anonymising their names and the school they teach at.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Findings

In this chapter, I will be presenting and analysing the findings of the study in connection with relevant theory and research literature. As a result of the analysis process, I have chosen to divide the findings into three categories: *1. Differentiated instruction, 2. Motivation* and *3. The teacher perspective*. I will be including quotes from the teacher interviews when presenting the findings. It should be noted that because the interviews were done in Norwegian, the statements presented here will be translated into English, due to the length of the answer it was also necessary to paraphrased. The interview guide will be included as an attachment, in both Norwegian and English to show what the questions related to.

4.1 Differentiated instruction

The first category we will be looking at is differentiated instruction, namely how the teachers implemented differentiated instruction in their classrooms, what methods they used, how the groups were formed and, most importantly, how the teachers define the term differentiated instruction, which in itself can be viewed as a general term with a vast room for interpretation. Due to the amount of topics included in this category, it was natural to divide this subsection into its own, three subsections: 4.1.1 Defining Differentiated Instruction, 4.1.2 Differentiated Instruction Methods and 4.1.3 Forming the Homogenous Groups.

4.1.1 Defining Differentiated Instruction

To begin with, I wanted to gain an understanding of how the teachers in this study defined this term, and so I asked the question: *How would you define differentiated instruction?* The following statements are the answers given by the teachers to this question:

> *I would say that differentiated instruction is about every pupil experiencing that they are working with subject material that is available to them at their own level each time they have a subject. It is an extensive goal for everyone to get started, to work and that everyone should be able to reach for something. (Teacher 1, paraphrased and translated)*

> *Differentiated instruction is, for me, not only differentiating the amount and task assignments, but also handing out assignments that are simplified when needed, or providing alternatives. Additionally, giving extended time, as there are some pupils work slowly or have problems that causes them to need more time to work. (Teacher 2, translated)*

> *It is to differentiate so that every pupil gets to develop themselves within their proximal development zone, with instruction from their teacher. The strongest pupils need help as*

well, because they are easy to overlook and usually do not receive differentiation because you only differentiate or adapt the instruction for those who are in greatest need. (Teacher 3, translated)

All three teachers seem to agree that differentiated instruction is a way of adapting the classroom instruction according to the pupils' level of ability. However, their opinions seem to vary regarding how this adapted instruction should occur. Teacher 1 is focused on differentiating the subject material so that every pupil feels as if the material is manageable. In order for pupils to feel as if they are in an inclusive classroom that is adapted to their level of ability, it is necessary to have a variety of subject material available at every level (Westwood, 2016, p. 25). According to Teacher 1, her main goal during a lesson is that every pupil in the class should have managed to achieve something. I interpret that she feels as if this goal can be reached through differentiated instruction material that is suited to the pupils' different levels of skill, though that does not mean that any other methods could be ruled out.

Teacher 2 seems to interpret differentiated instruction to be a method in which you adapt the amount of work and the type of task assignments the pupils receive. In particular, she focuses on the time aspect, pointing out that it might be necessary to grant more time according to the tempo in which the individual pupils work at. This interpretation of differentiated instruction relates to Westwood's definition where he points out the need for differentiation reflecting the varying amounts of time that the pupils require to solve their assignments (Westwood, 2016, p. 22). This aspect of differentiated instruction is especially linked to pupils with special needs and difficulties that are usually served by breaking down the curriculum into more manageable pieces (Ellis, 2005, in Westwood, 2016, p.22).

Another aspect that is interesting to note in the answer given by Teacher 2, is her tendency to focus on the pupils with a lower level of ability, the pupils that need differentiation in the sense that their assignments are simplified. Considering her background in Special Education, this focus is not surprising, but it is in contrast to Teacher 3 who points out that the strongest pupils need help as well, even though they are easy to overlook. She chooses to define differentiated instruction as a method in which the pupils get to develop themselves within their own proximal development zone. In my opinion, this way of defining differentiated instruction is the most objective out of all the teacher responses, though she does move on to focus on the pupils with a higher level of ability, moving away from the initial objectivity.

Through looking at the statements, it is clear that Teacher 1 and 2 focuses on the pupils who are struggling in English, whereas Teacher 3 concentrates more on differentiation for the strongest pupils as well. Considering the fact that these three teachers are co-operating on this project, this variation in focus is favourable because it creates a balance where the teachers focus on both pupils who struggle in the subject and the ones who are at a higher level. Although, it could have a negative impact on the quality and equality of the instruction the pupils receive, the pupils with a higher level of ability might go unheeded in the groups instructed by Teacher 1 and 2, and the lower level pupils might be overlooked in the group instructed by Teacher 3.

4.1.2 Differentiated Instruction Methods

In order to get a proper idea of how the teachers have experienced the use of differentiated instruction in homogenous groups, it is necessary to look at how they have implemented the differentiated instruction. What methods have they chosen to use? What kind of assignments have they chosen to give the pupils? How have they differentiated between the groups? Moreover, what is the thought process behind these choices?

> *We had them working with the same thematic contents and the same skills, but we used different amounts of time on it, and have varying focus. In Group 1, they focused on writing a sentence with a dot at the end, and capital letters after and what a paragraph is. Group 2 focused on topic sentences and the structure of a text. In group 3, they focused on text structured and using, for example, hooks and cohesion. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)*

> *They were supposed to write a 5 paragraph essay and every group got the same assignment, but we wrote model texts at different levels, both regarding length, use of vocabulary, transitions, advanced sentence structure and so forth. We used the writing frame on group 1 and group 2, while the group 3 had had a planning sheet, but not a writing frame. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)*

> *We chose assignments that everybody could work with, simplifying it even more for those who needed it in Group 1. We worked together in the beginning, creating the paragraphs, looking at what should and should not be there. And we handed out model texts that we had in relation to the level they were at. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)*

A common denominator between the groups is how they have received the same assignments, which is also supported by the observational notes. There is not much sign of differentiation in the task assignment in itself, however, the elements surrounding the task and the tools used to help the pupils do the assignment has been adapted to fit the level of ability in the individual groups. By focusing the differentiation on the frame surrounding the assignment rather than the assignment itself, the teachers comply with research that points out that differentiation should occur by selecting resource material that accommodates the variation in skills, literacy and numeracy that exists among pupils (Westwood, 2016, p. 22). The advantage of using the same assignment in every group is that it reduces the difference between the groups; the pupils have the opportunity to talk about the assignment across groups, which, in turn, can affect the way they perceive the difference between the groups. This could be a valuable element in reducing any possible form of social stigma related to the group allocation and it seems this was a part of the reasoning behind using the same assignments, as stated by Teacher 3:

> *We did it this way because we did not want there to be any stigma related to being in one group or another. It is more motivating for the pupils to work on the same theme, because it enables them to talk about it across groups. (Teacher 3, translated)*

In other words, the assignment of the same tasks, regardless of group or level of ability was a deliberate move on the teachers' part to reduce the chance of the pupils experiencing any form of social stigmatisation. I would like to mention, however, that this assignment of a common task could have an effect on the assessment of the material the pupils hand in, particularly in regards to the fact that the teachers deliberately altercate their expectations according to the group they are assessing:

> *They used the same basis material, the same assignment, but varying amount of time to go through it, and with different expectations to the results. (Teacher 3)*

As we have seen, the teachers are aware of the potential for stigmatisation in the application of differentiated groups. As stated by teacher 3, they took steps to avoid any such stigma related to the groups. While the teachers have been mindful of preventing stigmatisation between the pupils, it is interesting to note that one teacher displays a small degree of stigmatisation toward the pupils:

> *Pupils, who are clever in an early age, are often arrogant when it comes to their own skills. They do not believe they have anything they can improve and remain seated and bored. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)*

I interpret this as the teacher creating a stigma related to high achieving pupils, and while she considers this arrogance to be a reason why the pupil needs differentiation, it is important to keep in mind that a teachers' perception can have an impact on the pupils' allocation (Hallam, Davies & Ireson, 2013, p. 77).

Another aspect I would like to point out is how, despite the teachers' intentions, the assignment in group 1 was differentiated and altered in a way that separated them from the two other groups:

> *Everybody were supposed to write a fantasy story, in Group 1, they chose between writing a story and making a comic strip. There were quite a few who chose that, I think. They thought it was fun. However, Teacher 1 and I had the same assignments. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)*

> *There's been difference within the group, especially the last time, because then Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 focused on writing, while on my group they got to choose between writing the text and making a comic strip from the text, where they made a story board for themselves to begin with. Many of the ones who struggle with writing thought it was funny that they could draw; it became easier when they could do it in a combination and they achieved more than they usually do. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)*

In this case, the variation of the assignment between the groups could be interpreted as having had a positive effect on the pupils, enabling them to achieve more than they usually would and increasing their motivation in making the task more accessible to them. The fact that they had the opportunity to choose the level at which they wanted to do the task also introduces the element of pupil participation and invites the pupils to push themselves and their academic limits. This differentiation of the assignment within the groups shows that even though the pupils have been allocated according to their level of ability, there are also differences between the skills of the pupils within each group as well. This is an important point to consider, showing that it is not simply enough to give each group assignments and resource materials that are adapted to the general level of the group, but the teacher is also required to use differentiation within these groups as well. Teacher 1, who instructed the pupils in group 3, the high ability group, talks about having to differentiate within the group:

> *Yes, because there are different levels of ability within the group as well, but writing assignments are generally rather grateful assignments, because the pupils solve them at the level they are at, you could say. Of course, some needed more help than others to get started, some needed help to plan, some were done very quickly and had a lot to do to expand their content and explain more, right? But they got feedback during, we took in the texts and gave*

them feedback on what they could do to improve their text, and then they received a grade on the last draft. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)

It is clear, from this statement, that the teachers have seen the need to differentiate their instruction within the groups as well. That coupled with the fact that Group 1 had the opportunity to choose between two versions of the assignment shows that the need for differentiation is constantly present, even though the level of ability within the groups is similar between the pupils.

4.1.3 Forming the Differentiated Groups

To gain an understanding of the foundation of how the differentiated instruction was implemented in the project, it is necessary to look into how and on what criteria the differentiated groups were formed. Through the interviews, it is quite clear that the teachers disagree on how the groups were formed. This disagreement comes across in the following statements:

You quickly get an understanding of what the pupils can handle. So, to begin with, we divided them into groups based on our assessment of their academic level. And if there are any social reasons they could always switch groups, so we've had very few protests or objections. In many ways, it has strengthened my understanding of the teacher judgement. We know what they know; it does not take a very long time until we get an overview. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)

We had questionnaires they filled out beforehand, then we looked at national tests and the results from that, and we made our own impression in the beginning of some of the pupils. The pupils with special needs, who we knew struggled with the subject, were placed in the Level 1 group permanently. And then we filled it up with pupils from the other classes who we saw needed some extra instruction in some of the themes we covered during the periods of ability grouping. (Teacher 2, translated)

We did not know them very well at the time, but we observed them for a while. We divided them according to their level ability after having looked at some of their work. We also used national tests where the mistakes, or the scores, are categorised. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)

Both Teacher 2 and 3 mention the use of national tests as a foundation and criteria for placing the pupils into their respective groups, though this criterion is combined with what the teachers themselves have observed. Teacher 1 does not mention the use of national tests as a basis for their organisation of the pupils into differentiated groups, and is more focused on the teachers' role in placing the students. She emphasises the importance of teacher judgement when organising the pupils, claiming that it does not take a long while until they have achieved an understanding of the pupils' academic level. This statement is a stark contrast to that of Teacher 3 who mentioned that they did not know the pupils well at the time. Moreover, the element of teacher judgement as a factor in the allocation of pupils in differentiated groups goes against research that claims the placement of pupils should be done objectively, based on results and not merely the teachers' perception of the pupils (Hallam, Davies & Ireson 2013, p. 77).

Considering the statements made by Teacher 2 and 3, however, I interpret the answers in such a way that the pupils' allocation in groups is based on a combination of test results and teacher perception. The validity of the teachers' project would have been greater had they based their allocation of pupils on more objective criteria. Although, the combination of test results and the teachers' own judgement as a basis for the organisation can be justified when considering the fact that there is usually agreement between the teachers' perception of the pupils and the test results (Troman, 1988, in Hallam, Davies & Ireson, 2013, p. 77).

Another aspect that I find important to point out is the fact that the pupils are free to move between the groups, should they have any social reasons for doing so, as mentioned by Teacher 1. This sort of flexibility in the organising of the groups is important because it makes room for pupil participation, where the pupils feel as if they actually have some say in which group they are placed. This sense of "ownership" is important to nurture in the pupils because the most successful differentiated instruction is often found in classrooms where the pupils feel some responsibility for their own learning, where they participate in the learning process alongside their teacher (Birnie, 2015, p. 21). Moreover, the opportunity to move between groups also creates an opportunity for the pupils to practice self-assessment, because they have to reflect on their own progress and if they are suited to their current group. According to Teacher 3, encouraging pupils to practice self-assessment and making room for pupil participation is a goal they hope to achieve with the project. This comes across in the answer to the question: *Do you think it matters for the students that everything is so open, that they know that they can change groups if they want to?*

> *Yes, though I do not know how aware they are of it. In tenth grade last year there were pupils who came to us each time and told us they were in the wrong group. Often, they wanted to move to a lower group, and then there were some who told us that they felt as if things were going too slow and that they wanted to change to the other group, which they were allowed to. When this settles more with the current pupils, I think they will play a more active part in …because they are supposed to assess themselves. We continually try to stimulate self-assessment and pupil participation. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)*

It is important to note that the answer to the question is based on the teacher's previous experience from the pilot project that preceded the current project. As such, it is not possible to conclude that the pupils in the current project will practice the self-assessment and pupil participation that the previous pupils did. Although, there are some instances mentioned by Teacher 2, that supports the notion that the pupils in the current project will move on to play a more active part in their own allocation, and that some of them have already done so:

> *What we see now, is that with the pupils who are in the grey area, especially between level 1 and 2, there are pupils who has expressed a wish to be in the level 1 group, or special education group, for the rest of the year. Because they felt the tempo suited them better according to where they are right now. (Teacher 2, translated)*

According to the teachers' statements, the desire to change groups seems to be especially related to the lower-level group. It is difficult to say whether this is because the lower level group has the biggest potential for improving themselves, whether the distance between group 1 and 2 is smaller than group 2 and 3, or whether it is related to any form of social stigma.

Among other things, there was a girl in one of the original groups, who actually wanted to be on level 2 and felt it was difficult to be in the least … in the lowest group. I spoke to her today, and she had actually begun changing her mind. (Teacher 2, translated)

Considering the situation Teacher 2 mentions in this statement, the element of social stigma cannot be ruled out as a factor in the desire to move from group 1 to group 2. Moreover, based on the teachers' observations it does seem as if there has been a greater struggle for the pupils in group 1 to accept the group they have been allocated to. However, these situations seem to have resolved themselves, and the pupils who have been uncertain about their allocation seem to have settled down in their group. The pupil mentioned in the previous statement seems to have been affected by the presence of another pupil in the group, who wanted to remain there permanently, thus it became easier for her to find someone to co-operate with. Teacher 2 reflects upon why the pupil wanted to change groups and says:

I think she felt very uncertain to begin with, so next time, she will assess if she wants to continue. (Teacher 2)

This is a good example of how the pupil participation takes place in the project, and although the teacher tries to persuade the pupil to remain in the group and see if it works, in the end it is up to the pupil to decide if she stays in the group. Although, there are also instances where the teachers have taken charge and chosen to relocate the pupils, discovering that their original allocations were wrong. This comes across in the interview of Teacher 3:

Several pupils were placed in the wrong group. Some were relocated during, and some have sort of been moved afterwards. Because we saw that, "you may as well be on the other group". (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)

This teacher interference could be because of the manner in which the pupils were first allocated, namely because the teachers allowed their own perceptions of the pupils to play such a large role alongside the test results in dividing the pupils into groups. The consequence of this failed allocation is the uprooting of pupils during a period of differentiated groups. This uprooting can be disturbing to the pupils and can challenge them because they have to adapt to a new group and a new level of ability to which the lessons are adapted to. According to Hallam, Davies and Ireson (2013), it is important that pupils in primary school be allocated properly and according to their real level of ability, as improper allocation can have a long-lasting effect on their learning opportunities later on (Hallam, Davies & Ireson, 2013. P. 77). In this instance, the teachers caught the improper allocation, relocating the pupils to their rightful level of ability and prevented the possible, negative effect on the pupils' learning opportunities. Although, the occurrence of these improper allocations do indicate that the basis on which the teachers divide the pupils into groups must be of a more objective nature, in accordance with previous research on the subject.

4.2 Motivation for differentiated instruction in differentiated groups

The second category I would like to introduce is *Motivation for differentiated instruction in differentiated groups.* This category looks into different factors that affect the teachers' motivation for implementing differentiated instruction and differentiated groups in their classrooms. Below, I will be presenting the teachers' statements on why they chose to take part in such a study as this, looking further into their motivation for both differentiated groups and differentiated instruction itself.

> *To begin with, I found it to be an exciting approach, and secondly it is an approach towards differentiated instruction for everyone. Not only in a way where the special education groups or the special education pupils have their lessons alone, but you look at it as a bigger picture, and you include different pupils according to what they need extra instruction or challenges on. I would think the main teachers in the subject, in periods, have difficulty in reaching everyone in a manner that is satisfactory to themselves, compared to what they feel they need to give. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)*

> *We think the oral participation, for example, is much higher and occurs at a greater degree in English in all the groups this year, than it has with previous eight graders. The ones who are in the same group are more relaxed. (Teacher 3, translated)*

> *Because I have been working with this ever since I only taught Spanish early on in my career, and my experience was that I entered classes where the level of ability was so different that it was very difficult to look after everyone all the time. (Teacher 1, translated)*

An element that is important to point out in these statements is that the teachers, especially teacher 1 and 2, display a need or a wish to reach and cover the needs of all of their pupils, in some way or another. It is clear that all the teachers are focused on the pupils, and that the pupils themselves act as a motivator for the implementation of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups. Having said that, the teachers' focus do vary within this pupil-based motivation. Teacher 3 emphasises the fact that the pupils seemed to be more relaxed in the differentiated groups, linking that with the increase of oral participation. Whereas teacher 1 presents the need to look after the pupils as a motivation for implementing differentiated instruction in homogenous groups. Teacher 2 is motivated by the opportunity to include pupils, instructing them according to what they struggle with and points out the opportunity to include pupils that are normally kept separate from the "normal" class. She views this as a something positive, an opportunity for the pupils with special needs to feel included in ordinary lessons and to enjoy the benefits of being among the rest of the class. Considering the background teacher 2 has in Special Education, it is not surprising that she chooses to focus on this opportunity, more so than the other two teachers in the study.

Particularly Teacher 1 and Teacher 3 were very focused on the previous attempts they had made at implementing differentiated instruction in differentiated groups, emphasising the fact that this project was the result of those attempts. A lot of the motivation for the project was attributed to the success of the pilot study they had previously attempted, as such, it was clear that the teachers began this research project with a preconceived expectation of its success. This is clearly portrayed in the following statements:

> *It began in the tenth grade when we were approaching exams where some students started realising that "wow, perhaps it didn't pay off not working for 4 whole semesters, when all of a sudden it is time for exams." Some of them were in quite a hurry, and a lot of them began*

reconnecting again, thinking: "what do I need to do now, in order to move on, and how should I…" That is where the idea came from, you could say, and it worked! For those who were interested and wanted. (Teacher 1, translated)

Because we saw that it worked the time we had the trial run, and then we thought that when we could work on it continually, perhaps over a period of three years, it would most likely have an even greater effect. (Teacher 3, translated)

This preconceived expectation of success has a great effect on the teacher's motivation for the project, because they have already experienced some success in using differentiated instruction in groups, their motivation for further exploring the subject was therefore high. While this kind of motivation can provide a big support in upholding their motivation and drive in face of criticism, it can also be considered a dangerous element of motivation from a researching point of view. Their previous experience with the pilot project affects their objectivity, and might have a negative influence on the validity of their project. In turn, this can affect how they interpret the results and how they choose to use them in their classroom instruction, affecting the quality of instruction the pupils receive.

Another motivational factor that I found interesting to look at is the aspect of practicality when faced with providing individual differentiated instruction for a large amount of pupils. Only one of the teachers focused on this aspect as a motivational factor, as can be seen in the following statements:

It is to make the adaption for larger groups of pupils easier for the teacher, and we see that it helps the pupils' motivation as well. (Teacher 3, translated)

And it's because it is much easier to adapt, when they mostly have the same needs. (Teacher 3, translated)

When you have nearly 30 pupils in the group and 2 hours in a week to do it in, it is simply easier to do it in homogenous groups than in heterogeneous groups. That being said, these groups are not very homogenous either, in group 3 you have pupils with grades from 3 to 6, and that is not very homogenous. (Teacher 3, translated)

It is interesting to note, as previously stated, that only one of the teachers seems to focus on this particular aspect of motivation. Additionally, it is curious to see that teacher 3 feels it is necessary to justify dividing the pupils into these groups based on ability, pointing out that there are variations within the differentiated groups as well. Considering the Norwegian laws related to using groups based on ability over a longer period of time, it isn't very surprising that the teacher feels a need to justify their project. However, this need for justification is a recurring theme amongst the teachers, and this, in turn, leads us to the next category that involves the teachers' experiences and perspectives.

4.3 The teacher perspective

The third category in the analysis chapter is the teachers' perspective, providing a greater focus on the research question, because it looks at how the teachers have experienced the implementation of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups. In this category, we will be looking at how the project has affected the teachers' workday, how they have experienced outside views as well as looking more generally into the teachers' background and experience with differentiated learning. Because these are many themes to include in one category, I will be dividing this subsection into four categories: 4.3.1 Teacher Background, 4.3.2 Effect on Teacher Workday and 4.3.3 Experience with Outside Views and Critique and 4.3.4 Experience with Results of Differentiated Instruction In Differentiated Groups.

4.3.1 Teacher Background

I chose to include the teachers' background, as a theme in this category, because I think it is important to understand what sort of foundation the teachers have for using differentiated instruction, especially when they are doing it in the setting that they are. It is important to discover what kind of education they have had on the matter, learning whether they are working based on education or experience. In order to gain this information, I asked each of the teachers what experience they have with differentiated instruction; the following statements are the answers they gave:

> Well, for as long as I have worked as a teacher it has been high up on the agenda, you could say. It was a part of the pedagogical education as well, so it has been on the agenda, you could say, all the way. (Teacher 1, translated)

> Normally I have only had special education pupils, so I have worked based on IOP [individual learning plan], so I have not worked as much in the class before, as I have this year. However, I have had … we have had pupils with more differentiated instruction as well. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)

> I have the experience that it is difficult to do. Another experience is that those who get differentiated instruction are the weakest pupils, and they really need it, but the stronger pupils have never received any particular differentiation, at least not through guidance from a teacher. Perhaps they have said: yes, read this book and answer some questions, but you are going to have to do that alone, and the teacher never has the time to check it. (Teacher 3, translated)

It is clear that the three teachers have had different experiences with differentiated instruction. Teacher 3 expresses clearly that it is something she finds difficult to implement in the classroom, focusing on how the stronger pupils rarely receive any form of differentiated instruction. Although, she talks about it in a general manner, I interpret the

experience with lack of differentiation for high ability pupils as an expression of how she, herself, never has the time to differentiate the instruction for the high ability pupils. Teacher 2 points out that she has more experience in working with special education pupils, working with individual learning plans and in smaller groups, than with differentiated instruction. Although, she has worked with some pupils and used differentiated instruction, her main experience comes from her work with special education. Teacher 1 provides a vague answer, expressing that differentiated instruction has been high on the agenda throughout her career as a teacher; however, she does not express how she has experienced it. Because of the vagueness of some of the answers, it was necessary to look into what kind of education the teachers have had in differentiated instruction and how big a part of their pedagogical education was made up of differentiated instruction.

> *Well, not very much, they do not have their own credits, to put it like that, but it has been talked about in both didactics and subjects. Only practical training, only after I was done, you could say, but we talked about it in our work experience too. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)*

> *Nothing other than didactical training, and when we were students we were out on … the same as you have been [work experience]. Other than that, I have worked with other special education teacher and with other teachers to differentiate the instruction. I have done that, but I have not had any other form of education, no. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)*

> *None at all. I attended PPU, so it was mostly not relevant what we learned, I think. In the didactics, we learned nothing about differentiated instruction; we learned many things that were good and useful, but nothing about that. We had nothing about special pedagogics and special needs, things like that; we have had to educate ourselves on that, those of us who studied during that time. (Teacher 3, translated)*

It seems all of the teachers agree on having a lack of training or education in differentiated instruction. This is consistent with previous research done on differentiated instruction practices by teacher educators that suggest that while teacher educators do report to using differentiation of content or elements of differentiation, they do not use a complete framework for differentiation as an example for the teacher students (Santangelo & Tomlinson, 2012, p. 323). Considering these statements, one could conclude that the differentiated instruction occurring in the differentiated groups, bases itself on the teachers' experience and not on any form of education that they have previously received.

4.3.2 Effect on Teachers

It is natural that any form of rearrangement of the pupils and the instruction as has occurred in this study, should have an effect on the teachers. I was interested to find out whether the teachers experience this as something positive or if it had a negative impact on their work. In turn, this could affect how the teachers' experienced the use of differentiated instruction. To begin with, I looked into how the use of differentiated instruction affected the amount of time spent at work.

> *Yes, in a way it has become more … we have to co-operate more, so …but I like that, because if you are to develop yourself as an educator, you need input from other. In addition, yes, in a way, there is more work before and after, but it is not that much more. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)*

Yes, because it is new, so we have spent more time than usual on planning, and we use a lot of time on organising the groups each time, because we discuss nearly every pupil. It takes more time, but as we get a routine on it, I think it will most probably go faster then. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)

In the preliminary rounds we have, considering that we've been doing a project and that we have spent more time on assessment, but our idea is that we should be able to do this with the same amount of time as usual. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)

All of the teachers agree that the time used on work has increased, though I interpret this to be due to the freshness and the lack of routine in implementing differentiation. The teachers seem to be of the opinion that the amount of time spent at work is a result of the work with planning the project, and that the amount of time spent should return to normal when they have more experience and routine. I would like to point out that the teachers emphasise the project planning as one of the main reasons for this increase in required time. Teacher 3 also points out that it is difficult to set aside time for working on the project, especially considering that it is a Research and Development project, explaining that while they've had time to plan it, they haven't had the opportunity to evaluate it yet.

Considering that the project acts as an additional workload during their workday, it is also important to explore whether the duality of the instruction they do during a day, has any effect on them. Does it matter that they are doing differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in English, and normal instruction in mixed ability groups in other subjects?

It is unproblematic. […] It is a challenge because there are even more names to learn, because I have to learn the names of the pupils in class B as well, but it gradually runs smoothly. And that is an advantage in the school society that I have a relation with more pupils […]. We have discovered that as a positive side effect that we know more pupils in the school, and that is always good. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)

I have some special education lessons in the third class, which is not in on the project, where most of the work happens in the normal group. There I have had to adjust myself regarding how I do it when I have people in a smaller group. […] And that has been both developing and frustrating at times, because I don't know what they are supposed to do in the lesson, you know. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)

No, it has not been a problem […] and the school's administration is very enthusiastic regarding the project with dynamic groups, and want to have it in mathematics too. But the schedule is facilitated by the administration so that we can do it. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)

An interesting element that emerges from these statements is the fact that both Teacher 1 and 3 have experienced no problems in implementing differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in one subject and having normal groups and instruction in others. However, Teacher 2, who usually works more as a supporting teacher for pupils with special needs, expresses some difficulty in mixing the two. This is especially in regards to not knowing the contents of the lessons as well in the other class as she does in the classes included in the project, where she plays a greater part in planning the lessons. Moreover, she admits to having had some difficulties in adjusting to working in a smaller group after beginning the project.

It is also interesting to note that Teacher 1 expresses an improvement on her relation to the pupils, pointing out that as a consequence of the groups she has gotten to know more

of the pupils by name. Knowing the pupils by name is the first step in creating a student-teacher relationship, and establishing a student-teacher relationship can help the pupils become active participants in the learning process (Thayer-Bacon, 2004, p.171). This brings us back to the previously mentioned necessity of pupil participation, which is easier to encourage if the pupils feel as if they have a positive relationship with their teacher. Teacher 3 provides an example of increased pupil participation and expresses how she experiences this:

> *She and another pupil, got grade four on an oral assignment they did, and I have never been able to get them to speak English in class. I was so touched. (Teacher 3, paraphrased and translated)*

From this statement, it is clear that the pupils' oral participation has increased in the differentiated groups. What is interesting is the fact that the teacher reacts in such an emotional way, to the two pupils' improvement. I interpret this as another representation on how the teacher-pupil relationship has improved, as the teacher experiences an emotional reaction to the pupils' success.

Teacher 3 moves on to point out the support they have had from the school's administration. There has been an increasing focus on the school as a learning organisation, where teachers are encouraged to research their own practice. To make this commitment easier, it is necessary to facilitate a collective learning within the staff where they share experiences, reflect upon those experiences and develop theories connected to their field of practice (Hovdenak, 2010, p. 25). Moreover, it is necessary to set aside time for this reflection and co-operation (Hovdenak, 2010, p. 26). While it is clear that the school administration has given the teachers' time to do the project and have facilitated the schedule, thus making the differentiated groups possible, Teacher 3 has also expressed that she feels they do not have enough time to deal with the project, especially regarding the evaluation of it:

> *The problem with it, as a Research and Development project, is that we are struggling to set aside time to work on it. We do have time to plan, but we have not yet had time to sit down and evaluate it, other than looking at the questionnaires. (Teacher 3, translated)*

Another aspect that I believe is important to comment on, is some of the information that was produced in the observation of the teachers before and after their lessons. It was clear that an element of collaboration occurred in these moments in the form of discussing pupils and instruction methods. Moreover, it was clear from my participating in teacher meetings, that the teachers had a continual discussion going on in regards to the project and how they should implement it. Once more, this suggests an element of teamwork in the teachers' workdays. This element of collaboration can also be seen in the statements given by the teachers in the interviews.

> *Group 1 chose between writing a text and making a comic strip, every pupil had to make a storyboard first. The reason I did this was a tip from Teacher 3 on how I could differentiate for the pupils who struggled with the text. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)*

> *We use a lot of time to organise the groups each time, because we discuss nearly every single pupil. (Teacher 3, translated)*

> *If I am uncertain, I ask the other teachers. (Teacher 2, translated)*

These statements are an example of how the teachers collaborate on both differentiating their instruction, producing assignments and organising the groups. Moreover, it also demonstrates how they discuss their teaching practice, because I interpret this differentiation of assignment as being a result of a conversation or a discussion between Teacher 2 and Teacher 3.

4.3.3 Experience with Outside Views and Critique

Differentiated instruction in differentiated groups, is a subject with varying opinions amongst Norwegian educators. For instance, previous Norwegian research has established that differentiated groups according to pupils' level of ability has had no positive effect on their learning outcome, however, a positive learning outcome has been shown in pupils in heterogeneous groups (NOU2016:14; Ogden, 2013; Union of Education Norway, 2013). Considering that the teachers in this project is researching a teaching method that goes against this research, it is interesting to explore how they have experienced outside views and how their project has been received, both by the pupils, parents and by their colleagues.

> No objections from the parent group, at all and, for instance, in group 8A there are, perhaos, 12 parents who are school people. On every level, from principals to teachers themselves, so I experience that people have been very little critical to it. The fact that there has not been anything during either has, for me, been a sign that if people were feeling stigmatised, I think we would hear it. (Teacher 1, translated)

> So, I feel that we have a lot of support there [from the administration], and no critical voice from the parents, at all. (Teacher 3, translated)

> But it is controversial, and we have received a lot of critic for it here at school, as well as when we have been out presenting it in bigger subject departments in high schools too. (Teacher 3, translated)

Based on these statements, I believe the teachers have had varied experiences when presenting their project to other people. Both Teacher 1 and 3 report no objections from the parents of the pupils involved in the project, which especially Teacher 1 expresses surprise in, considering the academic background of some of these parents. As previously mentioned, in subsection 4.3.2, Teacher 3 states that the administration of the school have had little to no objection, showing their support in facilitating the project. However, they do report some critical response as well, both from their own school as well as from others. In the following statement, made by Teacher 3, it comes across that one of the English teachers they usually work with in that grade did not wish to participate in the project.

> And they [the administration] really want us to have dynamic groups in English in the whole grade, that is why all of the three classes' English lessons are located simultaneously on the schedule, but the third class does not want to participate. The teacher does not want to participate. (Teacher 3, translated)

This is an interesting point to consider, because it seems to have an effect on the team co-operation between the English teachers. According to Hargreaves and Fullan (2016), teachers who work in professional cultures that are usually signified by co-operation, usually perform better than teachers who work by themselves (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016,

p. 131) Based on the teacher's testimony one could contemplate whether that co-operation has in some way been broken, at least in regards to English lessons. Teacher 2 previously expressed some difficulty in the transition between the differentiated groups, and the group that remains outside of the project:

> *It has been frustrating when having to adapt to what the teacher has decided to do in the lesson. Because even though I knew what the topic of the lesson was, I still did not feel prepared enough. That has been the most difficult transition. (Teacher 2, translated)*

It is apparent that the lack of knowledge regarding the topic of the lessons is frustrating at times. This statement could signify a lack of co-operation between the teachers involved with the project and the teacher who has chosen to remain outside. While many teachers appreciate teamwork and view it as a valuable addition to their teaching practice, one can also encounter resistance to it. This can often occur in an interdisciplinary co-operation (Riksaasen, 2010, pp. 189-190). While there is no indication of the teacher's reason for remaining outside of the project, it could be theorized that the resistance is based on a difference in opinion regarding differentiated instruction in differentiated groups and might be a part of the criticism the teachers have received from their own school. However, that idea is in no way based on evidence.

Another experience with outside views that presented itself in the interviews, is the pupils' views:

> *We have received positive feedback from the pupils saying they have learned a lot. (Teacher 1, translated)*

> *The pupils themselves say they feel safer when the others are, more or less, on the same level as them. (Teacher 2, translated)*

> *When we ask for feedback from the pupils, an overwhelming majority say they think it is good to be in the dynamic groups. They feel it is safer to talk and they think it is nice that they do not slow anyone down and that they receive the help they need. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)*

According to the statements of all three teachers, they experience a positive attitude from the pupils. The common response is an increased sense of safety, of the pupils being more comfortable in their groups. I interpret these views to come from a genuine place where the pupils have been asked to express their opinion and have provided it, though some element of interpretation on the teachers' part cannot be disproved.

4.3.4 Experience with results of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups

During the analysis of the interviews, it became clear that the teachers continually referred to the results they had experienced from the implementation of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups. This was something that clearly had an impact on their motivation for using differentiated groups, and, therefore, it is necessary to present the findings of what results the teachers have experienced while using these groups. The following is a series of statements relating to their perceived results:

> *It creates a safety in the pupils, both according to what we see and what they give feedback on. (Teacher 1, translated)*

The pupils get to know each other across the normal classes, which is positive for them. Additionally, many say that they do not feel embarrassed by talking English. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)

We believe the oral participation is much higher and occurs to larger degree in English in all the groups this year, than it has in previous years. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)

We see that it improves their motivation. (Teacher 3, translated)

We've seen that pupils who struggle keeping up in the normal classes, improves in the groups, they become better at their level and even better than that after a while. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)

Many of the pupils have become more comfortable with talking English, they also co-operate better, so in time I believe they will have a great attainment, both oral and written, in the subject (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)

All of the teachers mention experiencing positive effects from the differentiated groups. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2, point out the emotional impact the differentiated groups have had on the pupils, creating a feeling of safety in the groups when compared to the normal classes. All of the three teachers draw attention to the improvement in pupil participation, emphasising the increase of pupils talking English in class. This seems to be an opinion shared by the pupils as well, as Teacher 1 mentions pupils telling her they are less embarrassed to talk English.

Another result the teachers have experienced is the social benefit of breaking up the normal classes and re-organising the pupils, in doing so, the teachers have seen an increased social interaction across the classes. Teacher 3 also brings up the factor of increased motivation as an experienced result; this can have an impact on what Teacher 2 mentions when she points out that the pupils have improved at their own level and have even raised their level. A statement in subsection 4.3.2, where Teacher 3 talks about two pupils experiencing an improvement in their grades, supports the statement of teacher 2. This can indicate that these two teachers have had the same experience of improvement in the pupils' skills in the subject.

At the end of each interview, the teachers were asked to give a short summary of their experiences with the differentiated groups. The following statements are extracts from the answers they gave:

It is exciting to research one's own practice, we came up with the project and it is always fun doing something you want to do. It has also generated less of a guilty conscience in regards to the pupils; because I know everyone is taken care of and receive a more focused and differentiated instruction. (Teacher 1, translated and paraphrased)

I actually believe that this is the way to do it, and I hope more subjects can do it as well. Because the pupils with special needs, have use for and joy from being with the normal pupils in the subjects' ordinary instruction. In a way, they do not feel as special when we do it this way. (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased)

I think it is positive, for both the teachers and the pupils, and it is nice to see the pupils' answers to the questionnaires, especially the ones who dread speaking English in class. The pupils say it is nice to be able to relax and keep up in class, and that they get help when they need it. They are not afraid of being teased because they work slowly. I think that is wonderful. (Teacher 3, translated and paraphrased)

Once more, it seems as if the teachers have very positive experiences with the project, and that they believe the pupils have had positive experiences as well. Teacher 1 points

out that the guilty conscience she talked about as a motivation for using this approach has decreased, she is more confident in her ability to reach each pupil during a lesson. This is an interesting finding because it indicates that the differentiated groups have enabled her to give the pupils more help in class when compared to her previous experiences in normal classes. Teacher 2 expresses her belief in this teaching approach, emphasising the positive effect it has had on the pupils with special needs. I interpret this as being in regards to the social impact the differentiated groups have had on pupils who normally would not be very involved with the other classes. This positive impact is related to the fact that it is less intimidating to have needs that make a pupil stand out in environments where differentiation occurs as a rule (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014, p.222). Teacher 3 also expresses a positive attitude towards the differentiated groups, believing the approach is beneficial for both the teachers and the pupils. While she focuses more on how the differentiated groups have been positive for the pupils, it is important to note that she includes the teachers in this as well.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Findings

In the analysis chapter, I presented and discussed the implication behind some of the findings. However, in this chapter, I will look at the findings in light of the research question: *how do Norwegian ESL-teachers experience the use of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in the English classroom?* Based on the analysis and the statements presented in the previous chapter, I focused on the experiences the teachers expressed to have had in the findings. Considering this, I have divided this section of the study into three categories: *5.1 The impact of teamwork on teachers' experience with differentiated groups, 5.2 The impact of outside views on teachers' experience with differentiated groups & 5.3 Teachers' experience with differentiated instruction in differentiated groups.*

5.1 The impact of teamwork on teachers' experience with differentiated groups

As previously mentioned, collaboration between teachers can have a positive impact on their motivation and self-efficacy (Goddard & Kim, 2018, p. 2). Moreover, teacher collaboration can provide the support a teacher needs in face of major changes of instruction practice, as often occurs when moving on to a differentiated teaching approach (Goddard & Kim, 2018, p. 6). This is reflected in the findings of this study, because there are several instances where the teachers report to having experienced teacher collaboration in relation to the project. For instance, in chapter 4, I refer to a statement where Teacher 2, mentions how Teacher 3 assisted her in differentiating an assignment. Teacher 2 had a positive collaborative experience that enabled her to provide the necessary differentiation for her pupils. Moreover, this positive experience was enhanced by the success of the differentiation, where Teacher 2 was allowed to witness an improvement in the pupils' motivation because "they thought it was fun to get the opportunity to draw […] and they achieved more than they usually would" (Teacher 2, translated and paraphrased). This instance also indicates a level of collaboration between the teachers where there is room to discuss and reflect on their practice. As previously mentioned in chapter 4, this collaborating by discussion and reflection, was witnessed during the observation of the teachers where the teachers actively discussed both the pupils and their instruction. The collaboration portrayed by the teachers is a practice that, according to Goddard & Kim, especially encourages improvement in teachers' motivation and self-efficacy (Goddard & Kim, 2018, p. 2). This is supported by Teacher 2's positive experience, who also shows no hesitation in turning to the other teachers when she needs help and who talks about how she likes the increase in collaboration.

Another instance that highlights the collaboration the teachers experience during this project is the organisation of the pupils into their respective groups. According to Teacher 3, they spent a lot of time allocating the pupils, and this was done by discussing each pupil, co-operating on finding the correct level to place them in. Collaboration in the manner it occurs in between the three teachers is positive because they, through exchanging ideas and planning the instruction together, can learn from each other and are more able to develop in a professional sense (Riksaasen, 2010, p. 186).

While the findings showed several instances of teamwork having a positive impact on the teachers' experience of differentiated groups, there are also mentions of instances where collaboration or lack thereof, affected them negatively. As stated previously, Teacher 2

expressed some difficulty in teaching English in both the differentiated groups and in the class that did not participate in the project. The differentiated group and the normal class are in contrast to each other, where Teacher 2 is aware of everything that is planned in the differentiated group, and is dependent on information from the non-participating teacher in the normal class. The fact that Teacher 2 reports a difficulty in adjusting to this and that she does not always know what is to occur in the normal class, can be an indicator of a lack of collaboration between the ESL-teachers in the project and the ESL-teacher outside of it. This situation is an example of how the teachers' experience is affected when faced with opposition to a close collaboration.

It is interesting to note that the teacher, who is not a part of the project, was asked to join them and refused. Teacher 3 specifically mentions this in subsection 4.3.3. In observing and participating in the teachers' meetings, the teachers expressed a disappointment in not having the entire grades ESL-teacher team on board with the project. However, they have also conveyed that they expect the administration will force the teacher to join them, at some point. This could be a contributing factor to the lack of collaboration between the participating teachers and non-participating teachers. Nevertheless, this study has not looked closely into the collaboration with this teacher, and therefore, it cannot definitely be concluded.

Because teamwork plays such an important role in the implementation of differentiated instruction in the differentiated groups, time is an element that also came up in the findings. The teachers admit that they spend more time planning and doing their work now, than with normal classes. Teacher 3 points out that she has experienced a shortage of time in regards to dealing with their research project, which I interpret as making time for and coming together to assess their project. She does not relate this to the implementation of differentiated groups. Instead, she connects this shortage of time to the more administrative aspects of doing research on her own practice. In fact, if forced to choose between the research and implementing differentiated groups, she would terminate the research project while continuing to instruct in differentiated groups. None of the other teachers in the project mentions any lack of time, though they do report to using more time on planning. Because none of the other teachers mention experiencing a lack of time, it is difficult to conclude that lack of time to collaborate has any effect on their experience with differentiated groups. All that can be concluded is that Teacher 3, personally, experiences this shortage of time for collaboration.

5.2 The impact of outside views on teachers' experience of differentiated groups

When looking at the teachers' experience of differentiated groups, it is necessary to consider the many onlookers that observe them as they are doing this research project. The school's administration is aware of the project and observes, their colleagues are also aware of what they are doing, and as educators may have formed an opinion of their own on it. Moreover, the parents have to be informed of the project, and any objection they have has to be considered because their child will be involved in the study. Because of this, I believe it is necessary to explore how the teachers have been impacted by the outside views and how this has affected their experience of differentiated groups. The findings of this study, reveal several instances where the teachers express and experience with opinions of others on their project.

All three teachers reveal that there has been no objections from the parents, and Teacher 1 expresses surprise in this because some of the individuals in the parent group are educators on varying levels. This is interesting to consider, especially when keeping in mind the lack of tradition for differentiated groups in Norway. Does this mean that the parents do not mind their children being involved in such a study, or have they simply stepped out of the educator role when in contact with the teachers of their children? It is difficult to interpret this lack of objection, when not aware of the circumstances and how the parents with a background in education choose to relate to their child's school. Nevertheless, Teacher 1 interprets this lack of objection as an indicator of a lack of stigmatisation between the pupils. Based on this interpretation, I conclude that this lack of objection from the parents seems to have a positive impact on the teachers and their experience of differentiated groups.

Another element of positive opinions the teachers have experienced related to their project, is the support they have received from the school's administration. Particularly, Teacher 3, points out the role the school's administration has played in facilitating their project, adapting the lesson schedules and enabling the teachers to hold their English lessons at the same time. This seems to have a positive effect on Teacher 3's experience of implementing differentiated groups. She expresses that she feels they have support from the administration, and that this support goes as far as them also wanting to implement this approach in mathematics as well. The administration's wish to use differentiated groups in other subjects seems to act as a representation of their belief in the teachers' work. It is a confirmation that their project has produced positive results and that they are doing something worthwhile.

The findings also reveal that the teachers have experienced a positive attitude from the pupils as well. The three teachers all mention that pupils have expressed a greater comfort and safety, as well as how they feel they have learned a lot in the differentiated groups. The teachers point this out several times in the duration of their interviews, indicating that this experience has had a major impact on their experience with differentiated groups. This could relate to the student-teacher relationship, which can be considered a reciprocating relationship where the teacher also has needs in said relationship (Riley, 2011, p. 29). Because the teachers are implementing differentiated instruction in differentiated groups to improve the pupils' attainment, it is natural that their encouraging feedback and experiences will have a positive impact on the teachers' own experiences with the project. In their eyes, this can be interpreted as another confirmation that they are doing something right and worthwhile towards the improvement of differentiated instruction implementation in Norwegian schools.

Up until now, we have dealt with the positive experiences the teachers have had with opinions from people on the outside of their project. However, the findings also revealed several negative experiences, both within their own school and in other schools. Teacher 3, reveals having received a lot of critique from people in their own school. This is interesting to consider due to the complete positive opinion the administration seemed to have of the project. This suggests a contrasting opinion and disagreement in the school which Hargreaves and Fullan (2016) claims is a common occurrence in schools with a collaboration culture, this is because the purposes and values connected to instruction practice is continually discussed (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2016, p. 132). It is also interesting to look at the manner she chooses to express herself in revealing the negative experience with her co-workers' attitudes towards the project. While she just mentions it in passing in

the interview, her emphasis on "a lot", indicates that this critique has had an effect on her. Adding to that, she also expresses that they have received critique when presenting the project in larger subject departments in Upper Secondary schools as well, which also indicated that the critique has not gone unnoticed. While analysing the interviews, I discovered a tendency, in Teacher 3, to justify their projection, explaining their reasoning for doing it. This could be linked to the critique they have received, as such a justification quickly followed when she mentioned receiving the criticism. However, it is important to note that neither Teacher 1 nor Teacher 2 mention receiving any such criticism. While they might have experienced it without mentioning it in the interview, one must also consider the possibility that this is a subjective experience only Teacher 3 has had.

Though the teachers have experiences some negative response to their project, it is clear, from the findings in this study, that their overall experience with outside views has been positive. Many of these positive responses have had an impact on their experience of differentiated groups, and especially the encouraging feedback from the pupils seemed to have established a feeling in the teachers of looking into something that is worth researching. It cannot be concluded, though, that they have had an entirely positive experience in receiving response from those outside the project, instead, it should be said that their experience with any such feedback has been varied.

5.3 Teachers' experience with the result of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups

The teachers' experience with the results the differentiated groups had on the pupils; seem to be of a singularly positive nature. They report improvement both in regards to pupils' grades, social interaction, and a sense of safety, motivation and pupil participation. When faced with having to give a summary of their experience with differentiated groups they all give positive responses. Teacher 1, who has experienced an improvement in how she is able to help more pupils during a lesson, gives the most interesting response. This improvement has had a positive effect on her self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977, p. 193), which can have an impact on her implementation of differentiation in differentiated groups. Interestingly enough, the teachers do not mention having experienced any negative results in implementing the differentiated groups, therefore I believe it is necessary to discuss why the teachers seem to have experienced entirely positive results.

The first factor to consider in this discussion is the question of whether they have revealed everything to the researcher, or if they have held anything back in the interviews. The teachers are aware that this study seeks to explore differentiated groups by looking at how they have chosen to implement what they call dynamic groups in their project. Because of this awareness, it could be likely that they want to present their study in a positive light, emphasising the positive experiences they have had with it, while not seeing the need to mention any negative experiences or results. Moreover, because they were aware of this study looking into the use of differentiated groups, they could have adapted their answers so as to suit what they thought I was looking for. This is an important consideration to make when discussing the findings in this study, especially when faced with such a homogenous experience as these teachers have had in regards to the result of their implementation of differentiated group. Of course, it is also possible that these experiences are consistent with what the teachers have experienced, that they have had no negative

results from the differentiated groups. Therefore, I cannot give any form of conclusion on whether the teachers' experience of their results are positive, negative, or a combination of both.

Another consideration to make is whether the teachers are affected by their own, pre-existing perception of the topic. In the interviews, it becomes clear that both Teacher 1 and Teacher 3, have previous experience with differentiated groups, that they have already completed a pilot project on which their present project was based. It is unavoidable that they have made some experiences during the pilot project, which they have brought with them into the new project. They are preconceived because they had such positive experiences and results in the first project. This comes across in the interviews, because the teachers, especially, Teacher 1 and Teacher 3, continually refers to their previous project when answering some of the questions. In some way, the pilot project acts as a motivation for the teachers, because they already know that they can produce positive results from it.   Of course, the experiences they had with the pilot project are valuable in the way it creates motivation; however, it is important that they separate the two, so that they are able to produce credible proof that they have mange to repeat the results.

The last point to consider when discussing the positive results experienced by the teachers is how they have measured these results. Have they been measured in a legitimate and documentable manner, or are they merely the teachers' interpretations of what they believe the results to be? As previously mentioned, Teacher 2 talked about how the pupils had improved in the subject. In relation to that statement, I posed the question: *how do you measure the academic development then?* She responded that they measured this development through grades. That is, of course, a legitimate assessment that documents the pupils' skills and development. However, the teacher does not report any other way of measuring the pupils' development during the period of differentiated groups. Therefore, one could say that the way they have measured these results is deficient in the sense that it lacks assessment that supports the teachers' conclusions. For all we know, the teachers could have several methods of measuring their experienced results, but because I did not find any evidence of this in the interviews, I must emphasise the small foundation they make these conclusions on.

Overall, from the findings in this study, it is clear that the teachers have had a positive experience of the impact differentiated instruction in differentiated groups have on the pupils' results and development. While the reliability of these experiences can be question, there is no doubt that they are the subjective experiences of the teachers and are therefore relevant in light of the research question this study seeks to answer.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to look at the research question: How do Norwegian ESL-teachers experience the use of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in the English classroom? I have sought to answer this research question through data material gathered from interviews and observations. In chapter 5, I discussed the possible implications of the findings, in light of the research question, and reached the following conclusions:

Teamwork seems to be an important element in the teachers' experiences with differentiated instruction in differentiated groups. The teachers express an increased necessity for collaboration, where they co-operated on producing assignments and the differentiation of this assignments in each other's classrooms. The findings showed that the teachers practiced a continuous dialogue about their project, assessment of the pupils and their allocation in the differentiated groups. The teachers express a satisfaction with the teamwork and view it as a positive element of support. This positive experience with teamwork in their implementation of differentiated groups is enhanced by the teachers' willingness to seek help. However, there are also instances where the teachers' collaboration with other co-workers have produced negative experiences; this is especially related to the co-operation on the instruction occurring in the English class that is not participating in their project. Another aspect that seems to have a negative effect on the teachers' experience, is the lack of time. The teachers spend more time planning their lessons than before. They do not relate this to the differentiated groups, though, instead blaming it on the administrative work related to doing a research project. In fact, the teachers would prioritise the implementation of differentiated groups, over doing research on it.

The teachers have experienced a variety of outside opinions, of both a positive and negative nature, regarding their project. These opinions seem to have had an effect on the teachers, where they feel as if they have support from their school's administration in their implementation of differentiated groups. This seems to have enhanced their experience and their confidence in the approach, especially because of the administration's desire to implement it in other subjects as well. The teachers do not report any criticism or objections from the parents in their classes, and while it is difficult to establish the reason for this lack of objection, the teachers view it as an indication that their experience of no stigmatisation among the pupils is correct. Moreover, the opinion that appear to have had the most impact on the teachers' experience is the encouraging feedback they have received from their pupils. This particular response seems to be a confirmation for the teachers that their implementation of differentiated groups has been a success and has created the results they were hoping to achieve.

That being said, this study also revealed several instances where the teachers experienced negative opinions on their project, in the form of criticism from their co-workers and other schools. This has in turn had an effect on the teachers' confidence in their project. Particularly one teacher appears to feel the need to justify their implementation of differentiated groups. Even so, their experience with opinions from the outside seems to

be, over all, positive, though they have had an impact on how the teachers have experienced the implementation of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups.

In regards to the teachers' experience of the results they have achieved with the differentiated groups, the findings revealed that they expressed an entirely positive impression of the results, mentioning no negative aspects of their implemented approach. While their self-efficacy appears to have been improved, and their guilt for not being able to help every pupil during lessons has decreased, this entirely positive experience must be considered cautiously due to the subjectivity of the participants. Moreover, this study does not reveal whether the teachers have actually had any negative experiences with the results of the differentiated groups, it is possible that they have been selective in their answers, choosing to hide any negative experiences. Though based on the findings from the interviews, the teachers have had an entirely positive experience with their perceived results of differentiated instruction in differentiated groups.

This master's thesis is limited to looking at the teachers' individual and subjective experiences of implementing differentiated instruction in differentiated groups in English classes. It is a representation of what experiences these three ESL-teachers have had while implementing differentiated groups in their classrooms. It does not explore how successful this implementation has been, nor does it seek to discover how the pupils have experienced this sort of approach to instruction. The topic of pupil perspective is very interesting, and has the potential to discover whether the manner in which the teachers have perceived the pupils' experiences and opinions in this study, has any truth to it. Moreover, doing research into what results differentiated groups in an ESL-classroom can produce, is also a potential topic for the future that can confirm whether the teachers' experiences are in any way related to the objective findings such a project could produce.

Considering the lack of tradition for differentiated groups in Norway, it is necessary to do more research into how it can be implemented in the Norwegian school system. Moreover, it is necessary to explore how this can be done, while considering the Norwegian Education Act's directions for organising pupils into groups. This is particularly relevant now that we see an increase in the diversity of Norwegian classrooms, and because the variation in level of ability and instructional needs increase with it.

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Attachments

Attachment 1

Lisa Halle Dragsten

Masterstudent i fag- og yrkesdidaktikk

Institutt for lærerutdanning

NTNU

Til foreldre/foresatte på 8.trinn, ved Charlottenlund ungdomsskole

<div align="center">

Forespørsel om deltakelse i forskningsprosjekt

Elevers opplevelse av differensierte grupper i engelskundervisningen

</div>

Bakgrunn og formål:

Denne studien er en del av min masteroppgave ved Institutt for lærerutdanning hos NTNU, der jeg ser nærmere på bruken av differensierte grupper i engelskundervisningen og hvordan elevene opplever dette. Fokuset vil spesifikt rettes mot elevenes opplevelse av og erfaringer med arbeid med utvikling av skriftlige ferdigheter i engelskfaget.

Forskning, datainnsamling og publisering:

Data vil samles inn gjennom observasjon av undervisningstimer og intervju med elevene, både før og etter en periode hvor de er delt inn i differensierte grupper. I tillegg ber jeg om tillatelse til å få se på de skriftlige arbeidene som elevene har produsert i datainnsamlingsperioden, som går fra (dato her) til 20.01.2019. De skriftlige arbeidene vil kunne danne grunnlag for intervju med elevene. Det vil ikke innhentes noen form for personlige opplysninger, ettersom elevene kun skal svare på spørsmål knyttet til opplevelse av og læring i de differensierte gruppene i engelskfaget. Datainnsamling og behandling av data vil gjøres i henhold til kravene i personopplysningsloven og forskningsetiske prinsipper. Det vil bli brukt lydopptakere under samtalene med elevene. Opptakene vil lastes inn på en passord-beskyttet minnepinne, og de vil bli slettet med en gang forskningsarbeidet er avsluttet. I henhold til regelverket er prosjektet meldt inn til Norsk Samfunnsvitenskapelig Datatjeneste. Informert samtykke vil innhentes fra alle forskningsdeltakere, både elever og lærere. Alt materiale som blir samlet inn vil bli anonymisert. Det innebærer at ingen vil kunne bli gjenkjent. Rektor samtykker til at jeg kan gjennomføre datainnsamling i klassene til deres barn. Forskningsfunnene vil bli publisert i min masteroppgave.

Dine rettigheter

Så lenge du kan identifiseres i datamaterialet, har du rett til:

- innsyn i hvilke personopplysninger som er registrert om deg,
- å få rettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få slettet personopplysninger om deg,
- få utlevert en kopi av dine personopplysninger (dataportabilitet), og
- å sende klage til personvernombudet eller Datatilsynet om behandlingen av dine personopplysninger.

Frivillig deltakelse

Deltakelse i studien er frivillig, og du kan når som helst trekke samtykket, på vegne av din sønn/datter, uten å oppgi noen grunn for dette. Den eventuelle informasjonen innhentet vil da umiddelbart slettes.

Vennlig hilsen

Lisa Halle Dragsten

Om du har noen spørsmål kan jeg kontaktes på: mobil: +47 926 20 676 / mail: lisa.dragsten@gmail.com
Hovedveileder for prosjektet er universitetslektor Karen Bauer, Institutt for lærerutdanning, NTNU, E-post: karen.bauer@ntnu.no

Returslipp til skolen: Leveres innen xx.xx.xxxx

Jeg/vi gir, på vegne av min/vår sønn/datter, tillatelse til datainnsamling, slik dette er beskrevet over, og at det innsamlede materialet kan brukes i forskningsøyemed i min masteroppgave.

Foreldre/foresattes underskrift

Intervjuguide

Differensiert undervisning i differensierte grupper: lærerperspektivet

1. Kan du gi en kort oppsummering av din utdanning? Hvor mange år har du jobbet som lærere?

2. Hvilken erfaring har du med tilpasset opplæring?

3. Hvordan vil du definere tilpasset opplæring?

4. Har du hatt noen form for opplæring eller trening i hvordan man skal tilpasse opplæringen?
   - Hvilken opplæring/trening da?

5. Hvorfor ønsket du å jobbe med differensierte grupper?

6. Hvordan delte dere inn elevene i grupper?
   - Hvilke kriterier la dere til grunnlag?
   - Identifiserte dere typiske feil hos elevene gjennom denne inndelingen?
   - Hvis ja: Var disse typiske feilene grunnlag for oppgavene dere brukte i løpet av perioden med differensierte grupper?
   - Hvis ikke: Hva var grunnlaget for oppgavene dere brukte i den differensierte undervisningen?

7. Hva kaller dere gruppene?
   - Overfor elevene

8. Hvilken informasjon ga dere elevene før dere begynte prosjektet?

9. Hvordan har du innført differensiert undervisning i timene?
   - Hvilke typer oppgaver brukte dere?
   - Var det noen forskjell på oppgavene fra gruppe til gruppe? Hva med innad i gruppa?

10. En god del norsk forskning er imot inndeling av elever i homogene grupper, for eksempel peker Solberg, Brevek og Louto (2017) på at tilpasset opplæring burde skje i heterogene grupper, hva tenker du om dette?

11. Hvordan var overgangen fra et tradisjonelt klasserom til et differensiert klasserom for deg?

12. Har den differensierte undervisningen hatt noe å si for tidsbruken din på jobb? Hvordan?

13. Hvordan har det vært å gjennomføre dette prosjektet samtidig som du har tradisjonell undervisning i andre fag?

14. Kan dere gi en kort oppsummering av din opplevelse med differensiert undervisning?

    o Både med tanke på deres rolle som lærere og i forhold til elevene

15. Hvordan opplever du at elevene har reagert på de differensierte gruppene?

    o Sosialt

    o Faglig

16. Vil du anbefale andre lærere å prøve ut denne formen for undervisning?

    o Hvorfor/Hvorfor ikke?

Interview guide

Topic: Differentiated instruction through differentiated groups: teacher perspective

1. Could you give a brief summary of you education? How many years have you worked as a teacher?
2. What experience do you have with differentiated instruction?
3. How would you define differentiated instruction?
4. Have you had any form of training or education in how to differentiate instruction?
   a. What kind of education/training?
5. Why did you want to work on differentiated instruction?
6. How did you divide the pupils into groups?
   a. What criteria did you base the organisation on?
   b. Did you identify typical mistakes among the pupils in this organising?
   c. If yes: Were these typical mistakes the foundation for the assignments you used during the period of differentiated groups?
   d. If no: What was the foundation for the assignments you used in the differentiated instruction?
7. What do you call the groups?
   a. To the pupils
8. What information did you give the pupils before you began the project?
9. How have you implemented differentiated instruction in your lessons?
   a. What kind of assignments did you use?
   b. Was there any difference in the assignments from group to group? Was there any difference within the group?
10. A lot of Norwegian research is against dividing pupils into homogenous groups, for instance, Solberg, Brevek and Louto (2017), claim that differentiate instruction should occur in heterogeneous groups, what do you think about this?
11. How was the transition from a traditional classroom to a differentiated classroom for you?
12. Has the differentiated instruction had an impact on the amount of time you spend on work? How?
13. How has it been to do this project while you still have traditional instruction in other subjects?
14. Could you give a brief summary of you experience with differentiated instruction?
   a. Both in regards to your role as teacher and related to the pupils
15. How do you experience the way the pupils have reacted to the groups?
   a. Socially
   b. Academically
16. Would you recommend other teachers to try this approach to instruction?
   a. Why/Why not?