

Written Feedback in English

Teachers' Practices and Cognition

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Abstract

This study deals with written feedback on pupils' written texts and teachers' assessment practices and cognition. Providing effective, written feedback is a complex process that requires knowledge of the competency goal and development of methods for reducing the gap between pupil's current status and pupil's preferred state. Effective feedback is feedback that enhances pupils' learning. In order to enhance learning feedback should contain information related to the following questions: "Where am I going?"; "How am I going?"; "Where to next?" The answers to these questions provide feed up, feed back and feed forward. The three questions must be connected in order to result in pupils' greater achievement.

The data in this study consists of written feedback collected from teachers at an upper secondary school. The main objective of the study was to examine what kind of written feedback teachers provide to help their pupils further. The feedback texts were analyzed according to Kronholm-Cederberg's Response Triangle, divided into global and local text levels, and the terms defined above. Eight semi-standardized interviews were also conducted in order to examine teachers' assessment practices and cognition.

It is my experience that teachers' responses contained elements at both the local and global text levels with the exception of context at the global level. In terms of the three questions mentioned above, most responses contained clear information about feed back and feed forward, however, there is a lack of feed up (goals) in most of the written feedback texts. This is unfortunate since feed up must be clear in order for pupils to develop further and increase their learning. This study also showed that teachers in general know much about assessment. However, there seems to be a tension between teachers' knowledge and their practices. Teachers do not always tend to do what they know and believe.

Preface

This study deals with formative assessment, more specifically with written feedback in English and teachers' thoughts about assessment. I became very interested in the topic during my master's degree program at NTNU. At that time, I became aware of the educational significance of discovering what my pupils know and what they think in order to give them relevant feedback that could lead to better learning outcomes and improvements in my teaching. Hegel once said that nothing great in this world has been accomplished without passion. I would like to think that this is my passion.

Working with motivated, dedicated teachers has inspired me to attempt to make learning more effective for my pupils. At the same time, I see classrooms lacking formative assessment, and, in my opinion, to establish such practice will require significant change. Currently, secondary education places too much emphasis on summative assessment, and a shift away from testing and exams would improve the learning environment and increase pupils' learning and motivation. The attention must focus on continuous and systematic feedback.

Working in an upper secondary school, I find that providing feedback to pupils cannot be a straightforward process. There are many factors to consider which makes feeding back demanding. One needs to consider the number of pupils each teacher has. It is not uncommon for a class to consist of 30 pupils, thus making it very challenging to provide individual feedback. Finding enough time and space during a busy school day can also prove challenging. However the intention of feedback is clear. Teachers should always provide constructive feedback that moves learning forward. Effective feedback, as I see it, should shape future learning and outcomes. High quality feedback should be a fundamental aspect in the learning process of all pupils.

Two years after I started my master's program, the time has come to thank all those who have helped me along the way. First, I would like to thank my parents for the general education and their continuous support. You have taught me the value of education, and I am so grateful to you both. Thank you to my supervisors Tale Margrethe Guldal and Inger Langseth for their valuable feedback and constructive criticism. I feel the utmost gratitude and respect for you both. At times when I became considerably confused, you always managed to say the right thing. My sincere thanks go to all my colleagues who provided me with the research material

necessary to finish this thesis. Thank you for showing interest in my work and speaking words of encouragement.

I am especially indebted to my girlfriend for her understanding and her patience. Thank you for always making me do my best. I am blessed to have you in my life.

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Abstract	i
Preface.....	iii
1. Why Assessment?.....	1
2. Theoretical Background.....	5
2.1 Summative and Formative Assessment	5
2.2 The Relationship between Formative Assessment and Summative Assessment	11
2.3 Feedback.....	12
2.3.1 Three Feedback Questions	15
2.3.2 Four Levels of Feedback	18
2.3.3 Grades	23
2.3.4 Seven Principles of Effective Feedback Practice	26
2.4 Feedback on Written Texts	26
2.4.1 Interpreting Teachers' Feedback.....	30
2.4.2 Teachers' Written Responses in English, Early Research	33
2.4.3 Assessing English	34
3. Method.....	37
3.1 Qualitative Research	37
3.2 Data Collection from Written Feedback.....	38
3.3 Phenomenology.....	42
3.4 Interviews with Teachers	43
3.4.1 Selecting the Participants.....	45
3.4.2 Interview Guide	46
3.4.3 Conducting Interviews.....	47
3.4.4 Working with Interview Material	49
3.5 Reliability and Validity	50
3.6 Ethical Challenges.....	51
4. Analysis and Results	53
4.1 Teachers' Written Feedback – Practices	54
4.1.1 Orthography Related Response.....	54
4.1.2 Lexical Related Response	56
4.1.3 Syntax Related Response	57
4.1.4 Disposition Related Response	57
4.1.5 Genre and Content Related Response	58

4.1.6 Context Related Response.....	59
4.2 Feed Back, Feed Up and Feed Forward	62
4.3 Teachers Thoughts and Reflections on the Assessment Practice	68
4.3.1 Purpose of Assessment	68
4.3.2 Provision of Feedback - How?	69
4.3.3 Pupils' Involvement in Assessment	71
4.3.4 Pupils' Use of Feedback.....	73
4.3.5 Adjustment of the Lesson.....	75
4.3.6 Challenges and Improvements.....	75
4.3.7 Interpersonal Aspect of Feedback.....	77
5 Conclusion and Final Remarks.....	81
5.1 Final Thoughts	81
Bibliography:.....	I
List of Figures.....	IV
List of Tables.....	IV
Appendix.....	V

1. Why Assessment?

Teachers understand intuitively that assessment is part of their work, but at one point or another we start wondering what assessment actually accomplishes. One way of addressing this question is to look at some answers that have been around for decades and some recent answers.

Assessing pupils is partly about gathering the data needed to assign pupils their grades and certification. In terms of grading, Popham stated: “The more frequent and varied the evidence of student accomplishments, the more judiciously the teacher can assign to students the grades they deserve” (Popham 2011: 12). Assessment is also a method for motivating pupils. I believe that teachers use tests as a device to motivate their pupils to do their best. However, a more vital purpose of assessment is to diagnose pupils’ weaknesses and strengths.

Weaknesses discovered through assessment can form the basis of further instruction, and by identifying pupils’ current status teachers can enhance pupils’ learning and already mastered skills can be instructionally avoided (Popham 2011).

Another purpose of assessment is for teachers to monitor pupils’ progress. Through assessment, teachers determine whether pupils make adequate improvement. According to Popham (2011) teachers certainly can often, unofficially, detect in their teaching that their students are not making satisfactory progress. However, more often than not, teachers tend to believe that they teach well and that their pupils do make progress. Because of these beliefs, without formal assessment, teachers can wrongly assume that pupils are progressing when in fact there is no actual progress. If pupils do not make adequate progress, teachers need to adjust their lessons and perhaps differentiate and modify their instructional approach (Popham 2011).

Yet another purpose of assessment, in this case formative, is to move the learning forward. During their empirical studies, Black and William determined that progress-monitoring assessment can increase pupils’ learning. They stated, “There is a body of firm evidence that formative assessment is an essential component of classroom work and that its development can raise standards of achievement” (Black and William 1998:148).

Moreover, assessment also shows teachers the effectiveness of their teaching. It confirms that the instructional approach used by the teacher seems to be working and that it does not need

much alteration, if any. On the other hand, if post testing shows that pupils' learning outcomes have not improved, then adjustments must be made. Even though this is not the only way to determine whether teachers should change their instructional approaches, it is a fairly good indicator.

In addition to the traditional purposes for assessment mentioned above, there are also some current reasons provided as to why teachers should be familiar with assessment theory. One reason is an increasing interest in public perceptions of educational effectiveness. According to Popham (2011), teachers' effectiveness is strongly motivated and influenced by nationally standardized achievement tests. The way that pupils perform on national tests, which are published and made public, will have an impact on every teacher. This in turn has an impact on the assessment that teachers employ in their classrooms. Public opinion on education is more significant than educators would like to think.

Finally, I would like to mention the evaluation of teachers. Pupils' performance on tests is one indicator often used to evaluate teachers. Clearly, however, performance on tests depends on pupils' abilities and capacities. But in Norway, there is no history of teacher appraisal. Teachers are implicitly evaluated through Pupils Surveys which are mandatory for all Norwegian schools. There are mainly two questions based on teacher appraisal according to the Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training (2011):

- How often do teachers tell you what you need to do to improve in school?
- Do you tell teachers what you need help with to do better in school?

Other than these two questions, the national quality assessment system (NKVS) conducts no implicit appraisal of teachers. Nonetheless there has been a great deal of discussion about this topic in the past 20 years. There has been much disagreement on whether teacher appraisal should be part of quality assessment. Part of this discussion concerns whether pupils can distinguish between the teacher as an individual and the teacher's practice in the classroom (Norwegian Directorate for Education and Training 2011).

Assessing pupils and giving pupils feedback is a major part of a teacher's role in education. Feedback is given to assess students' achievements and to specify what the next step in their learning course should be. This thesis deals with elements and aspects of written feedback, which is perhaps the most common practice of feedback in schools today. In my experience, feedback has been a one-way practice, going from the teacher to the pupil. Today, many

additional forms of feedback have emerged, such as student-teacher, student-student and student self-assessment. My focus in this thesis is mainly teacher-student feedback. My two-part research question is: What kind of written feedback do teachers provide in English and what are the teachers' reflections on their assessment practice? To answer the first part of my research question, I analyze teachers' written feedback texts on pupils' written assignments. To answer the second part, I examine the interviews conducted during this study. The research in this study took place at a combined upper secondary school, with 720 pupils in general studies and vocational studies in English. It is my experience that the education and the environment in this school were influenced by cultural diversity and that the school's main emphasis is to develop a learning environment that enriches pupils' academic, cultural, and social skills.

2. Theoretical Background

In chapter 2 I discuss the theoretical background for this study. The chapter is divided into four sections. In the first part of this chapter I define summative and formative assessment in general, before I write about the relationship between these two processes in section two. In section about feedback I write about the requirements for effective feedback and purpose of feedback before I present the different levels of feedback. The last section in this chapter deals with feedback on written works in English.

2.1 Summative and Formative Assessment

Assessment can be divided into two categories: high-stakes and low-stakes assessment. Low-stakes assessment has little influence on pupils' future education. The term low-stakes implies day-to-day assessment. Such assessment is based on classroom work, oral activity or end of chapter tests. According to Butt (2010), these results assessments do not impact the pupils' future, and the main idea of such assessment is to enhance learning. High-stakes assessment, on the other hand, relates to examinations and other tests that influence the pupils' education and life. The well-known types of summative assessment are the high-stakes examinations at the end of a school year or the grades given to pupils at the end of a term. These assessments signify the acquisition of competency goals (Butt 2010).

Summative assessment normally

involves tests that are infrequent, isolated from normal teaching and learning, carried out on special occasions with formal rituals, and often conducted by methods over which individual teachers have little or no control (Black 2003 in Butt 2010:53).

Harlen (2008) pointed out some similar features in his discussion of summative assessment. The assessment takes place at a certain time and is not a recurring process. The criteria are the same for all pupils, and the assessment is conveyed in terms of level, grade or score. The pupils have little impact on the process itself (Harlen 2008 in Butt 2010). Thus, summative assessment is a gathering of evidence of learning after a certain period of classroom instruction. Pupils are tested, and their results are compared to other pupils' results in terms of

success on certain learning outcomes. This form of testing usually seeks to compare pupils' mastery of skills in terms of a selected set of goals (Greenstein 2010).

Formative assessment, on the other hand, has a long history, but became a particular focus of educators and researchers during the 1980s. The British Educational Research Association (BERA), Policy Task Group on Assessment outlines formative assessment in terms of "monitoring and informing teaching decisions on a day-to-day basis" (Harlen, Gipps, Broadfoot and Nuttall in Torrance and Pryor 2002:12). Both formative assessment and formative feedback are significant learning instruments. All activities that in some way create feedback or feed-forward pupils' learning success can be called formative assessment. And all interactions between pupils and teachers are to a certain degree formative. As teachers, we need to be aware of the impact our contact has on pupils' learning and motivation (Irons 2008).

Black and Wiliam defined formative assessment as:

All those activities undertaken by teachers and by their students in assessing themselves, which provide formative feedback to shape and develop the teaching and learning activities in which both teachers and students are engaged. This becomes formative assessment when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching to meet the needs of students or by students themselves to change the way they work at their own learning. (Black and Wiliam 1998 in Irons 2008: 8)

Sadler's definition of formative assessment centered on the idea of using assessment to mold pupils (Irons 2008). Sadler stated,

Formative assessment is concerned with how judgments about the quality of student responses (performance, pieces, or works) can be used to shape and improve students' competences by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial and error learning. (Sadler 1989 in Irons 2008: 17)

After researching approximately 700 publications, Black and Wiliam concluded that formative assessment increases pupils' knowledge and this finding was also supported by Torrance and Pryor (2002).

There are clear distinctions between formative and summative assessment both in terms of function and timing. Thus, summative assessment is usually carried out at the end of a course in order to assess pupils' performances for the purpose of a certificate. Formative assessment,

on the other hand, takes place continuously during a course and is defined as giving feedback to pupils in order to improve their learning (Torrance and Pryor 2002). The difference between formative and summative assessment is that formative assessment shows pupils the level of knowledge they have attained. It also shows them what they still need to do, in order to meet the expectations and standards of the syllabus. Summative assessment, on the other hand, indicates the pupil's attainment at a particular point in time.

Learning is a process influenced by what pupils and their teachers do in classrooms (Black and Wiliam 1998). At times faced with difficult and challenging situations, teachers must manage the situations successfully because this is the only way to enhance pupils' learning and raise the learning standards. Black and Wiliam (1998) compared the classroom to a black box where contributions from the outside are fed in or demanded. These contributions can be summarized as pupils, teachers, regulations, expectations, parents' worry, and pressure on pupils to do well. Some positive outputs may arise such as skilled pupils, good test results, pleased teachers, who are most likely exhausted. To be sure that the contributions result in improved outputs, we must be aware of what happens inside the black box, the classroom, and it is the teacher's job to make sure that what happens inside works well. According to Black and Wiliam, however, this is inadequate. Leaving this responsibility entirely to teachers is unfair, considering how many black-box contributions are out of their control. Policy makers must also be involved in raising standards and achieving better learning (Black and Wiliam 1998).

In any event, Black and Wiliam's starting point is that learning must be interactive. Teachers must be aware of pupils' learning progress and be able to adjust the lesson to the needs of the pupils, which vary from one pupil to the next. This can be done in a variety of ways, either through dialogue in the classroom, observation or written work. According to Black and Wiliam, formative assessment is defined as all activities carried out by teachers, in addition to activities by which pupils assess themselves, in order to provide feedback to adjust the lessons. It is worth repeating, "Such assessment becomes formative assessment when the evidence is actually used to adapt the teaching work to meet the needs" (Black and Wiliam 1998:2).

Black and Wiliam stated that formative assessment produces learning gains overall. They also stated that formative assessment enhances learning of low achievers, students who tend to

struggle in school. Continuous and systematic feedback has positive effects. In other words, formative feedback increases learning, but what does this concept actually imply?

- Changes in classroom practice and new methods of pedagogy
- Actively involvement of pupils in the process
- Teaching adjusted in response to assessment results
- Careful discussion of the relationship between assessment and motivation (Black and Wiliam 1998).

The OFSTED General Report (1996) listed some problems connected with assessment practice:

Marking is usually conscientious but often fails to offer guidance on how work can be improved. In a significant minority of cases, marking reinforces under-achievement and under-expectation by being too generous and unfocused. Information about pupil performance received by the teacher is insufficiently used to inform subsequent work. (in Black and Wiliam 1998:4).

In fact, assessment problems can be divided into three groups. The first deals with effective learning. The tests are mainly concerned with shallow learning. This can even be seen in classrooms where teachers work to develop understanding and a critical way of thinking. Many teachers, and especially in primary schools, tend to be more concerned with the quantity of work rather than to focus on the quality in relation to learning. The second problem is concerned with the negative impact. Frequent comparison of pupils may appear to pupils as competition and thus, to some pupils, as lack of ability. In this situation, grades rather than written feedback, are emphasized. The third problem is the managerial role of assessment. Feedback serves classroom management functions, rather than the learning needs of pupils. Too often teachers tend to know little about the needs of their pupils. Grading is given higher priority rather than assessing pupils in order to discover their needs.

According to Black and Wiliam (1998), policy makers are more committed to summative assessment rather than formative. This might be due to the belief that teachers already give enough attention to formative assessment, because, as noted above, every teacher-pupil interaction provides some sort of feedback and assessment. However, those who have studied education reforms still believe that formative assessment must continue to develop even further. Even though there has been some progress over the past two years, it is clear that

given the complexity of the national curriculum, formative assessment should be given a higher priority in education.

The question that all teachers should ask themselves is, “How can I improve formative assessment?” Most classrooms today, tend to focus on achieving the best grades possible instead of focusing on pupils’ actual learning. In fact, pupils hesitate to ask questions for at least two reasons: they feel self-conscious in front of their peers, and they fear disappointing the teacher. Pupils who make mistakes and struggle in school feel defeated. They find it is easier to step back instead of making an effort to learn. For these reasons, establishing a culture undergirded by the belief that everybody can succeed is imperative and formative assessment can be used to help establish such a culture. Furthermore, even though formative assessment helps all pupils, it greatly helps the so-called low achievers by dealing with specific problems, or in other words, formative assessment not only specifies where the pupil is in the learning process, but also how he or she should move forward. Black and Wiliam summarized this message like this: “Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils” (Black and Wiliam 1998:6).

Formative assessment is not just about observing and testing pupils: instruction and formative assessment are inseparable. According to Black and Wiliam choosing the right assignments and homework is essential. Choosing the right tasks in terms of the curriculum and giving pupils time to communicate their understanding is vital. “Opportunities for pupils to express their understanding should be designed into any piece of teaching, for this will initiate the interaction whereby formative assessment aids learning” (Black and Wiliam 1998:7).

Teachers, need to allocate time to pupils to engage in discussions of their comprehension of the syllabus in order to enhance knowledge and insight. Doing this provides a possibility for teachers to correct and respond to pupils’ understanding. However, teachers must be careful not to hinder pupils’ learning. The problem is that some teachers are looking for specific answers and therefore, are unable to deal with unexpected ones. Teachers’ reaction is to try to redirect the pupil to give the expected answer. This prevents the pupils from thinking on their own and leads them to try to guess the answers that teachers are looking for.

When teachers ask pupils questions in a classroom dialogue in order to check on learning, the main problem is that teachers do not allow pupils enough time to conceptualize an answer. Teachers, often unaware of this fact, tend to answer their own questions within just a few

seconds. Since this is the case, the types of questions that can be answered within couple of seconds are questions of fact, rather than questions that require reflection and critical thinking. Another factor may be that pupils do not even try to answer the question because they know that another question or even the answer will follow almost immediately. Indeed, only a few pupils usually even attempt to participate during a lesson. The teacher may feel that the lecture is going well, but only a handful of pupils actually manage to follow it, and even fewer participate in discussion or answer questions. To improve this situation, teachers must grant pupils more time to reply. Giving pupils the possibility to discuss in groups, jotting down answers might encourage all pupils to participate. “The dialogue between pupils and teacher should be thoughtful, reflective, focused to evoke and explore understanding, and conducted so that all pupils have an opportunity to think and express ideas” (Black and Wiliam 1998:8).

Formative feedback can also be achieved through class tests and homework. Black and Wiliam argued that short tests are better than long ones for formative assessment. But of course providing pupils with good questions is not an easy task, and teachers should collaborate in order to assemble such questions. On top of that, providing feedback only through grades has no impact on the actual learning process. Simply providing grades as feedback negatively affects low-achievers in particular, often proving to their teacher and themselves that they are just not clever enough. Black and Wiliam stated that giving pupils feedback that specifies the pupils’ weaknesses best enhances learning (Black and Wiliam 1998).

There is, of course, no easy way to improve assessment. However, teachers need to be realistic and make sure that they know enough about their pupils’ abilities and understandings in order to help improve their competencies through formative assessment. Teachers must take time to change existing practices, pupils’ views about learning, and even working methods of their pupils. Some pupils resist change, and we cannot ask pupils to change unless they experience the value and advantages of such change. Formative assessment works only if teachers believe that all pupils can learn if one removes obstacles, whether cognitive obstacles or obstacles connected to personal confidence (Black and Wiliam 1998). The next section examines in more detail the relationship between formative and summative assessment.

2.2 The Relationship between Formative Assessment and Summative Assessment

Maddelena Taras (2005) explored the relationship between formative assessment and summative assessment. Contrary to Black and Wiliam, Taras claimed that all assessment starts with summative assessment and defined formative assessment as a combination of summative assessment and feedback. She criticized Black and Wiliam for putting too much emphasis on formative assessment and for not investigating its connection with summative assessment. Therefore, to understand formative assessment fully, it is important to understand its development over time. The historical dimension of these terms is important. Scriven's use of the term *formative evaluation* raises some questions and might be confusing, and Taras (2005) contributes clearly to the distinction between evaluation and assessment.

According to Taras, assessment refers mainly to "judgments of pupils' work," and evaluation is "judgment regarding courses or course delivery, or the process of such judgments" (Taras 2005: 467). This judgment must be validated according to competency goals and may be generated by a grade or a comment. The process of assessment deals with phases required to instigate a judgment. This implies making comparisons with standards and goals; during the assessment process, these elements are constantly interacting.

Scriven (1967) argued that formative assessment, just as summative assessment, is a single process. In Scriven's definition, assessment is only formative if the feedback given implies that there is a gap between the acquired competency and the required standard. Taras' main argument, as I understand it, is that assessment cannot be formative if summative judgment has not preceded it (Taras 2005). In other words, summative assessment serves as a starting point or foundation for formative assessment. Summative assessment can be implicit, but formative assessment must be explicit. However, both formative assessment and summative assessment can also be explicit. Black and Wiliam (1998) preferred implicit summative assessment but Sadler (1998) preferred explicit summative assessment.

Taras (2005) pointed out that within an educational agenda, formative assessment can indicate two different perspectives. The first perspective, suggested by Sadler, shows formative assessment in a complicated, multi-criterion context. The second perspective portrays formative assessment as a method of classroom teaching pedagogy that enhances learning. This is the perspective that has been given a lot of attention by Black and Wiliam. Scriven's

interpretation of the relationship between formative assessment and summative assessment was that summative assessment centers around the product, but formative assessment puts an emphasis on the process and use of feedback. But according to Taras, whether one assesses a product or a process is actually the same.

I find Sadler's explanation of formative and summative assessment fascinating.

Formative assessment is concerned with how judgments about the quality of student responses (performances, pieces, or works) can be used to shape and improve the students' competence by short-circuiting the randomness and inefficiency of trial-and-error learning (Sadler 1989 in Taras 2005:472).

If a pupil uses the judgments to make a change, formative assessment is taking place even if the judgment itself is only summative. Sadler made it clear that summative assessment must come first. In other words, to enable feedback, there must be judgment of a product. The difference between formative assessment and summative assessment is that the learner uses formative assessment, thus implying that formative assessment must include feedback or results. Sadler actually lowered the profile of summative assessment, asserting that it just provides a basis for feedback.

After considering these definitions and positions on assessment, I have come to believe that summative assessment must take place in order to provide formative assessment. I agree with Taras that formative assessment must be seen as a combination of summative assessment and feedback. The feedback must imply that there is a gap between the pupils' current status and the required standard. These judgments must be used by the learner to enhance his or her competences. The next section of this thesis focuses on feedback and requirements for efficient feedback.

2.3 Feedback

According to Sadler effective, efficient feedback requires several characteristics. Sadler wrote, "Feedback requires knowledge of the standard or goal, skill in making multi criterion comparisons, and the development of ways and means for reducing the discrepancy between what is produced and what is aimed for" (Sadler 1989 in Taras 2005:471). Sadler declared that the first step in providing effective feedback must be summative assessment on which the

teacher then bases feedback for the pupil. The next step is to ascertain methods to reduce the gap between where the pupil is and where he needs to be. Thus, effective feedback is feedback which leads to learning.

Reducing the gap between pupils' understanding and the standard can be done through two methods. According to Sadler (1989), one method is through an affective process such as raising pupils' motivation, effort, and engagement. Another way of reducing discrepancy involves cognitive processes such as rearranging understanding, indicating right or wrong understandings of the syllabus, or providing new information and learning strategies to help the pupil understand the curriculum in a better way.

Hattie and Timperley (2007) also stated that well provided feedback can have a major impact on learning and success. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), providing feedback within a learning context and as part of a teaching context is essential. Furthermore, feedback is mostly effective when it tackles mistakes related to a specific task and not a complete lack of understanding. If understanding of the material is lacking then providing feedback is a waste of time. Feedback is ineffective when provided in a vacuum (Hattie and Timperley 2007). It is mostly efficient when related to a specific assignment. Feedback is mostly useful when it provides cues and support to pupils. It can take the form of a video-, audio-, or computer-assisted instructional feedback, but it must relate to a specific goal.

Depending on the method, providing feedback can also have negative effects. Programmed instruction, admiration and approval, and punishment are the least efficient means of increasing pupils' competence. Rewards and praise alone should not even be considered feedback because they almost do not provide any task information and are not directly connected to learning. In particular, feedback is most sufficient when it provides information on pupils' accurate rather than inaccurate answers (Hattie and Timperley 2007).

As noted above, the main goal of feedback is to reduce gaps between pupils' current understanding and the competence goal. Teachers and pupils should ask three main questions: Where am I going (the goal)? How am I going? Where to next? Efficient, effective feedback must answer all of these three questions. Answers to these questions provide "feed up", "feed back" and "feed forward". However, the answers to these questions have different efficiency in reducing discrepancy. Hattie and Timperley argue that the efficiency of an answer depends on "the level of task performance, the level of process of understanding how to do a task, the

regulatory or metacognitive process level, and/or the self or personal level” (Hattie and Timperley 2007:86).

There are different methods of decreasing discrepancies between pupil’s current status and the goal, but not all of them are effective. Those which are effective include pupils’ upturn in motivation and effort, which leads to managing a more complex task or appreciating the experience rather than seeing it as another bit of drudgery. Pupils tend to increase both their effort and motivation when the goal intended is well defined and the potential for success is high. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), pupils also tend to acquire their error detection skills that they use to self-assess. If pupils have a certain understanding of a task, error detection skills can influence them to develop strategies for gaining further information on completing the task.

Other ways of decreasing discrepancy may not be so effective. One example is that pupils sometimes forsake all goals and by doing that also remove any goals. According to Hattie and Timperley (2007), a consequence of this is that pupils’ motivation to search for further or other goals decreases. Pupils may also lower their standards by arranging less challenging goals, and in so doing, not really achieve according to their capabilities. Teachers can intervene in this process by decreasing discrepancy through clear, relevant, and challenging goals. By setting specific goals pupils’ attention is more focused and teachers’ feedback is more directed. Other ways in which teachers can reduce gaps is to enhance pupils’ motivation and effort through feedback, or establish a learning environment that enables pupils to discover their detection skills.

According to Wiliam (2011) teachers should perform more like coaches. In their work they not only recognize the talent, they foster and develop it and they make the athletes achieve more than they thought possible. And they do this by providing feedback that moves learning. This is also what schools should strive for instead of sorting pupils out according to different levels.

In conclusion, feedback is about reducing discrepancy between the present state and the preferred state. Just informing the pupils of a current state of achievement and not providing mechanisms to help them move forward is useless. Teachers need to know how to split learning into components or steps that will help the learner move step by step until the goal has been reached. In the next section, I focus on the three questions that teachers should consider when providing feedback to their pupils.

2.3.1 Three Feedback Questions

An important aspect of teaching is to be able to provide beneficial assignments and positive learning environments to pupils. However, it also involves providing feedback to pupils and using this information in order to adjust the teaching to the level of the pupils. Feedback should relate directly to the questions in Hattie and Timperley's model illustrated below in Figure 1: Where am I going? How am I going? And where to next?

The model is a summary of effective feedback by first showing the purpose of providing pupils with written feedback and second, how teachers and pupils themselves can reduce the discrepancy between pupils' current status and pupils' target status. This is one of the models I will be using to analyze feedback texts that I have collected from the participants.

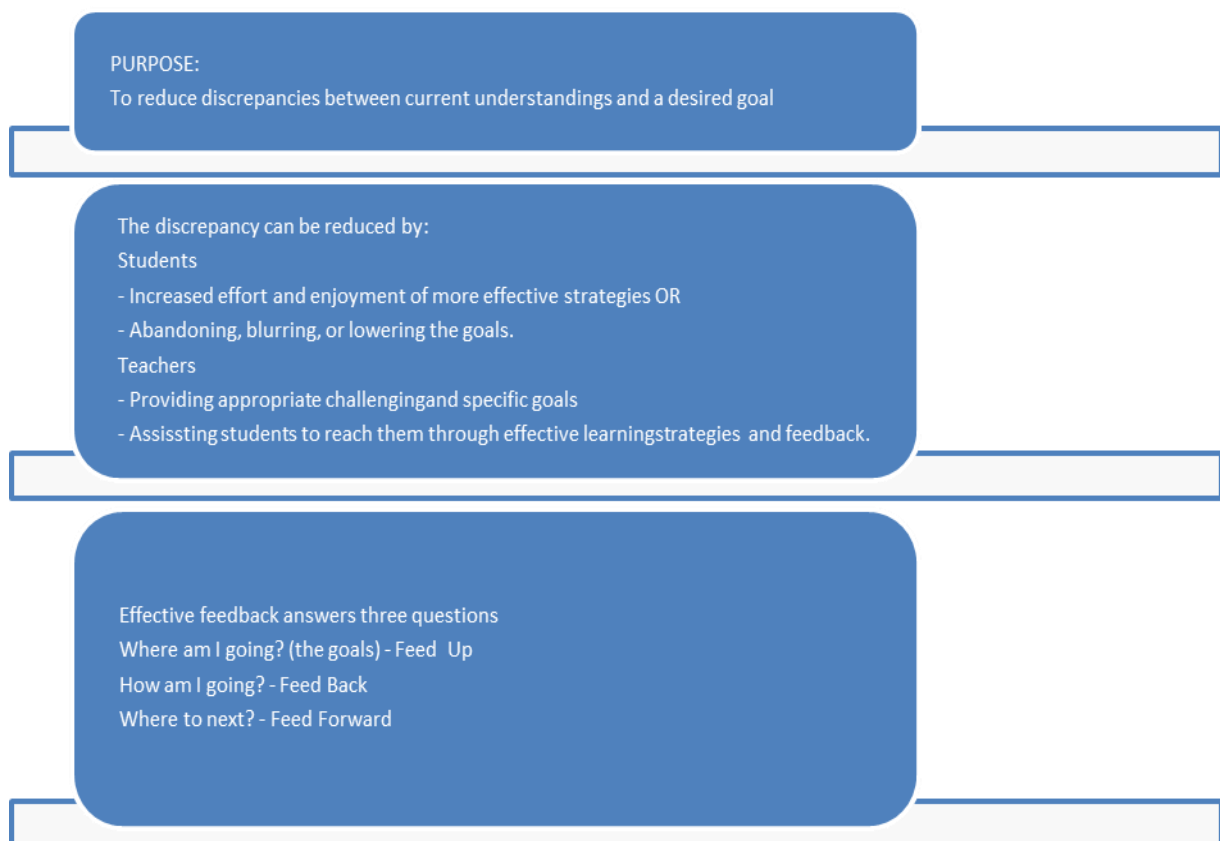


Figure 1. A Model of Feedback by Hattie and Timperley (2007)

2.3.1.1 Feed Up

The concept of “feed-up” provides pupils information about the intended learning outcomes of the goals that they are working toward, in this case, a written text in English. Specifically, these goals are related to language and grammar, text structure, and social and cultural aspects of English-speaking countries (Knowledge promotion, English). Black and Wiliam (1998) asserted that providing beneficial, stimulating tasks and effective feedback will result in pupils’ greater achievement. Feedback is therefore closely related to the task and the goals set for the specific task. Goals provide pupils with information

As to what type or level performance is to be attained so that they can direct and evaluate their actions and efforts accordingly. Feedback allows them to set reasonable goals and to track their performance in relation to their goals so that adjustments in effort, direction, and even strategy can be made as needed. (Locke and Latham 1990 in Hattie and Timperley 2007:88)

Goals need to be clear in terms of when and how pupils should increase learning; otherwise they will hardly enhance learning. Setting clear, appropriate goals helps pupils develop further goals as they experience success in accomplishing the previous ones, a process that leads to continuous learning (Hattie and Timperley 2007). If learning goals are weakly defined, feedback cannot lead pupils to better understanding. If goals are unclear, pupils cannot detect the gap between current status and intended learning, and thus they cannot perceive a need to reduce the gap. In this situation, a major problem is that feedback may not relate to learning goals in the syllabus. Hattie and Timperley provided an example: Teachers often give feedback to students on spelling, presentation, and length of an essay when the stated goal is “creating mood in a story” (Hattie and Timberley 2007:89). Such feedback does not relate to the syllabus’s stated goal and is therefore insufficient and even misleading.

It is vital that pupils commit to achieving the goal because then they are more likely to seek and receive feedback. Commitment to the goal must be explicitly established in order to engage and motivate student, to establish their openness to and need for feedback, to provide feedback that leads to better understanding, and, negatively, to avoid pupils reducing their attention and efforts. Of course, teachers should not assume that all students share a commitment to academic goals. As Black and Wiliam observed, “The provision of challenging assignments and extensive feedback lead to greater student engagement and higher achievement.” (Black and Wiliam 1998 in Hattie and Timperley 2007:88)

2.3.1.2 Feed Back

When teachers give “feed-back” they try to answer the question, “How am I going?” This involves not only making pupils aware of their progress toward the goal, but also how to continue further. At this stage, teachers often face difficulties and do not always give adequate answers to their pupils. Effective feedback contains information about how pupils can develop, and, pupils frequently seek feedback even though they do not always like the reply. Teachers very often believe that in order to answer the question “How am I going?” they must turn to testing. Hattie and Timperley argued the following:

Too often, attention to this question leads to assessment or testing, whereas this is not the fundamental conception underlying this question. “Tests” are but one method used by teachers and students to address this question and, . . . , often fail to convey feedback information that helps teachers and their students to know how they are going. (Hattie and Timperley 2007:89)

Feedback can be accomplished by methods other than testing, for just one example, through informal dialogue in the classroom.

2.3.1.3 Feed Forward

The concept “feed forward” answers the question, “Where to next?” Or to put it another way, “What activities must pupils next undertake in order to make progress?” Feed forward should increase pupils’ possibilities for learning, challenges, self-alteration in the process of learning and a variety of approaches for tackling different assignments. Of course, feed forward must be based on information about what pupils comprehend and what they do not.

All three questions, “Where am I going?”; “How am I going?”; “Where to next?” have to be connected, for only then will the power of feedback be effective. I used Hattie and Timperley’s model to analyze the written feedback provided by the participants in the study. In the next section, I focus on the four levels teachers may use to provide feedback, as distinguished by Hattie and Timberley.

2.3.2 Four Levels of Feedback

There are four levels of feedback and some are more effective than others. The three questions mentioned above must work together at the four levels. The first level of feedback is concerned with supplying more information for a specific task or a specific product. For instance, a teacher might tell a pupil that she needs to include specific information or a certain item in her product or perform a certain action to complete a task. The second level of feedback is concerned with the process of forming a product. This level involves learning processes and understanding of how to complete an assignment. Hattie and Timperley provided this example: a teacher might say to a pupil, “This page will make more sense if you use the strategies we talked about earlier” (Hattie and Timperley 2007:90). The third level is feedback centered on self-alteration and self-evaluation level in order to become more involved in a task. At this level, pupils are more encouraged to finish the task. The fourth and final level is applied to the “self” or the pupil personally. Examples are, “Well done” and “Great job”. However, Hattie and Timperley (2007) also asserted that the fourth level is the least effective one.

2.3.2.1 Level One: Feedback about the Task

Level one, feedback about the task involves assessment of how tasks are completed. This implies pupils’ making decisions against giving wrong answers and acquiring information needed to solve a problem or complete a task. As the common type of feedback given, it is frequently called corrective feedback. In fact, pupils direct 90% of their classroom questions to the information level. However, corrective feedback should not be confused with information at the self level, discussed below. At the task level, feedback is not given because pupils lack the information to solve a problem, but because of misunderstandings. Too much detailed feedback within a level may have an effect opposite to the one desired. Feedback should always be directed towards the procedure necessary to solve a problem or complete a task; otherwise, the feedback can actually reduce pupils’ attention to what is needed for a solution or completion. Too detailed feedback also causes pupils to concentrate on the current goal itself, instead of developing strategies to achieve it. In addition, the effectiveness of feedback depends on the pupil’s attention to information provided, usually by the teacher,

during work on the assignment. Finally, this level of feedback is best when it helps pupils develop strategies to eliminate errors (Hattie and Timperley 2007).

2.3.2.2 Level two: Feedback Centered on the Process Relating to the Task

Feedback at the second level centers on the process relating to the task. This feedback level concerns the detection of errors. By detecting their errors, pupils will manage to provide feedback for themselves. Their self-assessment may include needing to work out a new strategy or simply needing to ask for help. When pupils encounter obstacles in completing a task, the first thing they do is trying to assess how likely they are to solve the task if they invest more effort or change their plans. Put simply, completion depends on their effort and motivation to reduce the discrepancy. The teacher should provide cue mechanisms, and these are most beneficial when they help pupils reject errors and provide help to strategize. At this level, feedback helps, more than at the task level, to increase deep learning (Blazer et al. 1989 in Hattie and Timperley 2007).

2.3.2.3 Level Three: Self-Regulation

Feedback at the third level deals with self-regulation. This feedback contains interaction among dedication, control, and self-confidence, indicating methods the pupils use toward the learning goal. This feedback contains multiple factors, and according to Hattie and Timperley these are the

capability to create internal feedback and to self-assess, the willingness to invest effort into seeking and dealing with feedback information, the degree of confidence or certainty in the correctness of the response, the attributions about success or failure, and the level of proficiency at seeking help. (Hattie and Timperley 2007)

Self-assessment is a central function at this level. Pupils should strive to attain self-assessment proficiency, which involves the skill to examine their knowledge and their cognitive strategies. It is key for pupils to develop the metacognitive skills of self-assessment, including not only the ability to examine their level of comprehension, but also their effort and the views of others about their presentations. When pupils gain the ability to self-assess, they will

also know when and how to seek and receive feedback. Unfortunately, pupils perceived as low achievers rarely apply self-regulating strategies in their learning. Instead, they rely mostly on external influences, such as the teacher, for feedback. Neither do low achievers use already provided feedback to increase future learning and self-regulating strategies (Hattie and Timperley 2007).

All pupils should be involved in the assessment process. It is a well-known fact that pupils' participation can increase their learning and motivation. However, studies in Norway showed that pupils' participation in assessment is not very common. According to Hopfenbeck (2001), a solution to this problem might be to bring assessment and self-regulated learning closer together by teaching pupils how to evaluate their own presentations and increase their motivation and learning by doing so. The central aspect in self-regulated learning is to plan, participate in, and supervise one's own learning, always considering the changes needed to achieve the goals. Self-regulated learners use teacher feedback to supervise their goals (Hopfenbeck 2011).

However, self-regulation is a learned skill and thus should be taught. Studies have shown that pupils benefit a great deal from having teachers who are clear, evident leaders and who engage in formative assessment. Norwegian parliamentary directives require clear goals for pupils' learning and the establishment of criteria for the achievement of these goals and for formative assessment. The directives also state that pupils establishing their own goals and evaluating their own learning increase their motivation (Stortingsmelding in Hopfenbeck 2011).

Part of formative assessment means that pupils increase their learning when they realize what is expected of them. Specifically, pupils receive feedback indicating the quality of their work and, suggestions on how to do better. Finally, pupils become involved in their learning process through self-assessment, and self-assessment is closely linked to self-regulated learning. Thus, self-assessment is an important aspect of formative assessment; however, establishing self-assessment can be quite a challenge. To help pupils become more autonomous, teachers should do the following:

1. Establish clear competency goals and success criteria
2. Reflect upon learning through dialogue and questions
3. Introduce formative assessment

4. Enhance self-assessment (Hopfenbeck 2011:27).

A more autonomous learning style should oblige pupils to step back from their learning process, engage in dialogues with others and then return to the learning process. Each pupil should reflect on his own learning process. Still, simply learning study techniques is far from enough. Pupils should learn the metacognitive skills that relate to the subject they are studying (Stobart 2008 in Hopfenbeck 2011).

Self-regulation increases and develops with age, and one would expect this to be reflected in the school system's curriculum and culture. Nonetheless, the Ministry of Education's survey on the Bedre Vurderingspraksis Project revealed that the younger the pupils, the more they participated in the assessment process and in assessing their own work.

Hopfenbeck (2011) states that information about competency goals and criteria for assessment tend to motivate pupils and enhance their learning because pupils know what is expected of them. It must be said, however, that a teacher needs to balance what pupils should know and should not know so that the assessment criteria do not inhibit the learning process. It can be quite a challenge to equalize between control and autonomy. Another challenge is pupils' perception of their identity and how their self-perception correlates with autonomy. In many cases it is impossible for pupils to conform to the expectations of the teacher because by doing so they go against their own identity. Therefore, teachers need to increase their knowledge about identity, gender, and motivation in order to improve the learning environment and introduce self-assessment. Researchers point out the need to develop pupils' knowledge about assessment to meet these challenges (Hopfenbeck 2011).

2.3.2.4 Level Four: Feedback about the Self

The final level of feedback has not proven to be very efficient, but nevertheless, it is the kind of feedback that teachers use too often instead of the first three levels. The fourth level provides no answer to any of the three questions discussed above and does not positively impact learning gains. Specifically, feedback such as "Good job!" does not contain the task information needed to increase pupils' engagement and commitment to learning. The only way in which feedback about the self can have an effect on the pupil is if the feedback leads to a change in terms of effort devoted to learning. However, teachers must differentiate

between compliments directed toward the self or toward the product or task itself, and those focused on effort and self-regulation. One example of the latter might be, “You did very well because you managed to apply this concept to finish the task.” This type of feedback can actually increase self-efficacy and, in turn, positively affect present and future tasks. (Hattie and Timperley 2007)

The four levels of assessment are closely connected to timing and the timing of feedback is decisive. It should not be given too early. The consequence is that pupils do not learn. If pupils attempt to solve a problem or complete a task after having looked at the key, they are likely to learn less than when they make some attempts at solution or completion before receiving feedback.(Wiliam 2011)

The nature of feedback is also of vital importance. A study conducted in an upper secondary school engaged approximately 60 pupils in arithmetical tasks. Feedback was given either as scaffolding or in terms of response to a correct answer. Of these pupils, 50% received a scaffolded response, and the other half received the solution and then given a new task. The pupils who were given the scaffolded response enhanced their learning much more than the pupils who were given the solutions (Day and Cordon 1993 in Wiliam 2011). Of course, this result was not very surprising. The pupils who were given the solution were not given the possibility to engage in learning and to move their learning forward. An example of scaffolded feedback is provided below:

Teacher: “What part of the assignment do you not understand?”

Pupil: “I do not understand any of it.”

Teacher: “Well, the first part is just like the last problem you did. Then we add one more variable. See if you can find out what it is, and I’ll come back in a few minutes (Saphier 2005 in Wiliam 2011).

This example illustrates a typical reply from a pupil, possibly due to the unknown nature of the assignment. However, the scaffolded feedback from the teacher might be just supportive enough to oblige pupil to look at the task in detail and to present a potential path toward a solution.

Unfortunately, feedback can also be counterproductive. Feedback aims to close the gap between the current performance and the goal, but when feedback states that pupils have

exceeded the goal, several things can happen. Instead of adopting more demanding goals, pupils may use the feedback as confirmation that they can reduce efforts. Also, pupils who achieve their goals quite effortlessly may believe that the goals are actually insignificant and discard the feedback. When feedback implies that the goal has not been achieved, several reactions are possible. A pupil might decide to compromise on a lower grade because a higher and achievable grade requires too much work. Another reaction might be to desert the goal completely because repeated feedback seems to indicate failure; the pupil believes the goal is not within her reach. Another consequence might be that pupils who have made a contribution reject feedback because it is indistinctive. The result is lowered commitment. And the last reaction might be the one intended by the teacher – pupils to increase their learning efforts to reach the goal (Wiliam 2011).

These reactions are summarized in Table 1, below.

Table 1. Possible Responses to Types of Feedback

Response Type	Feedback indicates that performance exceeds goal	Feedback indicates that performance falls short of goal
Change behavior	Exert less effort	Increase effort
Change goal	Increase aspiration	Reduce aspiration
Abandon goal	Decide goal is too easy	Decide goal is too hard
Reject feedback	Ignore feedback	Ignore feedback

(Wiliam 2011:115)

Only two of the responses in Table 1 increase pupils’ accomplishments; the other six lower it or have no effect. However, predicting the reaction is difficult because it depends on the individual pupil, on the task, and on the relationship between the pupil and the teacher.

Taking all this into account, it becomes obvious that providing feedback is a complex process.

2.3.3 Grades

Black and Wiliam (1998) advocated a feedback containing comments rather than grades. A principle developed by Alfie Kohn urged, “Never grade students while they are still learning” (Alfie Kohn 1994 in Wiliam 2011: 123). As soon as teachers start giving pupils grades, the learning stops, a situation that we must take into and then develop assessment procedures

accordingly. Wiliam argued that if grades inhibit learning, then they should not be given as frequently as they are today. He also suggested giving grades to pupils only once during the marking period. Most educators are aware that Wiliam's suggestion is good practice, but still continue to assign grades because parents want them. Most surveys indicate that parents would like to retain the grading system in order to feel well informed about their children. However, this is certainly not the only way to be informed about their children's accomplishments. In fact, many parents really do not have an understanding of what grades actually stand for. Paul Dressel cogently observed:

A grade can be regarded only as an inadequate report of an inaccurate judgment by a biased and variable judge of the extent to which a student has attained an undefined level of mastery of an unknown proportion of an indefinite material. (Paul Dressel 1957 in Wiliam 2011:123)

It is not very surprising that providing pupils with comments rather than grades has a greater impact on pupils' learning. Grades tend to enhance involvement, but they do not enhance performance (Butler 1987 in Hattie and Timperley 2007). Butler discovered that providing comments, as opposed to marks alone or comments followed by marks alone, actually led to learning gains. We need a system of assessment which is developed to encourage learning and find systems to register data that tell something about pupils' learning. An assessment system should empower pupils and teachers' reflection on long-term learning, and feedback should trigger thinking.

Kari Smith (2009) stated that interaction between assessment or feedback and motivation can greatly influence pupils' learning. This interaction should be productive in order to increase motivation. Harlen and Diakin-Crick said the following about the impact of testing the pupils:

There is strong evidence of the negative impact of testing on pupils' motivation, though it is varied in the degree with pupils' characteristics and with the conditions of their learning. (Harlen and Diakin-Crick in Smith 2009)

But it is not the testing itself that has a negative impact on pupils' motivation; it is rather the use of the assessment results. The effect of the assessment is certain to have a negative impact on pupils' motivation if the grade is remote from any form of written comment. This will especially have an impact on the low achievers.

The purpose of assessment, among other things, is to close the gap between pupils' current status and the goal. This gap should be perceived by the pupils as a positive dissatisfaction.

Teachers should work to install feelings of self-efficacy in their pupils which will have a positive effect on pupils' motivation. It is a great responsibility to assess pupils. The teacher should try to create a positive sense of dissatisfaction which makes pupils want to achieve the future goals. It is this dissatisfaction that will encourage the pupils, however, if the dissatisfaction is too broad it will only create the opposite effect. This means that the assessment should be individual. One reason for this is that all pupils should be challenged in order to keep their motivation.

Pupils who are given grades in addition to comments tend to look at the grades first. Next they compare their grades with those of their classmates. When they engage in these comparisons, their instinct is to protect their well-being instead of learning something new. Their priority should instead be improvement rather than comparison with others. Wiliam (2011) provided the example of a swimming teacher who gridded pupils' names and four assessment criteria: arms, legs, breathing, and timing. The teacher would assign scores of 0, 1, or 2 in each column of the grid, according to achievement. The teacher did not want to add up the scores because this would be ineffective in planning further action in the learning process. In this way, the grid enabled both teachers and pupils to focus on the aspect of swimming that required attention.

Some teachers are dissatisfied with pupils' work that is not of a high norm. According to Wiliam some teachers give only one grade, an A, or the highest grade. If the pupil fails to achieve an A, the work is returned to the pupil with feedback for improvement. This process makes clear that only the best is good enough. Everybody can do excellent work they only need more guidance and support. Quality is more important than quantity.

Elementary teachers tend to provide pupils more feedback than, unfortunately, teachers provide to upper secondary pupils. Upper secondary schools tend to rely heavily on grading, but elementary school teachers emphasize extensive feedback for younger pupils. On the other hand, it is very possible that teachers provide feedback on how to increase learning without the pupils actually noticing or comprehending the teacher's pedagogical methods (Hopfenbeck 2011).

2.3.4 Seven Principles of Effective Feedback Practice

According to the seven principles of effective feedback, established by educators Gibbs and Simpson at Oxford Brookes University, good feedback accomplishes the following (Gibbs and Simpson 2004 in Dysthe et al. 2010):

1. Focuses on performance, helps pupils understand what good performance is
2. Enhances self-assessment and initiates reflection
3. Gives detailed information about pupils' learning
4. Provides information to teacher about adjusting of teaching methods
5. Closes the gap between current status and preferred status.
6. Increases pupils' self-esteem
7. Inspires conversations between teachers and pupils (Gibbs and Simpson 2004 in Dysthe et al. 2010).

Most pupils wish for immediate and detailed feedback. However, teachers should focus on some elements rather than everything which is not good enough. Commenting on everything that is not good enough might be quite demotivating for pupils. Teachers must consciously, purposefully prioritize. Giving effective feedback implies having knowledge about the criteria and purpose.

Understanding feedback is decisive for enhancing the learning of pupils. For example, in written assignments, a common type of feedback addresses structures of the text. Teachers might tell their pupils to pay attention to how they structure their texts, but pupils might not understand the concept of structure, or know what revisions would improve the text. One solution is for pupils to ask teachers for examples. From the teachers' viewpoint, however, it seems writing feedback wastes time because pupils do not actually use the feedback to enhance their learning. A method for ensuring pupils do use the feedback is to give them class time to go through the comments and revise their texts.

2.4 Feedback on Written Texts

When teachers read a text with the intention of providing feedback there are three different ways of doing this; reader based feedback, criteria based feedback, and writer based feedback

(Dysthe, Hertzberg and Løkensgard 2010). Løkensgard wrote mainly about feedback in response groups, where pupils give response to each other, however I believe that this can also be applied to responses provided by teachers. I believe that these three focuses mentioned above should lay the foundation of every feedback.

The reader based response tries to answer the following question, “How do I, as the reader, react to the text?” Reader based response can be given by anybody because this kind of response is subjective. It implies the reader’s subjective response to the text. To use an analogy, the reader reacts to the text in the same way as an audience reacts to a play- immediately and personally. Criteria based response considers formal requirements placed on a text. It deals with the text’s vocational content and structure and therefore requires that the reader possess certain knowledge, for instance, expertise on the topic. During my thesis writing, my supervisor gave me mainly criteria based response, that is, specific advice for modification of the text. In scientific texts there are some formal requirements that should be commented on: genre, structure and coherence, presence of theory, argumentation, reasoning, professional conventions, sources, formal requirements and originality (Løkensgard 2008). Reader based and criteria based responses depend on each other, and the best type of response is a combination of these two. Løkensgard (2008) suggested that the reader based response should come first, and indeed, reader based, subjective response is normally the first step of the feedback. Writer based feedback concerns the pedagogical and psychological aspects of feedback. It tries to answer the following question: “How do I convey the message to the reader?” Teachers should certainly use these three ways of providing response on texts in L2.

Giving responses to pupils is a social situation. A teacher must consider the writer’s identity and personality, asking how sensitive is he to critical feedback. (Dysthe et al. 2010). It really does not matter how often and how well pupils write, they are always excited and nervous before the submission. Author Sissel Lie (1995) put it this way (my translation):

All that we have not accomplished becomes so obvious as if it were written in shining letters, we put ourselves out there, we are bare naked, we reveal our awful secret: that we are dumb, ungifted, we do not manage anything. We cannot hide it. (Lie 1995 in Dysthe et al. 2010:181)

The fact that we as writers are sensitive to critique means that we tend to apologize and to acknowledge beforehand that what we have written is unfinished and badly needs revision. This is not a good starting point for a person responding to the work. The respondent usually tries to comfort the writer, and fears of insulting the person by addressing the real issues that

need to be improved. According to Dysthe, Hetzberg and Løkenstgard (2010) a teacher's response should contain several elements. It should be motivating, it should contain praise and it should reflect the pupil's status in the learning process. We also know that all texts can be improved, and the teacher or respondent giving feedback should say clearly and specifically what can be done to revise.

Paul Lauvås and Gunnar Handal, stated that constructive critique should include the following elements:

- Show the learner what is good
- Show what should be preserved in the text
- Point out what is imprecise
- Provide guidance to the unfinished elements in the text
- Motivate the pupil to finish the text (Lauvås and Handal 1998 in Løkenstgard 2008)

According to Weaver (2006), the following phrases describe unconstructive feedback:

- Is ambiguous
- Provides no suggestions for improvement
- Points out the negative in the text
- Does not relate to assessment criteria (Weaver 2006 in Løkenstgard 2008).

According to the elements in the first list, constructive critique suggests explicitly what must be improved. In addition, it tells the learner what is good in the writing and also relates the feedback to the assignment's criteria according to which the text should be written.

Feedback should be both reassuring and challenging (Løkenstgard 2008). Offering supportive feedback involves being open toward the text and the opportunities that lie within the text. This means that teachers should comment on its positive aspects of the text. This is motivating for the learner. Writers often become so involved in the text that they do not really see what is good in it, so positive comments make writers more aware of the text and the language. Lauvåsen and Handal referred to positive feedback as ritual praise, and in fact, teachers usually begin their feedback with positive comments. However pupils do not really trust the positive comments. Løkenstgard (2008) suggested that mistrust occurs because the positive comments are not documented equitably with the negative comments. Therefore it is important to elaborate on the positive comments and explain why certain parts of the text are

good. Well documented, positive feedback is especially significant in the beginning of a project, at least until the writer finds her way.

However, giving only reassuring and supportive feedback is inadequate. Challenging feedback brings the learner further in his learning process and is applied to the parts of the text that need to be addressed. At the same time, formulations that can be perceived as commands or disapproval might be rejected and ignored. The implication, of course, is that the writer needs to change, and, according to Carl R. Rogers having to change can be upsetting for most of us (Rogers 1951 in Løkensgard 2008). Løkensgard argued that feedback that is not very commanding has more influence on the learner: “What do you think you can improve here?” “Why not do it this way?” These are examples of not very commanding responses. A response should make the learner think, and make him become aware about challenges in the text. The response should not only try to address textual issues but also create challenges that inspire the learner to act. Finally, the example feedback questions above imply that the learner is in charge of his text. On the other hand, the reality is that most often writing must conform to certain norms, standards, and demands. For writers, guidance is about finding solutions to different problems and asking questions forces the learner to come further in his thinking. Yet, the questions should be authentic, conveying that the teacher or the supervisor really is interested in finding solutions to the problem. And once feedback is given, the learner might feel the need to go his own way. The need for supervision will certainly differ from one pupil to another. Insecure pupils might even become confused by all the questions asked by the teacher and might need more direct feedback. Especially pupils who are accustomed to a more authoritarian school system might become uncertain if feedback is not direct (Løkensgard 2008).

There will be times when asking questions is not sufficient and other strategies must be applied. Sometimes asking pupils if they could try to use another structure in the text is just not enough. Sometimes it might be necessary to hold a lecture on how to build a text and by doing so help pupils advance in their work. Another important strategy in providing feedback is to show different alternatives and give advice, whether about theory, method, solutions, or text structure. Here it is important to be very specific so that the learner fully understands the feedback. Another helpful type of feedback is to correct mistakes and give instructions. One instruction might be to write according to required formalities such as sources. “Instead of using the modal verbs *can* or *should* here we should say *must* or *shall*.” Having a meta-perspective on feedback is also of great importance. The teacher should not only be very

conscious of his expectations for the pupils, but also be aware of the pupils' expectations. When a teachers provides feedback it is to help their pupils, and, therefore, the teacher should ask their pupils to indicate what they consider difficult. Løkensgard (2008) called this concept ordered response.

2.4.1 Interpreting Teachers' Feedback

Teachers' written feedback is constructed in order to help pupils enhance their learning, that is, to lead pupils through the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1978). For instance, the additional comments that teachers provide on tests are more than just a justification of a grade. It offers a reader reaction and instruction on how to become better. Hyland and Hyland (2006) argued that feedback to a text should be more than a simple interaction between teachers and texts; it must be an interaction between the teacher and the pupil. After all, the main purpose of feedback is to enhance pupils' learning and it is only effective if it engages the pupil. The way teachers choose to formulate feedback may impact pupils' reactions to and processing of it. In order to answer my question – "What kind of written feedback do teachers provide in English and what are the teachers' reflections on their assessment practice?" – I also examine the interpersonal aspect of feedback in this section.

Both teachers and their pupils strive to achieve social harmony within classrooms (Allwright 1989 in Hyland and Hyland 2006). To put it another way, they try to avoid conflicts and arguments in order to establish an environment of trust and cooperation. Little research has related interpersonal aspects and social harmony to the structure of written feedback. Hyland and Hyland observed the following:

Like all texts, teacher feedback is a concrete expression of recognized social purposes, which means that although it is shaped by the teacher's personal goals, it is also mediated by the institutions and cultures in which it occurs. Every feedback act carries assumptions about participant relationships and how teachers think these should be structured and negotiated. (Hyland and Hyland 2006:207)

Teachers' classroom experiences affect the way in which they construct feedback and what they decide to emphasize, as well as their interactions with their pupils. Hyland and Hyland (2006) asserted that the way teachers provide feedback tells a lot about teachers as individuals. In providing feedback, teachers can be objective, detached, and critical, or they

can be helpful, compassionate, and understanding. They might be decisive in whether the feedback is effective and taken seriously or not.

Earlier studies showed that too much criticism can discourage and demotivate pupils (Connors and Lunsford 1993 in Hyland and Hyland 2006). Conversely, praise is especially important for less able pupils, helping to develop their self-esteem. The approaches used to express praise are important in providing good feedback. According to Hyland and Hyland (2006), teachers must consider their comments carefully in order to provide illuminating, pedagogical and interpersonal goals. Negative responses might have damaging effects on pupils' self-esteem, but unjustified comments and praise might lead to discouragement of corrections. Every response has the potential for interactive elements to develop relationships that can lead to pupils' progress or discouragement (Hyland and Hyland 2006). Most teachers are aware of this fact and use praise to bond and engage with pupils.

In terms of contextual factors it is important to understand that feedback is provided in a classroom context and through the teachers' opinions and understandings of each pupil. When providing feedback, teachers tend to take into account not only pupils' products, but also their personalities and their knowledge of the classroom situation. Hyland and Hyland mentioned that teachers, "actively construct a context that relates feedback to specific learners" (Hyland and Hyland 2006:213). Overall, feedback is influenced by the connections between teachers and, their pupils, the assignments, and the pupils' finished products.

Pupils are aware of the fact that feedback is helpful; however they may become discouraged if they fail to receive what they think they need (Ferris 2003). According to Hyland and Hyland, teachers are well informed about pupils' necessities and do what they can in order to meet their needs. Teachers should never provide feedback outside the context, as defined here, but make use of what they know about their pupils, their personalities and needs. It is believed that improving communication between teacher and pupil, in order to discover pupils' needs and preferences, will increase feedback's effectiveness.

Selecting the focus of feedback, as an example of interpersonal issues, also influences the formulation of feedback. Teachers in L1 put an emphasis on both form and meaning even though they are aware, especially in writing, that they should pay more attention to meaning rather than form. In L2 this distinction might be problematic for most teachers. Hyland and Hyland said the following about this, "Language is a resource for making meanings, not something we turn to when we have worked out what we are going to say" (Hyland and

Hyland 2006:216). Indeed, Hyland and Hyland (2006) recognized five feedback focuses for written assignments: (1) pupils' ideas, (2) control of form, (3) the ability to write academic texts and research principles, (4) the process of writing, and (5) relating global issues to the essay. In addition, research conducted by Hyland and Hyland (2006) showed that teachers' feedback focused most of the praise (64%) and criticism (44%) on pupils' ideas. Indeed, teachers focused equally as much on ideas as academic concerns, but less focus on form. Very importantly, pupils' ideas in their written texts are closely related to their self-image. Their ideas in written works express the way they think as individuals. Criticism of these ideas can therefore decrease pupils' confidence and even harm pupils' relationships with their teachers. Hyland and Hyland (2006) observed that teachers tend to reduce negative comments in order to maintain good relationships.

Another interpersonal aspect is how pupils react to the feedback. Lantolf and Pavlenko stated that pupils are "more than processing devices that convert linguistic input into well-formed (or not so well-formed) outputs" (Lantolf and Pavlenko 2001 in Hyland and Hyland 2006:220). Further, they stated that pupils "actively engage in constructing the terms and conditions of their own learning" (Lantolf and Pavlenko 2001 in Hyland and Hyland 2006:220). In other words, pupils tend to react to feedback that they believe is helpful and to teachers that they believe are encouraging. Little research has been done on pupils' choices about what kind of feedback to act on and how to act on it. I mention it briefly here even though it is not the focus of my thesis. Pupils tend to proceed selectively after receiving feedback, and therefore feedback that tends to be ambiguous, imprecise, rigid, or general does not really engage learners. Most learners are very clear on what kind of feedback they respond to. Even though pupils tend to respond affirmatively to positive comments and believe that positive comments are important, they also firmly believe that what they need most is constructive criticism. Studies show that pupils believe that positive comments are inadequate unless they are followed by constructive criticism. Some pupils go so far as to say that positive comments are artificial and dishonest. Perhaps they have a point because teachers often use positive comments to reduce the impact of negative comments. This situation can lead to miscommunication, but even so, teachers still use mitigation strategies to uphold good relationship with the pupils. Indirectness and the potential for misunderstanding are problematic, especially for English learners of low proficiency (Hyland and Hyland 2006). One thing is clear. Interpersonal relations must be taken into account to create effective feedback.

2.4.2 Teachers' Written Responses in English, Early Research

According to Ferris (2003), the early research showed that ESL teachers usually tend to think of themselves mainly as language teachers. This implies that teachers usually had a tendency to focus primarily on pupils' language mistakes instead of focusing on structure, content, pupils' ideas, or organization. Zamel pointed out that L2 teachers, during the 1980s,

seem to read and react to a text as a series of separate pieces at the sentence level or even clause level, rather than as a whole unit of discourse. In fact, they are so distracted by language-related problems that they often correct these without realizing that there is a much larger, meaning-related problem that they have failed to address. (Zamel 1987 in Ferris 2003: 21)

Later studies during the early 1990s revealed that all this began to change, including attention to the language of teachers' feedback. Teachers began to focus more on vocabulary, content, and organization (Cohen and Cavalcanti 1990 in Ferris 2003). These studies imply that during the last 15 years, teachers' have started focusing more on a wider range of issues.

There is no doubt that L1 composition research on response has had a great influence on L2 writing (Ferris 2003). Zamel advocated for allowing L1 research to influence and guide L2 pedagogy. Clearly, L1 and L2 composition scholarship are comparable. Zamel argued further that ESL teachers should provide feedback related to content just on early drafts, then at intermediate stages of pupils writing and form-based feedback at the end of the writing process. She said, "We need to establish priorities in our responses to drafts and subsequent revisions and encourage students to address certain concerns before others" (Zamel 1985 in Ferris 2003:22-23). Instructions about grammar and language errors should be limited or even non-existent. The main reason for this is that they are ineffective (Zamel 1982, 1983, 1985 in Ferris 2003).

Many question whether oral or written response is more effective. Studies have shown that there is actually no difference (William 2011). However, studies also show that pupils of L2 consider written teacher feedback to be of greater value than other forms of feedback (Hyland and Hyland 2006). The success of written feedback on error correction has no impact on pupils' writing. Studies also show that error correction is seen as unhelpful and even discouraging (Hyland and Hyland 2006). As noted above, Zamel (1985) advocated priority in meaning. Truscott agreed with Zamel in this matter; teachers need to modify pupils' attitudes

about the importance of error correction by implementing a “correction free approach” (Truscott 1999 in Hyland and Hyland 2006).

Language errors can become a setback for pupils, and therefore, most teachers tend to address these errors. Researches state that some teachers have no tolerance for language errors, which often significantly impacts grading. At the same time, some pupils expect their teachers to correct language mistakes and can feel resentment if teachers ignore these kinds of mistakes. The matter of the issue becomes even more important in higher education where pupils study to formulate themselves for academic audiences. Hyland and Hyland (2006) wrote that to a certain degree, ESL learners invested less of their self-worth in L2 writings than L1 writers invested in writing in their mother tongue. In other words, L1 writers do not find grammar errors as disappointing and discouraging as do L2 writers.

There are researchers who believe that form-focused feedback is successful (Master 1995; White, Spada, Lightbown and Ranta 1991 in Hyland and Hyland 2006). In fact, studies have shown that pupils who receive continuous language correction do improve their language accuracy. Even though one cannot say that feedback alone is responsible for this change, it is clear that the continuous feedback has had an impact. Pupils who receive direct correction do reduce language mistakes. Pupils welcome constructive criticism. Some teachers, however, fear providing critical comments, believing that they might demotivate their pupils.

2.4.3 Assessing English

To be able to communicate in L2 English, one needs to have multiple competencies. Reading, writing, speaking, listening, grammar and vocabulary are some aspects of L2 ability. The reason why I focus only on writing is because when teachers give written assessment, which is the focus of this thesis, it is mainly done so on written works. Most people believe that assessing writing is quite a simple matter. Teachers provide a topic for their pupils and give them time to write about it. The fact is, however, that even experienced teachers face some challenges when assessing writing. They ask themselves questions such as “Should I focus on language, content, or both?” and “How well does a test represent the ability of my pupils to write?” (Weigle 2012).

Understanding more about writing assessment requires knowledge about some basic issues in writing. Whether L2 proficiency or first language writing ability is more valuable in L2

writing ability is an issue that raises debate among academics. This is important because L2 teachers must know what the focus in their classrooms should be. Do they need to pay more attention to writing strategies or vocabulary and structure? (Weigle 2012) To succeed in writing assessment, teachers must carefully define writing in order to make good decisions about tasks. Language proficiency and writing ability are closely connected. However, there are often times when pupils show good language proficiency without succeeding in organizing and structuring a writing assignment. Weigle (2012) argues that a focal part in writing assessment is to identify the construct. Defining the construct depend on learners' proficiency. In foreign language classrooms, writing is used to support the structures and vocabulary addressed in class. This is the case for lower-level learners and implies simple writing tasks. Teachers' assessment focuses on aspects of language taught in class. In higher-level classrooms, where pupils actually use L2 for school or work, tasks are more complicated; the assessment focuses on content and composition of ideas and language structures.

Many have debated whether teachers should test writing or not. Weigle (2012) argued that real-life writing is not done under limited time conditions and some academics wonder whether time constraints can influence writing performance. However, there are several reasons given for testing writing proficiency. First, teachers recognize the need to test pupils to see how much they can perform without help. Second, teachers want to ensure that pupils actually do the work they submit. Third, L2 pupils may also be asked to take high-stakes tests, such as the TOEFL, during which they must perform under time constraints. Last, in L2 acquisition, testing may serve the purpose of evaluating automatized language knowledge. All this said, I believe that it is more sufficient to test writing in a setting that is not time limited. By doing so, pupils have time to reflect on certain issues, use dictionaries and gain feedback from others. This, I think, is more authentic than time-limited writing.

My research deals with examination of written feedback on pupils' written assignments. To make good assignments, teachers must consider several factors. Weigle (2012) said that writing assignments can differ, and the differences can have an effect on pupils' performances. Weigle wrote,

Factors such as the subject matter (what we are asking students to write about); whether students are writing from a "bare" prompt or in response to a reading passage, picture, or other input material; the cognitive demands of the prompt; how long students have to respond to the

prompt; whether they are given a choice of prompt or not; and whether they write on paper or computer (Weigle 2012:220).

The factors Weigle listed above do affect pupils' results, so teachers need consciously to choose the most needed factors for any given situation. In my study, I analyzed written feedback on assignments that required pupils to explain their experiences; of course, this implies personal topics, but also topics in response to novels or short stories read in class.

3. Method

In the previous chapter I have accounted for the three feedback questions “Where am I going?”, “How am I going?” and “Where to next?” Answers to these questions are defined as feed up, feed back and feed forward. Furthermore, I have outlined the four levels of feedback and the effectiveness of the different levels. I have discussed feedback related to written work and presented some facts about early research in L2, which will help me discover whether there is a difference in terms of written feedback then and now. I have written about feedback in general before relating it more to English.

This part of the thesis explains the methodological approach used to gather and analyze the data and research materials. In this section, I explain how the data on written feedback were obtained, analyzed, and interpreted. The data consists of 8 interviews approximately one hour long and 40 feedback texts from participants. To answer the first part of the research question, I used Kronholm-Cederberg’s Response triangle, inspired by Hillock’s text model, and the theory presented in the previous chapter to analyze the 40 feedback texts. In order to answer the second part of the research question I analyzed the interviews.

3.1 Qualitative Research

For this research, qualitative methods are used to explain a social phenomenon from the inside out. The social phenomenon in this case is the written feedback that English teachers provide to their pupils. The study also attempts to provide better understanding of teachers who participate in this social phenomenon through their reflections on assessment practices.

One of the main reasons why I have decided to make use of qualitative methods is because of its explorative ability and its flexible approach. Qualitative methods also offer participants the possibility of expressing their views and describing their experiences in their own words. I believe that the second part of my research question – “What are the teachers’ reflections on their assessment practice?” – is well captured with a qualitative method since the participants are mostly in control during the interview. I also feel that by speaking directly with my participants provides a better, more detailed understanding of their assessment practices. Such understanding can be gained only by allowing teachers involved in this study to talk freely and to share their stories, and then letting their stories be heard.

Qualitative research begins mainly with a notion that people play an active role in the creation of a social reality (Boeije 2010). Hennie Boeije provided the following definition of qualitative research:

The purpose of qualitative research is to describe and understand a social phenomenon in terms of the meaning people bring to them. The research questions are studied through flexible methods enabling contact with the people involved to an extent that is necessary to grasp what is going on in the field. The methods produce rich, descriptive data that need to be interpreted through identification and coding of themes and categories leading to findings that can contribute to theoretical knowledge and practical use. (Boeije 2010:11)

This definition contains three components; finding meaning, contact with participants, and delivering qualitative findings. Through the application of theories presented in the previous chapter, the qualitative analysis examines written feedback on written texts submitted by pupils and captures the teachers' views on their assessment practices.

3.2 Data Collection from Written Feedback

The data material in this thesis consists of written feedback collected from the teachers interviewed. As mentioned earlier, the written feedback data (40 items) was originally provided by teachers to pupils who have enrolled in programs of both vocational and general studies.

By reading Sandvik's doctoral thesis, I came across George Hillock's text model. Hillock's model, which he refers to as plans and process in composing, has been developed for native didactics and elevates the writing situation to a significant factor for the writing process (Sandvik 2011). According to Kronholm-Cederberg (2009), this model has also been used to analyze feedback responses on pupils' written work. Hillock's model (1987), the Text Triangle is reproduced in Figure 2, below.

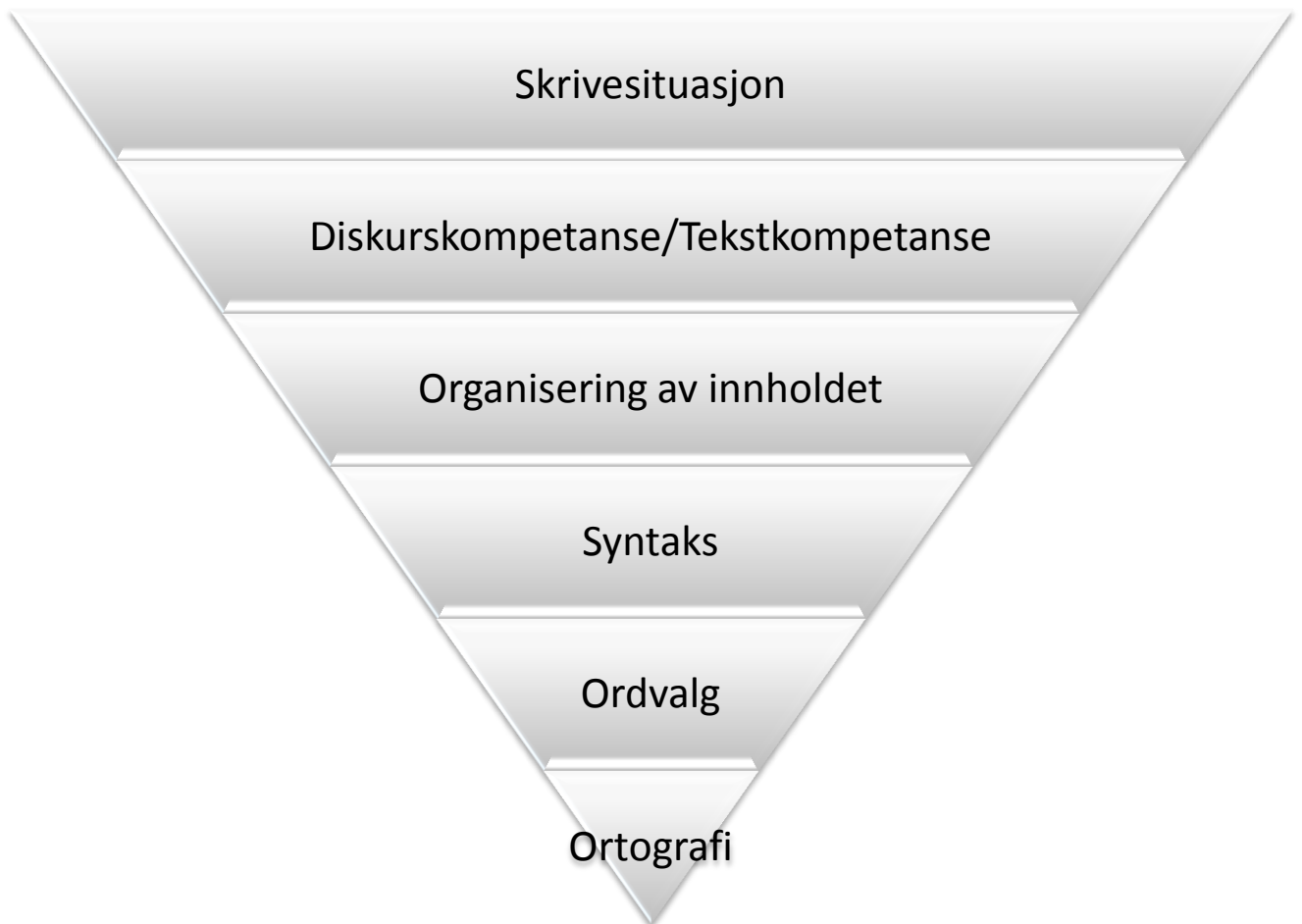


Figure 2. Text Triangle (Hillock 1987 in Sandvik 2011)

According to Sandvik (2011), the model underlines how genre and writing situation influence the text and how that context is very much decisive for writing. The model focuses on the writing process and also indicates assessment criteria. Kronholm-Cederberg (2009) stated that the model can also be used to assess the writing ability in L2.

Teachers focus on a range of elements when providing written feedback to their pupils. They may comment on aspects that range from spelling mistake to the structure and content of a text. Kronholm-Cederberg (2009) has modified Hillock's model and renamed it Response Triangle. The Response Triangle is reproduced below in Figure 3:

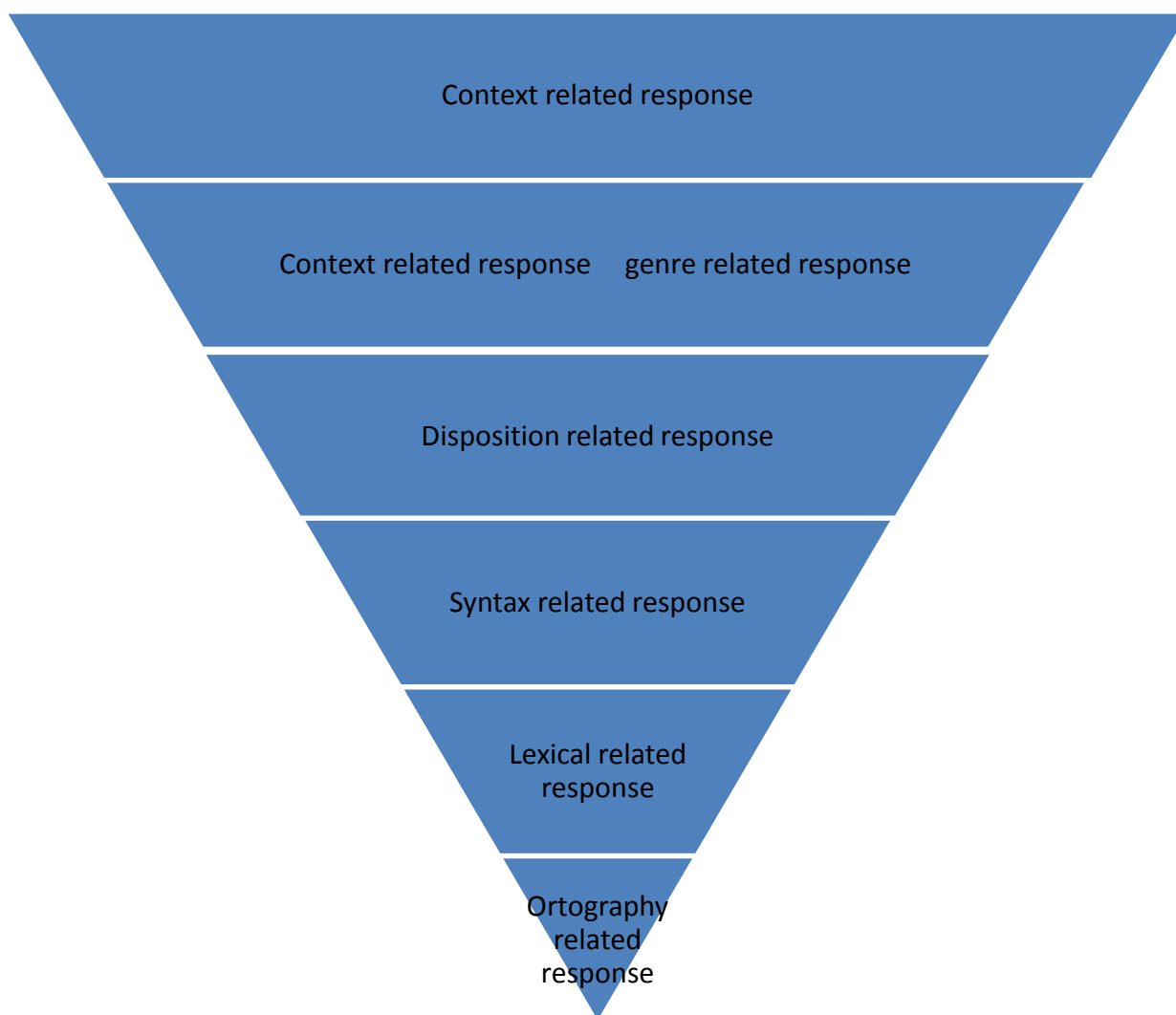


Figure 3. Kronholm-Cederberg’s Respons Triangle (2009)

Writing a text implies incorporating different factors and elements at different text levels, and those text levels are arranged hierarchically (Hillock 1987 in Kronholm-Cederberg 2009).

Hoel divided the model into two parts, global text level and local text level. Hoel also believes that the model can be used for providing feedback on written texts (Hoel 2000). Providing feedback on written texts indicates also incorporating different factors and elements at different text levels. Additionally, Hoel used the triangle model to indicate on which level feedback is provided during peer response. Responses related to global text level indicate large amounts of text and, are usually unclear, unstructured, and demanding or, as Hoel said, they require “more complex cognitive processes” (Hoel 2000:33). Responses related to the

local text level, on the other hand, are quite simple, reasoned, and less demand. The different levels from global to local level consist of the following:

- Awareness of the writing situation: the purpose of the text and its recipients
- Development of the content and ide; awareness of genre
- Structure of the text
- Syntax
- Lexicality
- Orthography

(Hoel 2000:33)

Since this thesis is more concerned with teachers' feedback, and not peer response, I used Kronholm-Cederberg's Response Triangle to analyze teachers' written feedback in addition to the theory acquired in the previous chapters. The main reason, why I decided to use the triangle model, in addition to acquired theory, is because I was hoping that the model would shed some new light on my research. The interviews can also help me address new things even though my interviews have been conducted mainly to answer the second part of my question.

The fact that researchers use different sources to confirm their findings is, coincidentally, called triangulation (Postholm 2010). Confirmation by different sources is thought to strengthen the research results, that is, triangulation acts as a validation strategy. The concept or triangulation originates from social studies even though it is used differently in surveying (Flick et al. 2004). Denzin distinguished among four types of triangulation (1978 in Patton 2002). In this thesis, I have made use of data triangulation. Flick et al. defined data triangulation this way: "Triangulation of data combines data drawn from different sources and at different times, in different places or from different people" (Flick et al. 2004:178). As already mentioned I will compare the interview results with the document analyses.

Triangulation as a method for validation, however, has been criticized. What happens in one setting does not necessarily replicate what happens in another setting. Fielding (Fielding in Flick et al. 2004) stated that researchers should link methods and theories in order to understand their analysis better, not in order to chase objective truth. In attempting to use

triangulation, people commonly and mistakenly believe that using different methods will produce the same results. That is not always the case, however, Patton noted the following:

Different kinds of data may yield somewhat different results because different types of inquiry are sensitive to different real-world nuances. Thus, understanding inconsistencies in findings across different kinds of data can be illuminative. (Patton 2002: 248)

In other words, discovering these inconsistencies does not undermine the credibility of a study. Instead inconsistencies can help us gain greater understanding of the connection between the studies' results and the phenomenon being studied (Patton 2002).

3.3 Phenomenology

In order to answer my research question, I chose phenomenological research as the theoretical perspective. A phenomenological study attempts to portray the meaning for a certain lived experiences for a number of participants (Cresswell 2007). According to Cresswell, the intention of a phenomenological research is "to reduce individual experiences with a phenomenon to a description of the universal essence" (Cresswell 2007:58). My description deals with what and how teachers experience a concept. In my case the concept in question is written feedback and assessment practice. In this study I have made use of interviews to answer my research question and Kronholm-Cederbreg's Response Triangle. I am interested in finding out more about teachers' experiences and their reflections about their assessment practices in teaching English to L2 learners.

Phenomenology has been very much influenced by the works of Edmund Husserl and those who later developed his ideas, for instance, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty (Cresswell 2007). The purpose of phenomenology is to recreate constructions of the life-world, and the phenomenological approach tries to describe an experience without considering its origin. In other words, an experience should be accounted for as it is lived in the moment. According to Husserl the life-world is original, and in fact, all science originates from the life-world. Furthermore Husserl conceptualized the principle of phenomenology as positive and safe knowledge about life-world.

In phenomenological research there are two approaches: (1) the hermeneutic approach and (2) empirical, transcendental, or psychological phenomenology. The hermeneutic approach deals

with the study of “texts” of life. However, in the teacher interviews, I used psychological phenomenology, which focused more on the teachers’ experiences of feedback and less on the researcher’s interpretations. This involved setting aside my own experiences of written feedback and looking at the phenomenon as if encountering it for the very first time. According to Husserl, this approach to a phenomenon is called “epochée” or “bracketing” (Cresswell 2007). Epochée is a philosophical term that indicates a theoretical moment when one suspends all judgment. Achieving “epochée” according to Cresswell (2007) is almost impossible. Therefore, in conducting qualitative research, it is very important for me to describe my own experiences with assessment before analyzing the experiences of others. Because I have been teaching for almost five years, I have encountered the phenomenon many times. I have assessed pupils’ works countless times; however, I still feel that I need to learn more about formative assessment, more specifically about written feedback. Providing pupils with effective written feedback, the kind of feedback that will raise them to the next level in the learning process, is in my opinion quite difficult.

3.4 Interviews with Teachers

The purpose of the interviews was to understand teachers’ assessment practices. The decision to make use of interviews as a method was based on reflections on the following questions:

1. Why do I want to have a dialogue with research participants to gather data to answer the research question?
2. Why do I want to use this loose approach instead of a more structured approach to collect data?
3. What are the disadvantages of using this method? (Mason 2002 in Johannessen et al. 2010:136).

The interview method gave the participants an opportunity to express themselves more freely. The teachers’ experiences and opinions became quite apparent when they were able to influence what was addressed during the interviews. Assessment practice is a complicated phenomenon, and qualitative interviews provided the participants the right set of circumstances to explain responses to the research question in great detail. It was very important for me to provide the participants with the freedom and independence to express themselves fully.

Qualitative interviews can be divided into three categories: standardized interviews (formal or structured), non-standardized interviews (informal or nondirective), and semi-standardized interviews (guided-semi-structured or focused). The basic difference among these types of interviews is the rigidity of the structure of presentation (Berg 2009). For this study, I designed a semi-standardized interview guide. Semi-standardized interviews are situated between standardized and non-standardized interview structures. Some questions in the interview guide were determined beforehand, but the questions were usually reordered during the questioning. As an interviewer, I sometimes felt the need to digress and explore beyond the prepared questions. The questions, the topics, and the order varied at times. I believe that the advantage of using semi-standardized interviews is the possibility of being flexible and making clarifications during the interview by employing an unplanned probe. This was especially useful if the participants answered only yes or no to the questions.

In an interview situation, of course, there are always two participants, the researcher and the research participant. The relationship between the two depends on the research tradition used by the researcher as the starting point. By using the tradition of interpretivism, I tried to understand the phenomenon at the place where the interview took place. Interpretivism does not *discover* reality, as is the case in a positivistic approach, but it tries to *construct* a reality within a social, historical, and cultural context.

Participants in the study had acquired subjective meanings of the phenomenon I am studying, and those meanings were diverse and numerous. According to Creswell, these meanings are developed by individuals through their contact with others and their historical and cultural norms (Creswell 2007). As a researcher, I was interested in the density of views and therefore I had to rely on the participants' experiences of the situation.

Every relationship between the interviewee and the researcher must be individually developed (Seidman 1991). I feel that I managed to establish a good relationship to all my research participants. These are my colleagues that I work and cooperate with every day. All my interviews were conducted face-to-face at the upper secondary school where my participants work, and which is also my work place. The main reason for conducting interviews at my participants' work place was so that the research participants did not feel inferior. I do realize that studying the reality of my profession can pose some challenges in terms of objectivity. However, interviewing my colleagues can also have some advantages. I believe that my colleagues felt more comfortable being interviewed by someone they knew. I believe we

spoke the “same language”, the conversation developed much easier and participants felt more understood and respected.

On the other hand, at times it was difficult to ask naive and simple questions because my participants knew that I was familiar with the field or the profession. It felt artificial to ask my participants to describe a usual day at work because they knew I was familiar with the answers they were likely to provide. For some researchers, it can also be difficult to publish critical findings in one’s own profession which also can lead to self-censorship. At the same time, however, I believe that my knowledge about the field I am studying makes me better equipped to ask good questions and give me a better insight into the participants’ experiences of reality. For me as a researcher, it was important not to lose sight of the critical distance necessary, so I kept epochée constantly in mind, in order not to overlook or lose important research data.

3.4.1 Selecting the Participants

For this study, participants were chosen through purposeful sampling, which means that the researcher selects participants who can firmly inform the researcher about the phenomenon that is being studied (Cresswell 2007). This meant that I needed to decide who and what should be sampled. A sample was chosen from a distinct research population in order to meet the needs of the analysis (Boeije 2010).

I have chosen participants that meet the following criteria: First, all the participants were teachers of English as a second language, with different levels of experience in assessment for learning. For study purposes, it was essential that the participants have a wide range of perspectives and experiences. Second, the participants taught at an upper secondary school, where pupils took general studies or vocational studies. Pupils who applied for general studies had, in general, more interest in theoretical subjects than those enrolled in vocational studies. In my opinion, the two types of pupils often require different feedback. Both male and female teachers participated in the interviews; however, the majority of English teachers at the school were female.

Deciding how many participants is enough is not an easy task. According to Seidman (1991), there are two principles for deciding this matter. The first principle is sufficiency. The second

concerns practical aspects such as time and access to participants. Johannessen et al. 2010 mentioned that researchers usually conduct interviews until the researcher is not learning anything new. In this study, this happened after having conducted 8 interviews with 8 different teachers. After the interviews, the participants contributed 40 feedback texts (5 each) on students' English writings, and these were later analyzed.

3.4.2 Interview Guide

An interview guide is an outline of the various topics to discuss and the sequence of the questions (Kvale 2007). The topic for the interview was sent to all the participants beforehand so that they could prepare for the interview. As explained above, I have conducted semi-structured interviews and in this case the outline of the various topics and questions was only a suggestion. Since I am not a very experienced interviewer, I believe that the interview guide made me more comfortable and thus more capable of paying closer attention to the participants' answers. As part of my preparation for the interviews, I also created some main questions to go through during the interviews and also thought of different ways to ask follow-up questions.

The interview questions were based on the theories I have read about this topic and on my own experiences about the topic. The interview guide was divided into different categories based on the theoretical approaches relevant to the research question. In a phenomenological approach, the order in which the topics are addressed during the interviews is not very relevant, especially in this case, since all three main categories were equally important as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. Interview Guide Categories for Written Feedback and Assessment in English Writing

Categories	Description
Elements in written feedback	Various aspects in written feedback that teachers tend to focus on.
Pupils' participation	Pupils' involvement and reactions about assessment
Challenges	What teachers find frustrating about written feedback and their reflections about written feedback

Even though the interview guide had specific categorization, at some interviews the categories had to be altered somewhat because some of my participants started talking about specific category before I brought it up.

I tried to ask questions that encouraged the participants to reflect and then give detailed descriptions of already mentioned topics. Sometimes it was necessary to ask them to be more specific or to provide me with examples. Most of the questions have been *what* and *how* questions, short and without difficult terms. I have tried to avoid *why* questions because, according to Kvale (1997), these types of questions could lead to intellectualization. Kvale stated further that it is the researcher's job to figure out why something has occurred. *Why* questions should be answered in the analysis. I certainly agree and tried to avoid *why* questions, yet at times, I found it necessary to ask *why* questions in order to better understand the participants' answers. Many times I simply asked to hear more about certain subjects. Here it was important for me to follow my intuition. Whenever I felt that greater elaboration was needed, I asked participants to "explain further". Even though I prepared an interview guide and depended somewhat on my interview guide, I tried to use it carefully. Seidman (1991) gives the advice of asking questions that originate from what the participants utter.

3.4.3 Conducting Interviews

Conducting interviews gave me an opportunity to gain some insight into the participants' reflections. I was very interested in understanding my participants' actions. This understanding gave me an empathic understanding of the participants themselves and an understanding of their actions in a social and cultural context. The interviews were conducted as a dialogue between equals, the researcher and the participant, just as Postholm (2010) suggested.

Kvale (1997) wrote that there are certain quality criteria that must be taken into account when conducting interviews. However, at the same time he asserted, "One learns to be a good interviewer by interviewing" (Kvale 1997:92). During the interviews I have relied heavily on advice from Postholm (2010) and Johannessen et al. (2010). I will in the following paragraphs mention some aspects that helped me carry out the eight interviews during my research.

Most of the interviews were carried out in Norwegian even though the interview guide was in English. I asked the participants to choose the language with which they felt most comfortable. Most of them felt that they would be able to express themselves better in Norwegian although two of the participants did choose to speak English. For me the most challenging part in this process was to formulate good questions that would provide me with the needed data. Making quick decisions and formulating good follow-up questions in order to encourage reflection proved to be a challenge. Each interview lasted for approximately one hour.

The participants were clearly informed that during the interview they could also ask questions and raise new topics. Allowing participants to introduce new topics can bring to light a prime experience or knowledge about a phenomenon, in other words, illuminate all aspects of the phenomenon studied. And, in fact, some participants brought up topics that I had not thought about. According to Postholm (2010), the researcher should in this case also ask the other participants about these topics. This means conducting a brief re-interview with the participants already interviewed, but for practical reasons this was not always possible in my case. During the interviews some participants had a lot to say about certain topics, but others would touch upon some topics quite superficially. In the latter cases, I tried to elicit more information by interposing or steering the interview in different ways to find out more about certain topics, as explained above.

One key-ability in interviewing is listening, and another is listening actively (Seidman 1991). Following Seidman's advice, I tried to listen on three different levels. First, I needed to understand and evaluate what was being said. This was not an easy task. Second, I needed to be aware of the process and progress of the interview and know when to move the interview forward. I experienced that this required a lot of concentration. Third, Seidman advised researchers to avoid reinforcing participants' responses. In the aftermath of my first interview, I became aware that I was accustomed to saying "okay" or "yes" or giving other affirmative replies. Some literature on this topic suggested that there was nothing wrong with this; however, Seidman argued, "Interviewers who reinforce what they are hearing run the risk of distorting how the participants respond" (Seidman 1991: 67). After reflection on the first interview and gaining some experience, I feel that this situation was not a problem.

I was also quite careful to avoid leading questions. I must say that this was a struggle. And in fact, after transcribing all the interviews, I realized that some of my questions did actually

lead the interviewee in a certain direction. For example, I asked one of my participants, “How do you use assessment results to adjust your teaching?” Here I actually took for granted that the interviewee does use feedback to pupils to adjust the teaching. However, for the most parts, the questions were open-ended, and the participants could lead the interview in any direction they wanted. Occasionally, I would also ask the participants to reconstruct an incident in the assessment process. Even though this thesis deals only with written assessment, I sometimes asked the participants to reconstruct oral-feedback conversations to see whether any elements differed from the topic that I am interested in, written feedback. Yet not all the participants seemed quite comfortable telling a story; this seemed to block some participants, but others remembered specific incidents that aided the analysis.

Conducting the interviews confirmed Kvale’s observation, “One becomes a good interviewer by interviewing” (Kvale 1997:92). This is so true. Interest, engagement, and instinct are highly significant elements for conducting good interviews, and these elements led to good, effective questions. Certainly my interview skills improved with experience.

3.4.4 Working with Interview Material

I have experienced that research based on interviews is quite demanding, beginning with the interviews themselves and then the transcription process. Even though there are computer programs that can organize and arrange the data gathered, I decided to do so manually and also allowed sufficient time to study the data.

As a researcher it was difficult for me to distinguish between the processes of gathering data and analyzing data. Seidman noted that even before the interviewer starts gathering interview material, he or she has developed “an anticipatory frame of mind based on his or her reading and preparation for the study” (Seidman 1991:86). And as I began the interviews I started working with the material. Seidman argued that even though complete separation of interviewing and analysis is almost impossible, researchers should wait to perform in-depth analysis until all interviews have been concluded. The main reason for this is to prevent imposing meaning from previous participants to succeeding ones. In addition, transcribed interviews unfortunately do not contain all the potential information that could be gathered. Such aspects as facial expressions, tone of voice, and rhythm are lost. To compensate for this kind of lost information, I took observational notes.

The descriptions were verbatim, and I believe this is important for accurate analyze of the meaning. Much of the literature on this topic advises that the researcher can actually rephrase and summarize statements during an interview, however, as I already noted above I chose to transcribe directly since I am not very experienced in this type of work.

3.5 Reliability and Validity

Reliability means being able to replicate research results. According to Postholm (2010), it is a requirement that research results must be reproducible and repeatable, however, this is not always possible with qualitative, phenomenological methods that I have chosen. Indeed, some believe that variations in the interviewer's compassion and sympathy are usually advantageous (Kvale 1997 in Postholm 2010). This can lead to more highly varied accounts of the interview topics and thus to more complete information. Of course, one barrier to an interview is that participants have obvious difficulties repeating what was said during the original research interview. Another barrier to conventional reliability in this phenomenological method is the increased insight that participants gain during and after the original interview.

Instead of using the term reliability, phenomenological researchers apply the term dependability (Postholm 2010). As a researcher, I have tried to make sure that the research was conducted consequently and objectively. This indicates that the findings were free from my preconceived notions. For the research to be considered dependable, it was important to be open about my experiences and my relationships with the participants and the impact these aspects have on the collected data (Thagaard 2009). At the beginning of the thesis, I explained my professional experience and the reasons for my interest in the research topic, in other words, my pre-understanding of the phenomenon under this study. Earlier in this chapter, I disclosed my relationship with the research participants.

Validity concerns whether the method chosen actually examines what it is supposed to examine. Thus, validation is a way of evaluating the exactness of the research data. For one thing, this research used different methods to acquire data, and data from different sources—conducting interviews and analyzing written feedback—to understand the phenomenon. As explained above, a method of validation is triangulation, advocated by Postholm (2010) and Cresswell, who defined triangulation, “In triangulation, researchers make use of multiple and

different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence” (Cresswell 2007:208). Thus, the literature review and theories underlying this research and the 8 interviews and 40 examples of written feedback, provide triangulation that strengthens the validity of this study.

3.6 Ethical Challenges

A qualitative researcher faces many ethical issues, regardless of the approach to qualitative method. Through the interviews, I entered a research relationship with the participants, so of course, I was concerned how the participants were treated. The employment of certain methods ensures that the safety and dignity of the participants are protected (Marvasti 2004). (Marvasti 2004).

All my participants have voluntarily taken part in this study. However, sometimes participants cannot always predict the consequences of taking part in a study. I have made it clear to all my participants that they can at any time end the interview. In the information letter sent to all my participants before the interviews, I have informed about the topics they will be asked (see appendix). They have also been informed about the possibility not to answer certain questions. Some of the questions about feedback might be perceived as a critique of the participants and therefore affect the participants in different ways. It was important for me to make sure that they are protected.

Some of the participants asked about confidentiality and anonymity. One other way of protecting the participants is to ensure that their identities are not revealed (Marvasti 2004). In this study teachers have revealed feelings and views about colleagues, pupils and their workplace. These are the things that might affect participants’ every day at work if their identities are not protected. When I refer to my participants in my thesis I will be referring to them mainly as teachers. I will also avoid using identifying information such as which class the teachers teach. Marvasti affirmed, “Confidentiality implies that, except for the researcher, no one else will know the identity of the participants” (Marvasti 2004:138). In an interview situation guarding the complete anonymity of my participants is impossible since I met my participants face-to-face. Anonymity implies that even the researcher is not aware of the identity of his participants. However, I have informed the participants that tapes from the interviews will not be labeled with actual names.

Marvasti (2004) says that there are three ways that qualitative studies can benefit the participants. It might increase awareness and encourage debates within a profession. It can make the participants more aware of their choices and the way they provide their pupils with feedback and provide new ways of thinking about feedback. I certainly hope that the findings from this study will benefit the participants and other teachers by increasing awareness about this important topic.

Like I mentioned above, all my participants have been provided with an information letter. The information letter included a short description of the study. The letter has been written under the guidelines of Norwegian Social Science Data Services (NSD). NSD has also allowed me to conduct the interviews. The consent has also been attached in the appendix of this thesis.

4. Analysis and Results

In the previous chapters I have introduced relevant theoretical perspectives on written assessment and described how I have collected data for this study. In this chapter I will analyze the text material (teachers' written feedback to pupils), performed according to Kronholm-Cederberg's response model, and discover the meaning behind the transcribed interviews. I begin with the teachers' written feedback, and by doing so, answer the first part of the research question: "What kind of written feedback do teachers provide in English?" Then I present the findings from the teacher interviews in order to elucidate their assessment practices. Even though I already analyzed parts of my data during its gathering, wrote copious notes on the interviews, and analyzed the examples of written feedback received from the teacher-participants, this section pulls all the data into a coherent text that will, hopefully, initiate discussions and establish better practices in similar settings.

I have discovered that analyzing qualitative data is not a linear process and does not begin, or end, when all the data has been collected. Analysis actually begins with the first interview and continues throughout the entire process. However, researchers distinguish between analysis done during the research and performed after all the material has been collected.

For this study, the approach to analysis is what Postholm (2010) referred to as theoretical analysis. She distinguished between descriptive analysis and theoretical analysis. *Coding* and *categorizing* are keywords used to define methods of descriptive analysis. This phase of analysis actually reduces the amount of data by applying coding and gathering certain types of data or responses into categories. On the other hand, theoretical analysis implies using acquired theories during the study to interpret the material. For this research, I used theoretical analysis, identifying different fields in the research material that are then analyzed from the theoretical viewpoints explored in chapter 1. The focus centered on discovering the characteristics of teachers' feedback in English, that is, "What do teachers focus on when providing written feedback?"

The feedback texts that I have received are given on essay assignments. One of the essay assignments that pupils had to answer is reproduced below. Other essay assignments are similar to this one:

Assignment:

Some critics claim that the short story you have read in class, among other themes, deals with loneliness. Choose some of the characters that you think are lonely and describe the nature of their loneliness. Are they lonely because they want to be, because that is part of their culture (“cowboys,” “lone rider”) or because they never had any choice? Call your essay: Loneliness.

4.1 Teachers’ Written Feedback – Practices

To analyze the feedback exemplified provided by the teacher-participants, I employed the Kronholm-Cederbergs response model or the Response Triangle, which is a hierarchical construction of responses given to pupils by teachers. The triangle stretches from a local text level to a global text level. The purpose here was to understand the kind of feedback responses most commonly provided to pupils in upper secondary schools in English as a second language classroom.

4.1.1 Orthography Related Response

According to Kronholm-Cederberg (2009), this type of response is located at the local text level. Such responses are mostly negative and deal with spelling and punctuation mistakes.

In the written feedback texts collected for this study, the orthography related response seemed to be the most common type. All 40 feedback items analyzed contained feedback on spelling corrections at the sentence level. In general, orthographical mistakes were usually corrected within the texts of the pupils’ essays, followed by a general comment at the end of the essay.

Typical examples of orthographical feedback are provided below. One teacher warned:

Be aware of your spelling (or, the word you have written is not the one you have intended to write, it sounds similar, but cannot be used in this context). Use your dictionary frequently!

The same teacher gave detailed feedback on punctuation:

Remember that the plural (flertall), of a noun (substantiv), is made by adding an –s (in cases where the final sound of the root is an s-sound; -es; buses) and never apostrophe + s ('s). An apostrophe plus s forms a genitive (something is owned by or belongs to someone or something).

Another teacher wrote in Norwegian:

TIPS: lær deg hvordan ordet “decide” staves. Dette er en gjenganger i teksten din.
Bruk ordbok!

These are typical feedback in terms of orthographical response. In teaching English, the research participants were found to be very particular about spelling mistakes and punctuation. Most of the teachers believed that communication is the goal in L2 classes and that avoiding spelling and punctuation mistakes helps also avoid misunderstandings – a belief discovered during the teacher interviews. During the interviews, the teachers also stated that this kind of feedback is easiest for pupils to understand. This is the type of response that is not questioned by pupils. The teachers are considered to be language experts, and therefore pupils accept these corrections. This information is also confirmed by Kornholm-Cederberg in her doctoral thesis from 2009. The teachers also stated during their interviews that both pupils and their parents expect orthographic responses.

Some researchers argue that feedback at this level should be limited. According to Zamel (1985) this type of feedback should even be non-existent (Zamel 1985 in Ferris 2003). Hyland and Hyland (2006) disagree with Zamel and say that L2 learners invest less effort in L2 writing and that feedback at this level in L2 is not as disappointing as for L1 learners. All the teachers I have interviewed provide feedback at this level. However even though teachers are quite particular with feedback at this level they do not correct all the mistakes at this level. Usually the focus is on 3-4 recurring mistakes. In the interviews teachers say that they do this because they do not want to discourage their pupils. So, even though Weigle (2012) argued that language corrections are made in lower levels of education I do not see this to be the case in this study. The study took place in an upper secondary school and one focus of assessment that is recurring is language aspect taught in class.

4.1.2 Lexical Related Response

Lexical response deals with word choices and use of words (Kronholm-Cederberg 2009).

In English, most lexical mistakes seemed to be incorrect use of prepositions. These mistakes and similar typical mistakes, such as using the wrong word form or using certain words incorrectly, were normally corrected within the text, but were not generally commented upon at the end of the text. One teacher reported that pupils tend to struggle with the correct use of prepositions in English, and in foreign languages in general.

One pupil titled his essay “Case of the Defence,” and the teacher commented on the wrong use of the preposition: This is most likely not the word you intended to write, as the word you have written is not suitable in this particular context.

Another pupil wrote: The tone of the story is either positive or negative.

In the second example above, the teacher wrote “*neither*” within the pupil’s text. In parenthesis she wrote the Norwegian translation “verken.” In the margin she wrote “poor word choice.”

In many feedback examples, teachers underlined a word but made no comment or gave no alternatives. This alerted the pupil to a mistake, but provided no information on the nature of the mistake or its possible rectification. In addition, such feedback may actually confuse pupils, because they do not know other option and frustrate them because they are unlikely to ask the teacher about other options.

As noted in my theory chapter Hoel (2000) believed that Kronholm-Cederberg model could be divided into global text level and local text level. This kind of feedback is according to Hoel at the local text level and does not require too much effort from the teacher. This feedback is quite simple. All written feedback texts contained responses at this level.

4.1.3 Syntax Related Response

Responses related to syntax deal with sentence structure, that is, the way that students construct their sentences (Kornholm-Cederberg 2009). This level of response demands more attention from the reader. Teachers tend to give a lot of attention to feedback at this level. The most common feedback given in terms of syntax related response is verb tenses, sentence fragments, and agreement and concord.

One pupil wrote: After the two brothers walks out of the courtroom, one of them is pushed out in the street and is hit by a car.

The teacher corrected several mistakes of the same character within the pupil's text before writing a comment at the end of the essay. She wrote in both Norwegian and English:

Subject/verb agreement error. Det må være samsvar mellom subjekt og verbal. For å få dette til riktig, husk regla: I am, You are, He/she/it is, We/you /they are.

The same teacher commented on a fragment at the end of another pupil's essay:

Sentence fragment. Som på norsk, setninger i formelle tekster må være fullstendige. De må ha et subjekt, noen som handler i setningen, og et finitt verbal.

It seemed, therefore, that feedback at the local level was mainly negative. When I asked the teachers about this, during the interviews, teachers said that corrective, or negative, feedback helps pupils further their learning. This kind of feedback is also considered to be at the local level.

4.1.4 Disposition Related Response

Disposition related responses address text structure, that is, internal organization of a text. Kronholm-Cederberg (2009) declared that teachers devote little attention to this level of response. She suggested the reason might be that it requires larger effort since teachers' responses at this level must be thought through carefully before they are communicated to pupils. However, the findings of this research study do not support this statement.

All the examples of feedback in this study contained some response at this level even though the responses were not very specific. In contrast to orthographical and syntactical feedback, dispositional responses may be both negative and positive. Some examples of teachers' feedback follow. One teacher writes in Norwegian:

Det du skriver er i for seg bra, men du må huske å sette det i en helhetlig sammenheng. Teksten din trenger en tydelig innledning, hvor du presenterer romanfigurene og drømmene deres, før du går over til å drøfte drømmenes rolle. Og alle fleste tekster skal ha en konklusjon hvor du oppsummerer hva du har skrevet om.

Even though this feedback contained some response related to content, it certainly provided a disposition related response. Another teacher wrote the following:

Your text is a bit muddled and therefore you do not reach your reader clearly. There are some formal requirements when writing an essay. Your text needs to possess a clear introduction, main body and conclusion. You need to divide your text into paragraphs in order to guide your reader better.

This can be seen as feedback at the global text level. It can be both positive and negative feedback. Feedback at this level demands much effort from the teacher and large amount of the text. Usually the positive feedback comes before the negative. According to my participants this is to motivate the pupils. Usually pupils are so involved with their texts that they cannot see the positive. The positive comments make us aware of the text. However pupils have a tendency not to trust the positive comments according to participants. Løkensgard (2008) explains that this might be because positive comments are not equally documented as negative comments and therefore it is crucial to elaborate on these. The feedback at this level especially might sound commanding. This kind of feedback might therefore be rejected by the learners according to Løkensgard (2008).

4.1.5 Genre and Content Related Response

Genre related responses to pupils' essays were rare in this study. Among the 40 examples of feedback, one response related to genre. One teacher wrote:

Your way of presenting the facts about *Of Mice and Men* through an interview with the reader would have worked well in an article, but does not represent a book review. Make sure to read the text carefully and stick to the genre given.

It seems to me that when teachers commented on genre, they also implicitly gave feedback on content. In terms of content, all feedback contained responses at this level to a certain degree. However, some responses were very specific, and some were just comments related to the self, such as “excellent content, well done.” This generally applied to high achievers. Low achievers received some response in terms of content although in my opinion this response is most of the time not very specific. Some examples are provided below:

«Du er i stor grad i stand til å anvende kunnskapen du har om romanen. Du viser dessverre ikke tydelig at du har forstått oppgaven 100%. Du har i hovedsak besvart del a, del b er noe uklart.»

”I like the way that you start your text by telling about the author, but the next step should be presenting the main characters to the reader, before giving a summary to the story. Also be careful not to reveal how the story ends in a book review.”

4.1.6 Context Related Response

This type of response concerns the global level, that is, the highest level of response. Context related response deals with the writing situation and includes aspects such as the rhetorical purpose of the text, and, the characteristics of its recipients, but also time limitations and physical aspects. This study does not include empirical evidence at this level.

In terms of awareness of the specific readers for the text, Hoel (2000) stated that the ability to consider who the recipients of a text are, desires a high level of proficiency, meta-language and meta-cognition. In terms of giving response, meta-cognition indicates the writers’ awareness of what they write, what they need to express and their insight during the writing process. Meta-language is the ability to assess and reconsider elements and expressions in the text that are not necessary. Response at this level helps the writer take the perspective of a reader.

Clearly, teachers’ attitudes toward written feedback change gradually, but continuously. As noted in a previous chapter, teachers during the 1980s tended to focus mainly on language

mistakes, which represent the lowest level of response at the local level. In fact, the teachers' focus at that time was mainly at the sentence level. The empirical evidence in this study revealed that teachers still believe this form of feedback to be quite significant although this is not the primary focus of assessment. During the interviews all the participants stated that they donate much time and effort on language mistakes. However, in certain cases, teachers tend not to correct all language mistakes.

One teacher said: Depending on the level of my pupils, I decide how much to focus on language mistakes. With low achievers I tend to focus mainly on three things at the sentence level.

According to the participants, pupils who are quite good in school on the other hand receive more detailed form-based feedback. The teachers did not seem to agree with Zamel (1985 in Hyland and Hyland 2006) that instructions about grammar and language should almost be non-existent. On the contrary, they believed that this kind of feedback helps pupils' language acquisition, but at the same time, they were careful not to discourage their pupils. In fact, this study's participants said that pupils even expected feedback at this level. Teachers who work with pupils in a curriculum of general studies often showed no acceptance for language errors and stated that this also affected grading. This seems not to be the case at vocational studies. Teachers at vocational studies are more acceptant of language mistakes. Even though language errors are the focus of all teachers in this study it does not mean that teachers forget to focus on other aspects of feedback as Zamel claims.

In sum, feedback texts analyzed for this study, contained responses on vocabulary, content, and organization. These findings confirmed those of Ferris, who also observed that teachers begun to focus more on higher-level issues over the last 15 years. The empirical evidence from this research revealed that teachers usually focused on all levels of feedback, with the exception of context related feedback, in their written comments. According to the Response Triangle, these teachers' feedback contained elements of response at both the local level and global levels. At the least, this was the case in the higher level classrooms in an upper secondary school, which was the focus of this study.

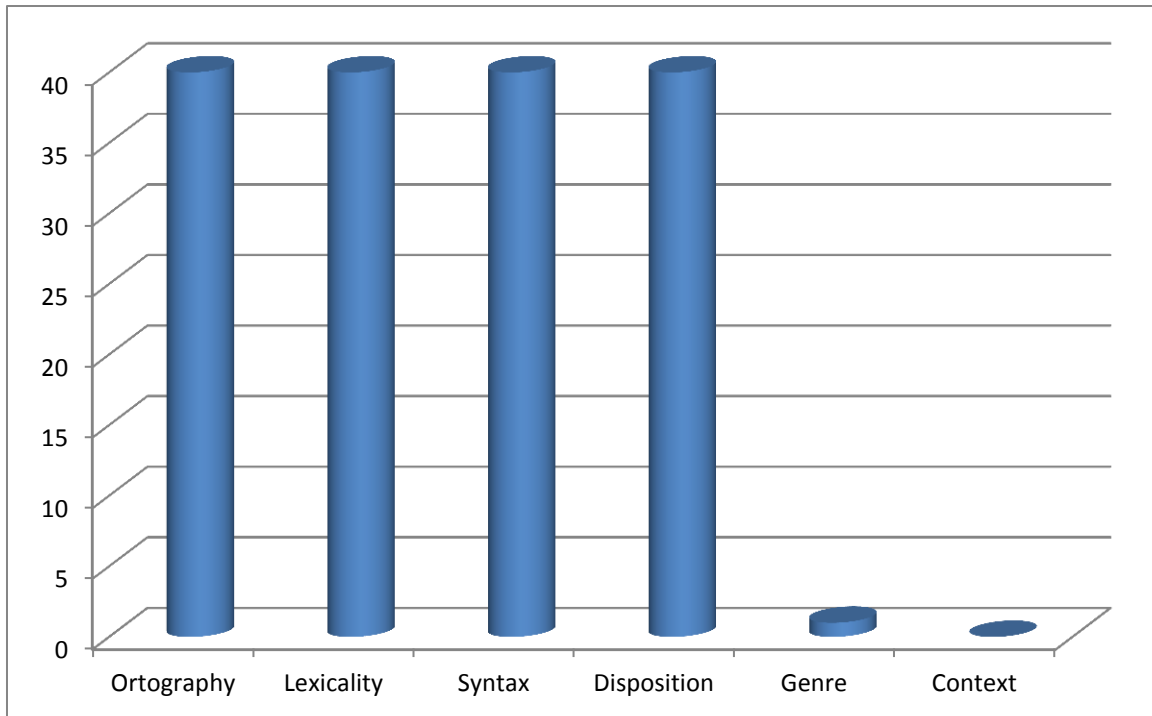


Figure 4. Distribution of Teachers' Written Feedback

It is clear that teachers pay more attention to linguistic competence rather than text competence. My conclusion is that teachers should focus more on response at the global text level. Teachers must focus more on content, genre and context. Even though all feedback texts contain some response about the content this response must be more specific as noted above. Saying that content is good is not sufficient enough. Teachers seem to know much about feedback. However what teachers say and what they know in theory is not what they do in reality.

4.2 Feed Back, Feed Up and Feed Forward

The types of feedback analyzed for this study took place continuously during a course in order to improve pupils' learning. In this chapter, I examine feedback examples, in order to determine if the teacher's content contained the three types of responses; feed back, feed forward, and feed up. Table 4, below, shows the distribution of the teachers' examples of responses in terms of feed back, feed up, and feed forward. I believe I am able to say something about feed up even though I have not received any assessment criteria from the teachers beforehand. The feedback texts given to me are responses on different assignments and because of practical reasons and the extent of this thesis it was difficult for me to gather the assessment criteria (feed up). However I still believe that it is possible for me to see whether teachers comment on feed up in their responses. I believe that teachers absolutely should comment on pupils' intended learning outcomes in their written feedback. Goals need to be clear in order for pupils to increase their learning and even though I have not seen any goals beforehand I will examine whether these are present in teachers' written responses, which I believe should be the case. My study deals with the kinds of feedback that teachers provide to their pupils. In this section the focus is on feed back, feed forward and feed up.

In order to provide helpful feedback, teachers must, of course, assess pupils' products. I agree with Taras (2005) that all assessment begins with summative assessment, as defined and explained in chapter 2. Taras' defined formative assessment as a combination of summative assessment and feedback. I strongly believe that Black and Wiliam undermined the importance of summative assessment and that, in fact, formative assessment cannot take place without completed summative assessment. In addition, formative must include feedback, and this type of feedback is examined in this chapter. After having analyzed 40 feedback examples and the eight interviews, it is clear, that teachers believe that assessment should be formative, which is the main purpose of assessment is to help pupils learn more. However, I return to teachers' reflections about assessment later in this chapter.

After having examined all of the 40 feedback texts it was very reassuring to see that all feedback examples tried to answer the question, "How am I going?" This, however, should be the minimum requirement of any written response. Feed back is the information given to pupils about their progress and achievements and to their attempts to attain the competence goal. For English as a foreign language, the three main areas of competence are: language acquisition; communication and culture; society and literature.

The data from this study revealed, that this type of feed back was both positive and negative

Examples of positive feed back are reproduced bellow:

Feedback 1:

Your essay is very well structured, Knut, and you give a relevant answer to the essay topic where you show great ability in analyzing the contents of the novel. Your language is also very good. You make very few errors and the paper is very easy to read. Keep up the good work!

Feedback 2

Your language is quite good and you have very few spelling mistakes and grammar errors. You also demonstrate that you have detailed knowledge of the short story, the author, and the themes. I like the way that you start your essay by telling about the author.

The research data collection revealed that teachers usually tended to give some positive feed back to all pupils, both low achievers and pupils with high academic achievements. Teachers found it important to give positive feed back to all pupils, even though most teachers felt that it is the negative feed back that would take pupils further in their learning. Positive feed back tends to say something about pupils' achievements and success and many teachers consider positive feed back as praise. After analyzing all the feedback examples, I have come to distinguish between positive feed back and praise. Whether feed back is positive or negative, it should be related to the competency goals in English. Praise can be related to other aspects of pupils' performances for instance handwriting, which is not a competence goal for English students. If a teacher comments on a pupil's handwriting, or other similar attributes, I consider it praise, not positive feedback.

Below are three examples of negative feed back:

Feedback 3:

I expect much more from you in this assignment. The text is too short and important points are missing. I am only assessing the language, but if I was to assess the content, the grade would be lower.

Feedback 4:

As you wrote in a comment after your text, this is not good enough in terms of your content. It is very obvious that you spent this class doing something else than working on the given assignment.

Feedback 5:

Your language is not very communicative here. There are some basic language and grammar mistakes that you must work on. You do not fully answer the assignment given.

Clearly negative, these examples attempted to sum up where the pupil was at the assignment's time, again answering the question, "How am I going?" Unfortunately none of these examples contained any feed forward, which in my opinion is the most important aspect of any feedback. But despite the lack of feed forward in the three examples above, most did contain feed forward. However, I must say that this is not the case for most of the feedback texts I have examined.

Both nationally and internationally, interest in assessment has increased. The Norwegian Education Department made assessment a major focus, and much has been done to increase teachers' knowledge in this area. However, I found it surprising that the teachers actually knew so much about assessment. In terms of assessment, teachers placed the most emphasis on feed forward, which tries to answer the question "Where to next?" Answering this question provides pupils with a possibility for moving to higher next level of knowledge.

Here are some examples of feed forward:

Teacher 1: I like the way that you start your book review by telling about the author, but next you should have presented the main characters to the reader, before giving a summary of the entire story. Be careful not to reveal how the story ends in a book review.

Teacher 2: Lots and lots of credit to you for trying... You have written a nice introduction/presentation of George and Lennie, and a nice conclusion. You show that you have acquired some knowledge about *Of Mice and Men*. What you need to do

next is increasing your vocabulary. Avoid using Norwegian words when you do not know the English words, and use the dictionary thoroughly in your work. Try to work hard on a short text of about ½ page where you look up all words that you do not understand. Try to learn 5-10 new words every week and please continue using your chance to get extra help with your English at “leksehjelp”. I am sorry that I wrote so much in English, I will tell you also in Norwegian.

In terms of feed forward, most teachers were very specific, trying to help their pupils develop their learning and improve their study techniques. Teachers’ did focuses carefully on the pupils’ need of information to help them do better academically, with the overall goal of reducing discrepancies between the pupils’ understanding and competences as stated in the syllabus.

As for feed up, that is, commenting on the criteria or goals for the course, most teachers simply did not. Of 40 examples only six examples of feed up emerged from the data. Hattie and Timperley (2007) stated that goals must be very clear in order for pupils to enhance their learning. However, even though teachers did not overtly include competency goals in their feedback texts, teachers are aware of the importance of feed up in order to enhance pupils’ learning. During the interviews, all the participants stated how significant it is for pupils to know criteria beforehand; setting clear goals helps pupils develop further goals as the previous ones have been achieved and thus clear, openly and often stated goals can result in continuous learning.

The following table, table 3, illustrates the distribution of teachers’ responses in terms of feed back, feed up and feed forward.

Table 3. Provision of Feed Back, Feed Forward and Feed Up in Feedback Texts:

Text	Feed Back	Feed Forward	Feed Up	Grade
1	X (+)			6-
2	X (+)			5+
3	X (+,-)	X		5
4	X (+,-)	X	X	5-
5	X (+,-)	X		4+
6	X (-)	X		4-5
7	X (+)	X	X	4
8	X (+,-)	X		4
9	X (+)	X		4
10	X (+,-)	X		4
11	X (+)			4

12	X (+,-)	X		4
13		X		4-3
14	X (+,-)	X		4-3
15	X (+,-)			4-
16		X		3-4
17	X (+,-)	X		3-4
18	X (+,-)	X		3+
19	X (-)	X	X	3+
20	X (-)	X		3+
21	X (+,-)	X	X	3
22	X (-)			3
23	X (+,-)	X		3
24	X (-)	X		3
25	X (+)		X	3
26	X (+,-)			3
27	X (+,-)			3
28	X (-)	X		3-
29	X (+,-)	X		3-
30	X (-)	X		3-
31	X (-)	X		3-
32	X (+,-)	X	X	2+
33	X (+,-)	X		2+
34	X (+,-)	X		2+
35	X (+,-)	X		2
36	X (+,-)			2-
37	X (-)	X		2-
38	X (-)	X		1+
39	X (+,-)	X		1-
40	X (-)	X		1

Positive feed back indicated by (+); negative feed back (-)

As table 4 shows, most examples of feed back given were both positive and negative. The pupils who received grades of 5 or 6 were not given any negative feed back or any feed forward. This is quite understandable, however, since when a pupil achieves the highest grades possible there is little or no feed forward to give. Most feedback texts, as already noted, contain feed forward. However, one can say that there is a lack of feed up in most feedback texts that I have examined.

The diagram below shows the provision of feed back, feed forward and feed up in percentage. In brief the diagram shows that 95% of all feedback texts contain some kind of feed back. This feed back can be either positive or negative or both. 52, 5 % of feedback texts contain both positive and negative feed back. Furthermore 77, 5 % and 15% of feedback texts contain feed forward and feed up.

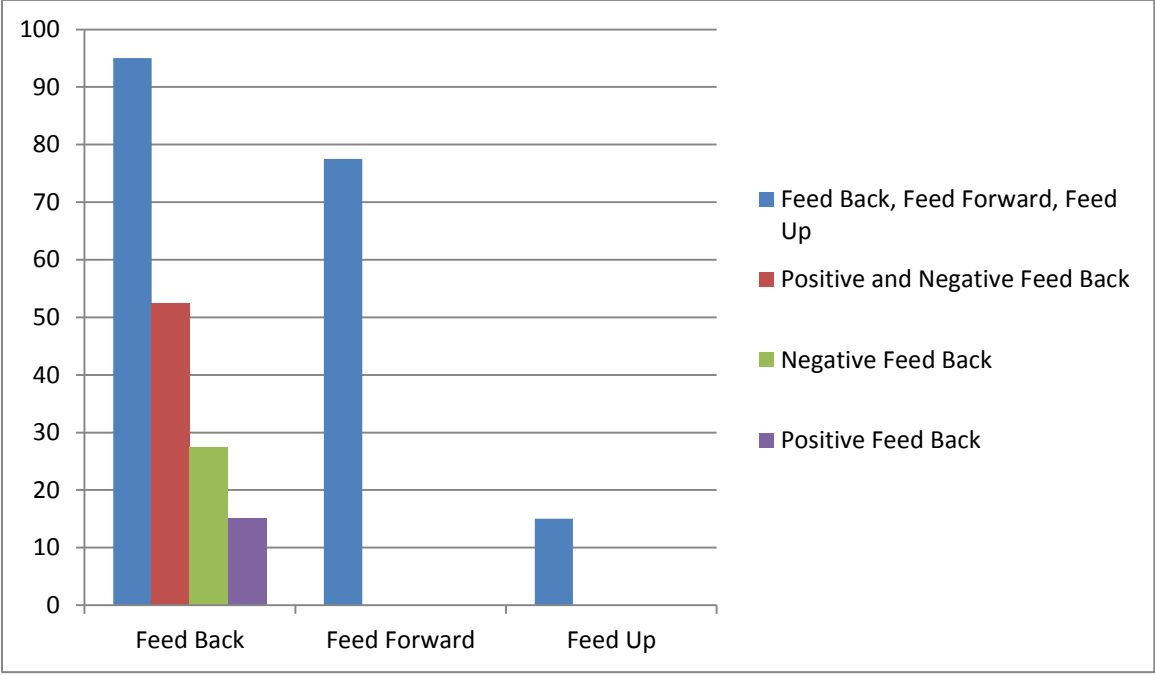


Figure 5. Provision of Feed Back, Feed Forward and Feed Up in Percentage

4.3 Teachers Thoughts and Reflections on the Assessment Practice

The main purpose with teacher-participants interviews was to find more about teachers' reflections on this topic. In this chapter, I will answer the second part of my research question and present my findings which deal with teachers' assessment practices. I am interested in discovering what teachers know and think about assessment. This is what Simon Borg (2003) refers to as teacher cognition. The only way to do this is to ask the teachers.

4.3.1 Purpose of Assessment

Purpose of assessment was a reoccurring element in all the interviews, of course, and based on the participants' answers, several essentials emerged.

One purpose of assessment is to discover pupils' current status in relation to competency goals. To do so, teachers must assess a product, usually three to four assignments from a semester to evince their accomplishments and current status. So the purpose, among other things, is to gather data in order to assign pupils grades that reflect their progress in relation to their goals.

Another purpose of assessment, and to most teachers' the primary, is to help pupils further their learning.

One teacher asserted: [The]

purpose of assessment has a primary focus and that is to help pupils further in their learning, and make it clear how to get to the next level, in order to formulate himself better in English or to avoid formal mistakes in written works for instance. For me, as a teacher, it is a secondary purpose to have something to assess.

All the participants in this study specified that the main purpose of assessment is helping pupils to attain higher level of knowledge and improve academically. This is what Hattie and Timperley (2007) called feed forward. Feed forward is the main aspect of formative assessment in my opinion. Formative assessment is all those activities that create feedback to develop pupils' further understanding and learning. As Sadler stated, formative assessment's main purpose is to shape pupils and improve their knowledge (Sadler 1989 in Irons 2008).

Black and Wiliam's principle is that formative assessment leads to learning gains. If the teacher provides assessment (or feedback) that is not usable for enhancing a pupil's performance, then it is not formative (Wiliam 2011). Feedback needs to be precise and accurate, it should clarify what must happen to attain a higher level, and the pupils must understand the feedback in order to use it. However, Black and Wiliam also stated that the assessment must be continuous and systematic, and the current study's participants also made the same point. In contrast, for reasons explored below, the participants tended to give only 4 written feedback responses during a semester. At the same time, they noted that with continuous assessment, they noticed improvements in pupils' learning.

One participant observed:

By giving assessments often, I notice improvements in pupils' written works. And also about oral performance. Each lesson I make a note of who said something serious, who said something wise ... and whether it is well communicated to me. Then I give them short feedback and it then becomes a motivation to do better as I see it.

Surprisingly enough, not one of the participants mentioned summative assessment as a purpose. They focused instead on formative assessment and primarily on feed forward.

4.3.2 Provision of Feedback - How?

Most of the teachers began their comments on their pupils' English writings with positive feedback, believing the positive to be especially important for the academically weaker pupils. Løkensgard (2008) observed that feedback should be reassuring and supportive, partially because, as writers of texts, pupils do not always see what is good. One teacher explained it somewhat differently:

I always give positive comments. I think that is the best acknowledgement for...for the will to learn.

All the teachers in this study also considered praise to be feedback, the kind of feedback that will encourage pupils. As stated earlier, I do not consider all praise to be feedback, agreeing with Black and Wiliam (1998) who, stated that feedback explains something about the pupils' quality of work and, provides a comment on how to improve their work. Comments such as

“well done” are praise, but do not tend to increase pupils’ commitment or motivation. Such comments do not explain anything in particular about the students’ work, nor do they provide any feed forward, and cannot therefore, be considered actual feedback. Hattie and Timperley disagree somewhat, referring to such comments as feedback centered on the “self”, but also arguing that this feedback is the least effective kind of feedback. After examining 40 examples of feedback, I want to make a clear distinction between praise and positive feedback. Praise centers around the self, but positive feedback relates to effort and self – regulation. Thus, in my opinion, positive feedback is much more effective than praise. And actually, I doubt whether praise is even advisable if the teachers’ comments contain positive, specific feedback.

In assessing and commenting on pupils’ work, the teachers applied focused correction. This means that they selected choose three to four features of pupils’ work and provided negative, or corrective feedback. In one of the interviews one teacher explained:

when I give feedback I tend to be quite specific. I focus on what is good before I give comments on what must be improved. I tend to focus on three to four things that must be improved.

However, teachers may correct the writings of high achievers and low achievers differently. Some teachers tended to correct everything for high achievers, because these pupils aspire to achieve the best grades.

Most of the participants in this study indicated that negative feedback can be demotivating, especially for the lower-achieving pupils, and this is one reason most teachers applied focused correction in their assessments. At the same time, the participants were well aware that positive comments give no information how pupils should or can improve.

A participant observed:

I believe that for most pupils negative feedback is most effective but I do not have a very good explanation for it except that... I notice that my pupils do not try to improve themselves unless they have been told which areas to improve.

Most of the teachers believed, that a combination of both positive and negative feedback works best and that the positive feedback must come first. Teachers provided feedback related to the task, probably the most common type of written feedback. It is also called corrective

feedback. This kind of feedback is mainly given because of misunderstandings. Teachers usually wrote corrections in the text, mostly about structure, content and language, before giving individual feedback.

Teachers tended to tell their pupils what was good in their texts and what should be preserved, but they also provided clues as to what was vague and what had to be improved.

4.3.3 Pupils' Involvement in Assessment

In my opinion, pupils' involvement – or lack thereof – in assessment is an aspect of feedback that needs improvement, and the research-participants were also very well aware of this. This is especially true in terms of making pupils familiar with the goals or assessment criteria. Goals must be clear, and at all times pupils should know where they are going. Hattie and Timperley (2007) stated that setting clear goals leads to pupils develop further goals as they reach the previous ones. Furthermore, it must be emphasized that in no way did the teachers in this study undermine the importance of goals or assessment criteria. However, they did not as often as they should apply these in their teaching. A participant argued for improvement:

what I would like to become better in is to make assessment criteria prior to a written assignment together with my pupils...quite often we have already finished criteria but these are not adjusted to a specific assignment...here at this school I feel that we do it just to meet the formal requirements and it becomes a paper that we are supposed to use but is just left posted on frontier...I believe they must be adjusted to every assignment.

This argument actually summarized the general thoughts of most teachers about feed up. They knew that the criteria existed, were important, and that pupils had seen them. However, the teachers also realized, that the criteria were not used openly or continuously and that pupils do not have much to say about the assessment criteria.

On the other hand, the study participants were much better at involving their pupils in self-assessment and peer-assessment. Most of the participants applied self-assessment in their teaching, and some would like to use it more often. A participant described the process:

I use self-assessment often with project works. I ask them to write a log where they evaluate their own effort, group participation, find a result ... I also ask them what they have learned and how they experienced the whole process... I guess that is a way of asking them to participate in my future planning.

These teachers believed that self-assessment and peer assessment could help pupils further their learning, a statement that is also supported by Hopfenbeck (2001). At the same time, Hopfenbeck declared that pupils' participation in these types of assessment was not very common in Norwegian schools. At the school where this study was conducted, however, Hopfenbeck's statement was not validated. Teachers there did believe in involving pupils in assessment, they knew certain improvements were needed and they tried to use self-assessment and peer-assessment in their classrooms whenever appropriate.

There has certainly been a change in this area of assessment. Hopfenbeck (2001) strongly affirmed that pupils' involvement in assessment will increase their motivation and learning. By evaluating their own learning, pupils realize what is expected of them and what needs to be done in order to improve academically. As a recently recognized and important aspect of formative assessment, self-assessment helps develop self-regulated learner, a person who can find solution to problems and use scaffolding, but who also possesses confidence in terms of content, language and study techniques. In order to increase the application of self-assessment and develop self-regulated learners, we need to increase pupils' knowledge about assessment. In fact, in terms of peer-assessment and self-assessment, the study participants pointed to several challenges due to pupils' lack of knowledge about assessment. One teacher noted:

The very weak pupils are not able to assess themselves or their peers. They lack the knowledge about the topic and they do not know much about the assessment criteria. They also lack the meta-language in order to provide good feedback.

Another teacher expressed the following: I guess maybe, my experience is, that not all students have enough self-insight to evaluate themselves correctly. Some students think higher of themselves than how they perform in class, but the good thing is... they can evaluate what they have learned and how they worked and I think that this process of thinking of what they have done helps them learn better too ... because they need to think back and then they will learn.

The same teacher summed up peer-assessment:

I think in some cases it is difficult for pupils to assess other pupils. I think it is easy to give positive feedback and especially when working with response groups. I always have to remind them that they must say something more than just: this was very good or this is a very good text. They must say what is good and also they must comment on something which can be improved because there is always something that can be improved or that they can help each other with. So I do believe it is difficult for them to give effective feedback.

The teachers in this study were also quite aware of how peer-assessment can influence pupils learning. According to Villamil and de Guerrero (2006), the popularity of peer-assessment and teachers' use of peer-assessment in L2 classrooms is mainly due to its valuable, extensive encouragement of pupils' learning, especially in their writing. Another reason for the increased use of peer-assessment is pupils' engagement in sharing the accountability of feedback. Villamil and de Guerrero argued, "Part of the great appeal of peer feedback is also derived, in our view, from its strong foothold in theoretical principles relating social interaction and meditation to individual development" (Villamil and de Guerrero 2006:23). These theoretical principles were derived from the works of Vygotsky and sociocultural theory (SCT). SCT indicated that learning is a social phenomenon rooted in historical, cultural, and institutional contexts. In other words, both mind and consciousness are social in nature, and complex ways of thinking require social interaction. In education, this means that teachers must examine sociocultural contexts in the classroom.

Teachers must also be aware of the factors that lead to effective scaffolding. Factors such as interest in the assignment and critical responses may come easily to some pupils. However, others benefit from open discussions about these factors in the classroom. Teachers must do their best to interest pupils in assignments, elicit critical thinking and responses from them, and encourage the social interactions that help develop complex ways of thinking. On top of all this, these concepts and methods should be discussed openly with the pupils in the classroom.

4.3.4 Pupils' Use of Feedback

The use made of feedback varied greatly among pupils. Some pupils focused mostly on the grade given even though all the teachers in this study spent much time and effort to provide

them with written feedback. According to research participants, the pupils' use of feedback depended on pupils' academic success in schools. Low achievers focused mainly on grades, and if no grade was provided, the feedback itself was so unimportant to them that they often simply threw it away. One teacher expressed it this way:

The weaker pupils do not pay much attention to feedback...those who have given up, those who are fed up by receiving negative feedback over and over...

In other words, low achieving-pupils were so used to negative feedback, that they ignored it to protect their self-esteem, which they had come to priorities over learning. Sometimes teachers attempted to force their pupils into looking at feedback by assigning them to revise a text and to include all the alterations and corrections.

In contrast, the pupils who usually attended general studies and who had a history of academic success displayed interested in written feedback. Teachers in this study explained that these pupils took good care of feedback comments and even brought them to subsequent tests. The teacher-participants knew that grades might encourage pupils or discourage them. A participant described the grading dilemma:

Grades deliver an immediate reaction there and then, it makes a strong impression, and it is the first thing that pupils see, which for some can be demotivating and for some motivating.

The participants also recognized that a grade is only a number reflecting only the pupil's competence level. The same participant explained:

A grade alone does not really function for me as a teacher, I do not feel that I say enough with just a grade, I feel that I cannot justify the grade and I believe that a combination of a grade and a comment works best.

Most pupils received grades in addition to comments. However, most of them look only at the grades. Kohn (1994 in Wiliam 2011) said that as soon as teachers put grades on pupils' tests, the learning stops. The teachers knew this, but they provide grades because the system expects them to do so. Parents expect grades as well, to give them information about their children's progress. However, there are certainly other efficient ways to report on pupils' progress. I believe that we need a system of reporting that encourages our pupils and enhances their learning in better ways.

4.3.5 Adjustment of the Lesson

Teaching, according to Black and Wiliam (1998), should be interactive. Weaknesses uncovered through assessment must be the focus of further instruction. Black and Wiliam further argued that assessment becomes formative when the evidence from the assessment is used to adjust the teaching in order to enhance pupils' learning. Formative assessment involves more than providing effective feedback, to help improve pupils' competencies. It involves changing the classroom in a way that produces learning gains. So, do teachers use assessment to make changes in their classrooms, and if so how do they do that?

The teachers interviewed for this study all confirmed that they do change their teaching in response to assessment. They tried to discover common problem areas and addressed these areas with the entire class. One teacher described this process:

I adjust my lessons mainly by locating problem areas for my pupils... we gather results about our pupils' competences all the time and the more information one has about the pupils the easier it is to guide the pupils... however, some of the pupils have the same problems and we can address the problems in common... it certainly affects my lessons in terms of language acquisition and grammar...much more than, for example, the cultural aspect of the teaching.

However, addressing problem areas with the entire class does not automatically mean that teachers did not address individual problem areas. Even so, addressing individual problems was a challenge if the class had many pupils ore pupils were at very different levels. Adjusting the lesson for each pupil in the class would be extremely time consuming. A teacher expressed frustration:

It is difficult, especially in classes with different levels in terms of knowledge, I feel it is difficult to see all the pupils and focus on each and everyone, from the weak pupils to the high achievers so that they all have gain in learning outcomes.

4.3.6 Challenges and Improvements

One thing is clear after the interviews; the teachers believed that there is a lot they can improve in terms of assessment, but the time needed to do so is a problem. The teachers

would like to spend more time on every individual assessment, but the time needed to write effective and efficient feedback was prohibitive. Teachers already spend much time assessing their pupils, and they felt especially frustrated with the emphasis on summative assessment in upper secondary schools as compared to lower secondary schools. The teachers believed in formative assessment, but they also had to consider the number of pupils in their classes. It is not uncommon for an English teacher to have 150 pupils. Thus, finding time and space for effective, individual assessment and feedback is challenging to say the least. With regard to time limits, the quality of feedback is decisive in whether pupils enhance their learning. When asked about time, one teacher replied:

It is a matter of prioritizing... One can always give up planning lessons, however, just assessing pupils and providing feedback is not desirable.

The same teacher said that most language teachers spend much more time assessing than what the position percentage allows.

Another challenge in assessment for some teachers was to provide pupils with precise and specific comments on how to improve their learning and at the same time motivate the pupils to actually do that. The way that teachers choose to express themselves may either motivate or demotivate the pupils. To illustrate this, Kari Smith (2009) referred to a survey implemented in England. After national testing was introduced in England, pupils with lower grades became much more insecure, and their self-esteem decreased more than that of pupils with good results. In other words, there is a clear connection between pupils' results and their self-confidence. The problem occurs especially when the summative assessment is not specified for the individual; the results must be discussed with the pupil and be part of the individual assessment process. It is not the testing of pupils' knowledge that negatively impacts their motivation, but the lack of authentically formative, individual assessment that negatively impacts their actual learning. In testing situations, communication between pupil and teacher is a decisive element that we must emphasize in our schools and classroom environments (Smith 2009).

Smith defined feedback as "information given to pupils about the current status of their learning" (Smith 2009:30). This type of assessment is criteria based. As noted above, grades have little or no impact on pupils' learning. Only the feed back, feed forward, and feed up, provided along with requisite grades specifying competence level, can motivate the pupil. Teachers must focus on what the pupils can do, but to move them forward, the teachers must

also focus on what the pupils cannot do – despite the possibility of demotivation. In addition, pupils must understand the feedback in order to conceptualize possibilities for further learning. As Black and Wiliam declared, feedback has no purpose if the pupils do not comprehend it and cannot do something about it. This means that both the teachers and the pupils have a responsibility to make sure that feedback is understood and that the learning is enhanced (Wiliam in Smith 2009).

4.3.7 Interpersonal Aspect of Feedback

The interviews for this research revealed that teachers were very well aware of the interpersonal in feedback. Establishing what Allwright (1989) called “social harmony” is seen to be of great value in terms of language development. Establishing social harmony involves creating a classroom culture that involves trust and cooperation. The way that feedback is structured to achieve social harmony affects pupils and their learning development (Hyland and Hyland 2006). Hyland and Hyland (2006) observed that the provision of feedback is framed by the social purposes in which it occurs. It is facilitated within cultures and institutions where it occurs. Teachers’ backgrounds and experiences impact the focus of written feedback affecting how they frame feedback and how much they become personally involved in their responses to their pupils.

The participants in this study said that the way written feedback is structured affects the learning environment in the classroom. They spent much time and effort to create feedback that raised pupils’ motivation and self-confidence, and the ways they formulate their comments was essential to the feedback’s effectiveness. In general, the participants stated, each in their own words, that negative feedback, which is ultimately the most formative, can negatively impact pupils’ confidence. Thus, formulating feedback that contains constructive criticism and not too much praise, which can easily confuse pupils, is a complicated process. A participant revealed the impact of her background on giving feedback:

I spent many years in children’s school earlier so my habit is to think as a mother - and I think the best mothering is praise. And you have to look for things to praise. But it has to be true, you cannot just praise for the sake of praise. That does not work, that is worse than not saying anything, you should not do that, I think. But - sometimes they need corrections and limits and sometimes students develop a habit of

underperforming, and then I tell them. I spend much time on formulating good feedback.

The same participant further revealed:

I think my role as a teacher resembles in many ways my role as a mother. I know I do a lot of good things, but even then I am always unhappy because I can do better. And I am always looking for better ways of doing it. And each time when a pupil fails - when compared with my expectations for that pupil – I feel responsible.

The teachers obviously found praise important for a positive learning environment and for the development of pupils' writing skills. Indeed, all the interviewees tried to find something positive in pupils' writing to comment on. In general, they felt that pupils were more receptive to critical comments after receiving some kind of positive response. Most teachers felt that a combination of both, positive and negative feedback, was most effective, and they tried not to overwhelm their pupils with negative comments. One teacher declared:

I never correct all the mistakes. If there is dyslexic for example, I choose only one thing, or I make an agreement with him; "Please just communicate in this text, and I promise you I will not at all correct spelling mistakes or comma mistakes." Correcting all mistakes would be devastating.

Again, some teachers remarked that there is clearly a difference in providing comments to high achievers and low achievers, adding that always receiving negative feedback is very demotivating for low achievers. Thus, they focus their comments narrowly, often limiting the corrections to three problem areas. Correcting texts for a third grader that attends general studies and for a pupil that attends vocational studies must be approached very differently, according to participants. Maintaining a good relationship with their pupils, in order to effectively encourage them to enhance their learning mattered greatly to the participants. They said that finding a balance between praise and guidance is the key.

The data from the written feedback and the interview demonstrated that teachers used praise in order to lessen the impact of negative comments. This was a way for teachers to build positive relationships with their pupils. Here are some examples:

Your English is fluent and your essay is well structured. You also manage to use the knowledge that you possess; however you do not seem to have understood the

assignment clearly. You have fully answered activity A but B is somewhat unclear. The way of presenting facts about the novel through an interview would have worked well in an article but it does not represent a book review.

You have written a good film review and you stick to the genre all the way. There are some language mistakes you need to be aware of concord and use of prepositions. The content is good; however do try not to focus on details. Remember that a film review is a personal genre, your voice needs to be heard more.

In these examples both teachers offered positive comments before focusing on what needs to be improved. In fact, each of the 40 examples of feedback contained praise in addition to constructive criticism. The teachers were hardly ever only critical because they believed that criticizing pupils' problems areas leads to discouragement and might be devastating. During the interviews, it became very clear that the teachers considered pupils' writing to be very personal and the pupils felt very insecure about their writing. These were main reasons why the teachers modified their feedback methods and used praise in order to reduce the effect of criticism. That said, however, even though the teachers tried to establish a positive learning environment, they also insisted that they must act as experts and provide feedback that moves the learner further toward the goals.

In summary, then, during the interviews teachers also stated that *most* pupils valued feedback, but that it must be helpful to be effective. And the teachers' feedback was very much influenced by knowledge of the particular classroom culture. But additionally, what they knew of individual pupils very much affected their way of giving feedback to the individual. Whether or not the teachers were knowledgeable about the theories of social harmony as sociocultural development, they did take into account pupils' personalities and the classroom environment when they constructed feedback. Finally, all this could be taken a giant step forward if teachers would ask their pupils what they consider helpful feedback and then try their best to respond accordingly. The pupils themselves are likely more aware of their problem areas than we might think. Thus, in addition to professional assessment, teachers should discover and facilitate students' self-assessment and peer-assessment under the bright lights of the criteria and goals and then construct their feedback responses accordingly.

5 Conclusion and Final Remarks

5.1 Final Thoughts

Formative assessment and the provision of effective feedback has been the focus of educational researchers for some years now. Research shows that teachers' assessment practices have a great impact on their pupils' enhancement of learning and that these practices affect the ways that English is being taught in schools today. The written feedback in English, which is the central point of this thesis, should offer pupils information on how to improve and develop their learning in the future. It should develop pupils' potential and give pupils an idea of what is expected of them. Teacher should lead their pupils through the "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1978).

Finding an answer to my research question has made me realize that assessment is much more complicated than teachers like to think. Teachers consider assessment as an internalized part of their work and they do this work quite routinely and spontaneously. Interviewing the study participants has made me realize that as soon as teachers start to understand and reflect more upon the purpose of assessment, they will also be more able to give effective feedback that enhances learning of their pupils.

In my theory chapter I have relied heavily on researchers such as Black and Wiliam, Hattie and Timperley and Sadler. Their definitions of feedback have influenced this study deeply. The interviews and examinations of written feedback are based on these definitions. I understand now how complicated the concept of written feedback actually is. Summative assessment must take place in order to provide efficient feedback. This can only happen if teachers discover where their pupils are in their learning process. In fact, feedback is a result of summative assessment. The purpose of this is to reduce the discrepancy between the pupils' current status and the competence goals. The ideal feedback should answer three questions: Where is the pupil going?, How is he or she going?, Where to next?. The answers to these questions are feed up, feed back and feed forward. The goal in this thesis was to discover what kind of written feedback teachers give to their pupils and whether the ideal is actually the reality. This study shows that the focus of teachers in terms of written feedback is feed back and feed forward. Feed up seems to be absent in most of the collected feedback texts. I also used Kronholm-Cederberg's Response Triangle to analyze the feedback texts.

The study shows that teachers pay a lot of attention to response at the local level and that they should also include more elements at the global level such as context and genre. In addition to examining written feedback I was also very interested in finding more about teachers' thoughts and reflections about assessment.

In order to discover more about teachers' cognition in assessment I conducted eight interviews at an upper secondary school. During the interviews it became clear to me that teachers have their own ways of doing things and their own individual ideas. In order to really understand teachers' behavior it is necessary to take a look at teachers' beliefs and their knowledge about assessment. However there were some challenges. Teachers are not often asked about their practices and to articulate these practices can pose some difficulties. Teachers find it difficult to put this into words. What I discovered during my interviews is that there seems to be a tension between teachers' beliefs and teachers' own practices. Teachers do not always do what they believe and know. This thesis can make teachers aware of that and perhaps improve their assessment practices.

For me personally, this study has been educational. My practices in terms of assessment are changing. I have become more aware of what my pupils need in order to enhance their learning. My feedback texts had a tendency to focus mainly on feed back. Today my focus is not just feed back but also feed forward and feed up. My beliefs and my practices in the classroom are much more consistent after this study.

There are other aspects of assessment that could be interesting with respect to further research. It would be interesting to develop my findings further and examine pupils' perspectives on written feedback texts and their attitudes towards the effectiveness of written feedback. It would also be interesting to take a look at the differences in assessment practice between teachers working in vocational studies and general studies. The field of assessment is enormous. More and more attention is being paid to this field and teachers know much about assessment. However, the main goal must be to decrease the inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and knowledge and their actual practices. Hopefully this study is a step in that direction.

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List of Figures

Figure 1. A Model of Feedback by Hattie and Timberley (2007).....	15
Figure 2. Text Triangle (Hillock 1987 in Sandvik 2011).....	39
Figure 3. Kronholm-Cederberg’s Response Triangle (2009).....	40
Figure 4. Distribution of Teachers’ Written Feedback	61
Figure 5. Provision of Feed Back, Feed Forward and Feed Up in Percentage.....	67

List of Tables

Table 1. Possible Responses to Types of Feedback.....	23
Table 2. Interview Guide Categories for Written Feedback and Assessment in English Writing.....	46
Table 3. Provision on Feed Back, Feed Forward and Feed Up in Feedback Texts.....	65

Appendix

Appendix 1 Forespørsel til lærere

Forespørsel om å delta i intervju i forbindelse med min masteroppgave

Jeg er masterstudent i fagdidaktikk ved universitetet i Trondheim og holder på med den avsluttende masteroppgaven. Temaet for oppgaven er formativ vurdering. I min oppgave ønsker jeg å undersøke hvordan lærere gir skriftlig tilbakemelding til sine elever og deres refleksjoner rundt vurdering for læring.

For å finne mer om dette ønsker jeg å intervju 7-8 lærere ved Tiller videregående skole. Spørsmålene vil dreie seg om skriftlig respons til elever og hvordan disse bidrar til å fremme læring. Jeg vil bruke båndopptaker og ta notater mens vi snakker sammen. Intervjuet vil ta omtrent 45 minutter, og vi blir sammen enige om tid og sted.

Det er frivillig å være med og du har mulighet til å trekke deg når som helst underveis, uten å måtte begrunne dette nærmere. Dersom du trekker deg vil alle innsamlede data om deg bli anonymisert. Opplysningene vil bli behandlet konfidensielt, og ingen enkeltpersoner vil kunne gjenkjennes i den ferdige oppgaven. Opplysningene anonymiseres og opptakene slettes når oppgaven er ferdig, innen utgangen av 2012.

Dersom du har lyst å være med på intervjuet, er det fint om du skriver under på den vedlagte samtykkeerklæringen og sender den til meg.

Hvis det er noe du lurer på kan du ringe meg på 97597376, eller sende en e-post til damir.budimlic@stfk.no. Du kan også kontakte min veileder Inger Langseth ved program for lærerutdanning på telefonnummer 412 73 111.

Studien er meldt til Personvernombudet for forskning, Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste A/S.

Med vennlig hilsen

Damir Budimlic

Samtykkeerklæring:

Jeg har mottatt informasjon om studien av vurdering for læring og ønsker å stille på intervju.

Signatur Telefonnummer

Appendix 2 Kvittering på melding om behandling av personopplysninger

Norsk samfunnsvitenskapelig datatjeneste AS
NORWEGIAN SOCIAL SCIENCE DATA SERVICES



Harald Hårfagres gate 29
N-5007 Bergen
Norway
Tel: +47-55 58 21 17
Fax: +47-55 58 96 50
nsd@nsd.uib.no
www.nsd.uib.no
Org.nr. 985 321 884

Inger Langseth
Program for lærerutdanning
NTNU
Låven, Dragvoll gård
7491 TRONDHEIM

Vår dato: 23.01.2012

Vår ref: 29020 / 3 / LT

Deres dato:

Deres ref:

KVITTERING PÅ MELDING OM BEHANDLING AV PERSONOPPLYSNINGER

Vi viser til melding om behandling av personopplysninger, mottatt 12.12.2011. Meldingen gjelder prosjektet:

29020	<i>Formative Assessment/ Formative Feedback</i>
Behandlingsansvarlig	NTNU, ved institusjonens øverste leder
Daglig ansvarlig	Inger Langseth
Student	Damir Budimlic

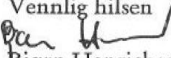
Personvernombudet har vurdert prosjektet og finner at behandlingen av personopplysninger er meldepliktig i henhold til personopplysningsloven § 31. Behandlingen tilfredsstiller kravene i personopplysningsloven.

Personvernombudets vurdering forutsetter at prosjektet gjennomføres i tråd med opplysningene gitt i melde skjemaet, korrespondanse med ombudet, eventuelle kommentarer samt personopplysningsloven/helseregisterloven med forskrifter. Behandlingen av personopplysninger kan settes i gang.

Det gjøres oppmerksom på at det skal gis ny melding dersom behandlingen endres i forhold til de opplysninger som ligger til grunn for personvernombudets vurdering. Endringsmeldinger gis via et eget skjema, http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/forsk_stud/skjema.html. Det skal også gis melding etter tre år dersom prosjektet fortsatt pågår. Meldinger skal skje skriftlig til ombudet.

Personvernombudet har lagt ut opplysninger om prosjektet i en offentlig database, <http://www.nsd.uib.no/personvern/prosjektoversikt.jsp>.

Personvernombudet vil ved prosjektets avslutning, 31.12.2012, rette en henvendelse angående status for behandlingen av personopplysninger.

Vennlig hilsen

Bjørn Henriksen


Lis Tenold

Kontaktperson: Lis Tenold tlf: 55 58 33 77

Vedlegg: Prosjektvurdering

✓ Kopi: Damir Budimlic, Jarveien 49 b, 7072 HEIMDAL

Avdelingskontorer / District Offices:

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TRONDHEIM: NSD, Norges teknisk-naturvitenskapelige universitet, 7491 Trondheim. Tel: +47-73 59 19 07. kyrr.svarva@svt.ntnu.no
TROMSØ: NSD, HSL, Universitetet i Tromsø, 9037 Tromsø. Tel: +47-77 64 43 36. martin-arne.andersen@uit.no