

Pre- and In-service Teachers' Assessment Literacy – A Qualitative Approach

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Abstract

The national school curricula in Sweden (2011) outline general targets for assessment and grading. Teachers are expected to foster learner autonomy in compulsory school so that students in upper secondary school can take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers are accountable for facilitating such progress, while head teachers are expected to manage and coordinate pedagogical activities in schools so that the national targets can be reached. The results in this study show that the majority of pre- and in-service teachers advocate alignment between various assessment strategies for validity and reliability. However, questionnaires and semi-structured interviews also reveal that uncertainty when applying such strategies and diverse approaches to optimal assessment and grading in primary and secondary school provide challenges for pre- and in-service teachers. This article advocates a systematic approach to assessment training for pre-service teachers and continuing training for in-service teachers to alleviate these challenges.

1. Introduction

Research on assessment is extensive with regard to teaching and learning in school. There is, however, a lack of research conducted on pre-teacher cognition about assessment in courses on campus and during practica [1], [2], [3], [4]. The focus of my study – assessment literacy (AL) – can be defined as “skills and knowledge” about formative and summative assessment strategies for constructive, progressive learning [5], [6]. Furthermore, as DeLuca stated in a lecture, “there is a need for teachers to negotiate how such skills and knowledge can be defined and implemented in relation to their classroom contexts and their own pedagogical perspectives” [7]. Wiliam’s argumentation about “assessment as the bridge between teaching and learning” and the necessity for formative assessment to be embedded in strategies for improving teaching and learning is a basic approach to language education in this paper [8].

In addition, my theoretical and empirical framework is based on findings in reports from authorities, such as the Council of Europe and the OECD. A further aspect to consider is Borg’s focus on pre- and in-service language teachers cognitive “beliefs, thinking, knowledge and decision-making” [2]. In light of these perspectives, the aim of my article is twofold: to state the facts of what is required in AL for language teaching and learning in the Swedish goal-oriented school system and to map pre- and in-service teachers’ cognition of AL and of their perspectives on assessment. The approach to my inquiry is qualitative and constructivist in the sense that my findings are guided by my interpretations both of current rules and recommendations in the literature and of certain patterns in the responses to my research questions as well as in negotiations with colleagues and external experts in the field of assessment [9].

This study employs a multidimensional definition of AL of Swedish and of English as a foreign language on campus and during practica in Greater Stockholm. The framework of AL for target-oriented teaching, assessing and learning includes essential aspects, such as alignment, transparency, accountability, validity, feedback and feed-forward, peer- and self-assessment, cooperative assessment, reliability and adjustment. This article includes results from questionnaires addressed to students and seminar leaders; semi-structured interviews with qualified teachers as well as results from studies conducted by students at the basic and advanced levels in the teacher training programme for compulsory and upper secondary school at Stockholm University, Sweden. In this country, municipalities and private companies make local decisions about priorities and policies, even if the legal rules are articulated by the state through the Swedish National Agency for Education and based on the current Education Act [10]. At universities, members of the teaching staff are accountable for conveying the legal framework as well as relevant research findings to students.

During practica, however, academics rely on supervisors to offer relevant training for student

teachers in light of the intended learning outcomes (ILOs).

Guided by seminar leaders on campus, student teachers may have formed their own plans or visions for how to approach and develop assessment strategies based on regulations and recommendations issued by authorities and by research, respectively. Circumstances in schools may, however, either encourage or discourage pre-teachers from carrying out their preliminary plans. One reason for this is that there may be discrepancies between what supervisors believe, think and know (or think that they know) about assessment vis-à-vis what they decide to, or can, do given the circumstances. Student teachers are dependent on the given conditions of the schools in which they are placed and this can have lasting effects on their cognition, that is to say on what they ultimately believe, think, know and do as qualified teachers.

In light of this background, my findings show that two thirds of the school teachers displayed varying levels of AL with regard to the implementation of systematic formative and summative strategies for valid and reliable teaching. Most teachers had autodidactic skills in this field while very few had taken initiatives to further training. One third proved to have less training in – and were either sceptical about or thought that they already knew – how to develop their competence in this regard. There can be several reasons for this lack of AL and of the sceptical attitude to reform. One can be that continuing in-service training has not been systematically introduced in the country. Another one can be that the teachers do not see the value of such training; it is, after all, the head teachers' responsibility to arrange in-service training that can cater for teachers' special requirements. A third reason can be the time and energy constraints that many teachers experience and/or that they react against autocratic decisions about how they should teach.

The students may face challenges, if neither school leaders nor the teachers themselves have received proper in-service training, time and space to hold recurrent negotiations about local strategies in connection with, and in the aftermath of, reforms, such as the ones introduced in 2011 [10], [11].

2. Method

My collected data has been analysed from the perspective of identified patterns that recur from respondents and informants over time in light of rules, regulations and recommendations articulated by authorities and informed by research.

The method in this article can be defined as constructivist and qualitative in the sense outlined by, for example, Levitt et al. Data and empirical evidence have been analysed. Examining “meanings within an iterative process of evolving findings” is of crucial

importance in this process [9]. When interpreting the legal framework for assessment; relevant research and recommendations from authorities as well as findings from questionnaires and interviews in my study, a number of features and issues were detected. For example, I discovered some contrasts between rules in the Education Act (SOU 2010:800) which are implemented through the steering documents vis-à-vis in-service and pre-service teachers' cognition about the targets for assessing and grading in school. For example, the curricula for primary and lower secondary school state what follows:

The goals of the school are that each pupil:

- develops increasingly greater responsibility for their studies, and
- develops the ability to assess their own results and relate these and the assessment of others to their own achievements and circumstances [10].

The curriculum for upper secondary school sharpens the demands for the targets further when stating that “the goals of the school are that all students individually take responsibility for their learning and study results, and [that they] can assess their study results and need for development in relation to the requirements of the education” [11]. Depending on the AL of the teachers and the literacies of the pupils/students as well as the circumstances of each school, these goals can provide possibilities and challenges that require monitoring from school leaders and further research.

As mentioned in the Introduction, my study of a limited group of in-service and pre-service teachers' AL in Greater Stockholm reveals contrasts between national ambitions and local circumstances, issues and dilemmas that can affect pre-service teachers both in the short term and the long term.

From 2014 onwards, I have conducted research on (meta-)cognition about assessment for pre-service language teachers (compulsory school K–9, and upper secondary school), in a deliberate attempt to map these students' cognition of AL, that is to say, of their perspectives on assessment in light of current research as well as of rules and recommendations outlined by relevant authorities in Europe and in Sweden. My inquiry has mapped one hundred and fifty students' cognition. However, this article mainly comprises results from thirty-three students' understanding of in-service teachers' AL and cognition during the second practicum in 2017 and their notions about circumstances for conducting assessment in schools in Greater Stockholm. The results are collected from questionnaires to students during their fifth term in the teacher training programme for lower- and upper secondary school (the same questionnaire was issued at the beginning and at the end of campus courses).

In addition, I have considered results from the same thirty-three student teachers' interviews with ninety-nine qualified teachers during the practicum in 2017. Each of the students were asked to interview three language teachers during the second practicum. These interviews were conducted in the framework of a sandwich course about assessment and grading. One course was held on campus during four weeks' time. The practicum comprised twenty-three weekdays under supervision in schools. After the practicum, the students returned to campus for examinations in both courses.

Furthermore, my semi-structured interviews with ten qualified school teachers in inner-city and suburban schools as well as with seven colleagues at Stockholm University through questionnaires and conversations will provide some perspectives for comparison and contrast.

In addition, my research considers findings of AL for pre- and in-service teachers in degree projects for fifty students under my supervision in compulsory school, K-6.

As a former teacher of English and Swedish in upper secondary school, I find that a constructivist, qualitative approach to my inquiry will lead to reliable findings. That is to say, empirical evidence from having worked as a teacher and a practicum supervisor for eight student teachers in two schools in the northern part of Sweden and in three schools in the Stockholm region can provide some necessary insights into some of the possibilities and challenges that language teachers as well as student teachers may face. Such insights may also lead to research bias. However, to redress the balance in this study, I rely on various sources, such as research on assessment; rules, regulations and recommendations outlined by Swedish authorities and by European recommendations from the Council of Europe as well as reports from the OECD.

3. Data collection and findings

3.1. Facts and circumstances

To understand the framework of teaching conditions in Sweden, below I will mention a number of facts and circumstances. Then, my data collection and findings will be presented.

Theories about assessment and grading were not included in campus courses at the teacher training programmes in Sweden until the 2010s. Previously, it was taken for granted that student teachers would learn about assessment during the practicum. An official report addressed this issue in 2008 and suggestions for including items on campus as well as during practica dealing with goal-oriented approaches to teaching, such as transparency, validity, reliability as well as constructive and progressive assessment strategies, were introduced [12]. The

recommendations in this report resulted in some improvements in the teacher training programmes when assessing and grading were introduced as fields of interest.

Hence, today we provide some training in formative and summative assessment on campus. Still, the teacher training programmes offer relatively limited opportunities for students to prepare for assessing, rating and grading pupils' contributions in school. For example, in response to my question handed out prior to my courses about assessment and grading in the spring and in the autumn of 2017: "the teaching to date (on campus and during my first practicum) with regard to assessment and grading has met my needs as a student teacher", thirteen students in the fifth term of teacher training for lower- and upper secondary school replied that they agreed, while fifteen students replied "undecided" and five students "disagreed". (There were no replies for the option "strongly agree" or for "strongly disagree".)

This result is surprising, if we consider the fact that all of the academics that I have consulted hold the conviction that "assessment is an integral part of teaching". Bearing in mind that my questions to colleagues may address an issue that is taken for granted, it is still worth considering the fact that a number of students need to develop their pre-teacher cognition through further focus on various assessment strategies in language education. This can also be relevant for qualified teachers, as one of the academics in my study stated: "In-service training is needed both for English- and for further foreign language teachers". This request is also articulated in the results from students' reports of interviews held with ninety-nine in-service teachers.

As the supervisors during the practicum – qualified teachers in schools – did not receive any official, formal training in assessment prior to 2010, the level of AL for student teachers often depends on their training in higher education and on the, still rather widespread, autodidactic skills of the supervisors, who are also expected to conform to local culture and circumstances in school. In lower- and upper secondary school, for example, teachers are often expected to cater for their own in-service training and for possible recurring training needs. It is true that school leaders are accountable for providing 104 hours of in-service training to fulltime employees annually [13]. HÖK12 is the collective agreement between the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR), an official organisation for employers and an organisation that represents and acts as an advocate for local government in Sweden. All municipalities, county councils and regions are members of SALAR, which represents and acts on their initiative. Nevertheless, the final decisions on, and the initiatives to, what the training will include are often taken by the school management. The intentions behind this process may be good, but interactive

communication with teachers about requests through questionnaires, for example, would empower them further, if their particular needs for in-service training would be revealed and addressed.

The fact that, ultimately, in-service training is planned by the accountable authority in question is confirmed by the Swedish Ministry of Education and Research [14]. It is surprising that school leaders provided insignificant time and space to continuing education in connection with the most recent school reforms in 2011. In my experience, teachers were invited to attend a couple of lectures about the updated curricula and they were then expected to work in subject groups to make sense of the revised texts. This impression of the implementation of the reform has also been confirmed in results recorded by the thirty-three student-teachers in my sandwich course of 2017. Interviews with nine-nine qualified teachers about assessment strategies showed that the inservice training in connection to, and in the aftermath of, the recent school reforms have been insignificant and has even been counterproductive, since it was neither properly structured nor continuous or subjected to evaluation.

It is true that qualified teachers are offered training as lead teachers, who are selected by the senior staff in Swedish schools. Normally, there are merely one lead teacher for each subject, however. This means that the teaching staff in general are dependent on head teachers and lead teachers to provide time and space for furthering their academic education or for arranging local negotiations about assessment strategies, for example.

3.2. Interviews with in-service teachers

The above-mentioned facts and circumstances have resulted in some challenges on the local level. For instance, interviews with secondary school teachers show that there exists a divergence in approaches to assessment strategies and, hence, to issues about validity and reliability. Students in school are also affected by this diversity of opinion. Divergence can be constructive and progressive, but reaching convergence in light of the legal framework for education will probably produce the stability and integrity that is necessary for valid and reliable teaching, assessing and learning. In my semi-structured interview with two male novice teachers of English in 2017 – one had been employed by two inner-city schools (named “a” below) and the other one had been working for two years in a suburb in South Stockholm (named “b” below) – they stated that there still was considerable confusion among teachers about the reform:

Question BF: With regard to the implementation of the most recent reforms, what are your impressions about teacher cognition among your colleagues and

about the training you received in the teacher training programme for lower- and upper secondary school? What do your colleagues and you know, think, believe and do when planning for and conducting assessing and grading in light of more recent research and recommendations from European and Swedish authorities?

Answer a): It is apparent how much confusion there is among teachers – still after six years from when the reform was launched – with regard to the syllabi and grading. The main concern is how to interpret the texts. Actually, I find that some things are clearly defined and easy to interpret, but many colleagues in school and in social media complain about uncertainty, especially in light of the fact that schools are supposed to interpret the steering documents locally and to provide equivalent education nationally. Many of them are even ignorant of the basic framework for formative and summative assessment strategies outlined in the steering documents.

Question BF: Can you elaborate on this and give some examples)

Answer a): Well, problems may occur for many teachers when defining what course grades should include. There can be a lack of consensus among teachers’ understanding of the expectations.

Answer b): I have also come across colleagues who are uncertain about how to weight the various achievements during a school year vis-à-vis the final results when reporting final grades.

Answer a): Still, according to the Swedish National Agency for Education, we are expected to grade students’ achievements in light of their optimal results. In other words, we are supposed to assess and reassess their achievements to promote a progressive learning curve. The rules and regulations for this approach have to be studied and understood by teachers.

Question BF: Can you describe how assessment and grading are conducted in your schools?

Answer b): At this point, I feel quite confident regarding assessing and grading. My colleagues and I are also working systematically with cooperative assessment.

Answer a) and b): Peer-assessment takes time for students to learn and understand. They are not used to assessing each other’s oral and written texts, and they do not know what to assess, at least this is the case in lower secondary school. The familiar technique

named” two stars and a wish” can, however, be quite useful.

Question, BF: In what ways did your teacher training prepare you for assessing and grading?

Answer, a): To be frank, there was an extremely limited focus on assessment and grading on campus.

Answer, b): I find that only one course [...] provided some useful theoretical and practical knowledge about assessing and rating.

Answer, a and b): Actually, we learned the most about assessing and grading in our three practica during the teacher training programme. It was not until we could apply the various approaches and techniques in schools that we understood and learned about the assessment and rating process.

In further interviews with eight qualified secondary teachers at inner-city schools in Stockholm, similar answers about diversity as regards teacher cognition and AL were recorded. In these schools, traditional grading enjoyed a higher status than aligned formative and summative assessment strategies among the school leaders, the parents and the students. This school culture of systematic testing and grading as the dominant approach, however, also included preferences for constructivist and sociocultural approaches to transparent teaching and to autonomous learning. In alignment with the steering documents, targets and requirements provide the framework for the education. One language teacher also stated that “students can participate actively and are invited to exert an influence on the forms of examination, for instance” and that they receive training in metacognition.

These inner-city schools enjoy high status and are well managed and yet the teaching-and-learning strategies are circumscribed by recurrent testing and grading. When there is neither any systematic implementation of alternative strategies to do with assessment and grading on the national nor on the local level from school leaders, then the teaching staff are likely to react either with enthusiasm indifference or despondency. The enthusiastic teachers further their own education. In circumstances where space and time for continuing negotiations are not introduced, however, other teachers can become indifferent or despondent instead of embracing a reform that they may even welcome once it has been introduced properly. All of the eight teachers that I interviewed argued that formative strategies should be implemented systematically to a higher degree than was the case in the year 2017, when the interviews were conducted.

3.3. Interviews with pre-service teachers

Turning to findings from questionnaires addressed to pre-service teachers, Tables 1– 4 below list some of the results from a questionnaire handed out during the year 2017 to thirty-three students in a sandwich course comprising a campus course of 7.5 credits and a second practicum of 7.5. These students were admitted to the teacher training programme (English as the first subject) for compulsory school (years 7–9) and for upper secondary school. I received thirty-three answers prior to the sandwich course and twenty-two answers after the examination of the two courses. The results confirm the holistic outcome of my study of preconditions for progressive language teaching; assessing and grading are often considered challenging areas for school teachers. This fact underlines the need for teaching about assessment and grading in the earlier stages of the teacher training.

Tables 1 – 4 present answers to questions prior to (pre) and at the end of (post) the sandwich course. The questions read as follows:

a:1 and a:2) “I was well-informed about general strategies or visions with regard to assessment and grading at my practice school” and

b:1 and b:2) “The teaching to date (on campus and during practicum) with regard to assessment and grading has met my needs as a student teacher”.

The figures in the tables represent the answers:

1. Strongly agree
2. Agree
3. Undecided
4. Disagree
5. Strongly disagree.

The results in Table 1 reveal the fact that there is a lack of consensus in the answers. For instance, two students replied that they strongly agreed with the notion that they were well-informed about general strategies or visions with regard to assessment and grading during their first practicum, while two students strongly disagreed, and four students disagreed.

Table 1. Answers to the question “I was wellinformed about general strategies or visions with regard to assessment and grading at my first practice school” (pre).

a:1) Information about assessment and grading during the first practicum

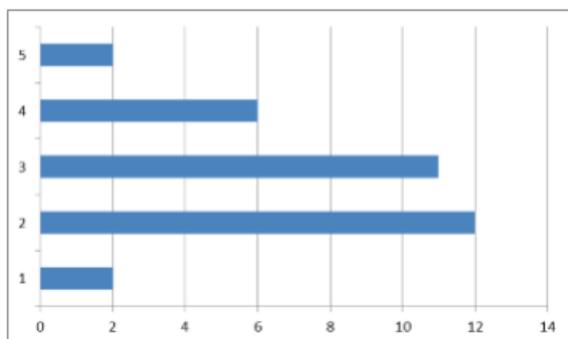


Table 2. Answers to the question “I was well-informed about general strategies or visions with regard to assessment and grading at my second practice school” (post).

a:2) Information about assessment and grading during the second practicum

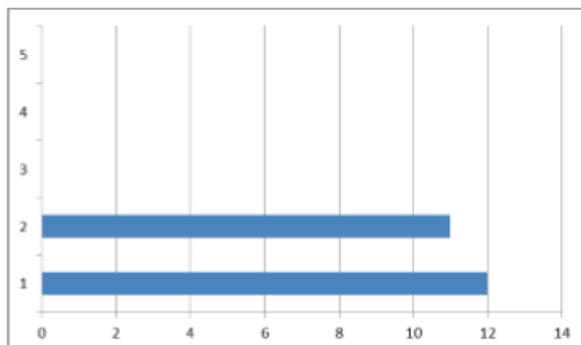


Table 2 shows a development, since all students either strongly agreed (twelve) or agreed (eleven) with the above-mentioned question. The ones who were undecided; who disagreed and who strongly disagreed had been given the opportunity to develop their knowledge of assessment and grading at the school in which they were placed. However, it also shows insignificant changes in the number of students who agreed in Table a:1.

Tables 3 and 4 show similar results; the number of satisfied students increased between the stages pre and post, but in this case there were still three students who were undecided and one student who was dissatisfied with the standards at the end of the sandwich course.

Table 3. Answers to the question “the teaching to date (on campus and during practicum) with regard to assessment and grading has met my needs a student teacher” (pre).

b: 1) The teaching to date has met students' needs

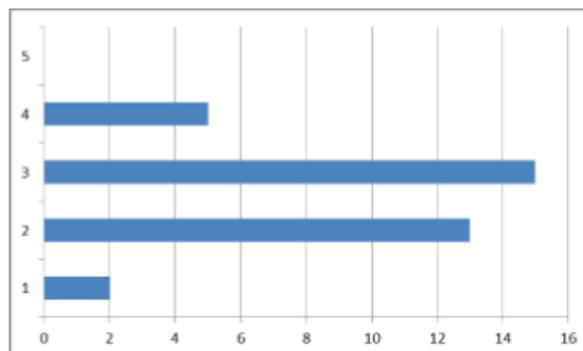
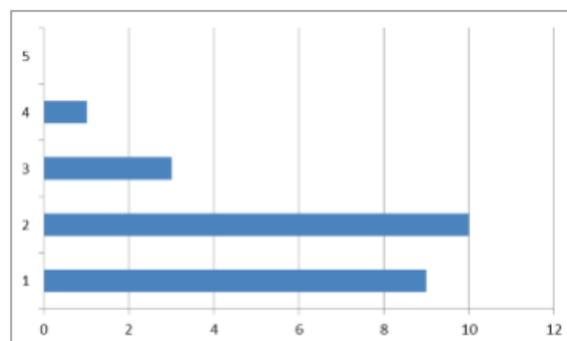


Table 4. Answers to the question “the teaching to date (on campus and during practicum) with regard to assessment and grading has met my needs a student teacher” (post).

b:2) The teaching to date has met students' needs



Given the fact that this sandwich course spanned merely eight weeks in total on campus and at various schools in Greater Stockholm, the results are not entirely surprising. As long as the teacher education refrains from creating courses with a clear ambition to focus on alternative strategies of assessing and grading, then these aspects will be placed at the end of the programmes. Still, it is worth noting that when seminar leaders are preparing for, and focusing on, a theme – such as assessing speaking in this case – there will be opportunities for everyone involved during practicum to meet certain targets and negotiate as well as reflect on the efficiency of selected strategies.

4. Analysis and Discussion

Recently, a school north of Stockholm approached our Department with an official request about

arranging a forum for assessing and grading. As a result, we plan to offer talks and a series of workshops to address a number of issues that the teachers themselves will be able to articulate during my first talk at the school.

This is one example of how universities can play a role in building bridges between research, official rules and regulations and practice. Instead of giving lengthy lectures, academics can engage in interactive dialogues with school teachers to identify development needs and requests. The design of the interaction in various stages – whether this concerns workshops and follow-up visits to schools by academics or alternative forms of interaction – can then be decided jointly by the academics and the teachers.

The results in my study show that teachers need to be empowered with rightful participation in negotiations about how to interpret rules, regulations and recommendations as well as how to apply their knowledge and skills, but they also need to be challenged in this process to lead the way for preservice teachers and pupils.

One of the most prominent aspects of the recent school reforms from 1994 and from 2011 is an increased focus on facilitating learner autonomy and self-directed learning in school by introducing formative strategies embedded in the teaching and learning processes. Essential terms in the framework of this approach to education are: alignment, accountability, democracy, validity, transparency, negotiation, adjustment, feedback/feed-forward, self- and peer-assessment, cooperative assessment and reliability. There are a number of preconditions for implementing and working towards the achievement of these targets and approaches for children and teenagers. One precondition involves stable conditions for professional, interactive relationships on all levels of the education system hierarchy. Secondly, it is crucial that empowered teachers can foster respectful relationships for a variety of assessment strategies to facilitate learning. Thirdly, active learners are crucial for creating an atmosphere of motivation and progress.

A democratic approach to education will make demands on everyone involved on the national as well as on the local levels; politicians and authorities as well as local school leaders need to provide space and time for various kinds of professional development among the teaching staff; teachers must be willing to invest time and energy either to develop their teacher cognition further and to embrace a progressive mindset towards teaching, assessing and learning, while it is expected that pupils – through guidance and scaffolding – can realise the potential of learner autonomy and self-directed learning. To arrive at situation in which all parties concerned are accountable for implementing ideas about the unplumbed potential of human beings of all ages to

engage in progressive learning can appear to be insuperable, but the ambition is nevertheless clearly outlined in the Education Act and in the steering documents as well as in support material about assessment and grading from the Swedish National Agency for Education.

Teaching full time can be taxing; in a profession which hinges on how to instil others with motivation, confidence and the ambition to take responsibility for the process of learning, it is necessary for teachers to articulate areas of interest for their own professional development and to draw inspiration from extensive research on education. On the one hand, a reasonable level of conformity with regard to teaching, assessing and learning strategies in general among the teaching staff is often a requirement for good teaching and supervision of student teachers. On the other hand, diversity, indifference and despondency among the teaching staff will probably affect preservice teachers' cognition and will ultimately have destructive consequences for the learners.

The responses in my semi-structured interview with two novice English teachers and with eight qualified, experienced language teachers, corroborate the diversity among teachers regarding AL and teacher cognition about assessment and grading. As mentioned above, I have also considered results from the thirty-three student teachers' interviews with ninety-nine qualified teachers during the practicum in 2017. One significant finding from these interviews was that two thirds of the language teachers expressed enthusiasm for structured strategies in assessment for, and of, learning, whereas one third of the ninety-nine teachers raised concerns about the way in which formative aspects have been highlighted in recent decades. These concerns can have emerged – as a logical consequence – from insignificant and deficient professional development; a lack of motivation from students, their parents or guardians and even from school leaders.

It is a well-known fact that there may be a misalignment between how national targets are implemented by local schools. The Swedish Schools Inspectorate (SSI) mapped various deficiencies in the communication and interaction between leadership alignment and strategy implementation across hierarchical levels and how such circumstances can affect teachers and pupils/students' activities in a tangible way. For instance, the SSI reported about major deficiencies with regard to equivalent assessment and grading in Swedish schools and that this issue is also well documented in previous surveys by various authorities [15].

Furthermore, this diversity can create considerable confusion for pre-service teachers, most of whom invariably articulate an enthusiastic intent on working systematically with various kinds of alternative assessment strategies to traditional testing and grading.

In my opinion, continuing training can alleviate this diversity. Furthermore, I would add that taking for granted that teachers are expected to have the time and the energy to take charge of their own learning about various rules and regulations as well as about recommendations from research and from school authorities is hardly wise. It is self-evident that teachers need guidance when learning about new or alternative strategies.

To make matters complicated, the two novice teachers argued that it was not until they were placed in schools that they actually learned about assessing and grading. This argumentation inadvertently corroborates the fact that teacher educators refrained from dealing with these aspects on campus. This dilemma, however, produces two major problems for seminar leaders on campus. First, how can supervisors be provided with relevant in-service training so that they are able to guide student teachers and can have constructive conversations with them about relevant research? Secondly, how can talks, theories and reports about assessing and grading on campus prepare student teachers for authentic situations on placement?

Necessary aspects of goal-oriented education, such as alignment, transparency, feedback and feedforward, peer-, self- and cooperative assessment and qualified interpretation of steering documents, are also difficult to implement due to time constraints for teachers abroad. As Vogt and Tsagari stated in a European context, “to compensate for insufficient training, teachers seem to learn about language testing and assessment on the job” [4]. If “assessment is a process that helps focus attention towards what matters most in education, beyond just access and participation: the actual learning outcomes of each student”, as OECD argued in the report *Synergies for Better Learning*, then it is relevant to examine further (pre-)conditions for teaching, assessing and learning [16]. My results also show that national requirements on schools for empowering students to take responsibility for their own learning via relevant peer- and self-assessment in school are not met. This was also observed by DeLuca, Valiquette, Coombs, LaPointe-McEwan and Luhanga: “research has continually demonstrated that teachers face significant challenges integrating new approaches to assessment that align with contemporary mandates and assessment theories” [17].

As university teachers, we are accountable for providing pre-service teachers with relevant training that prepares them for a teaching profession in which they may face the fact that professional learning “is largely determined by [school leaders’] individual preferences and the specific contexts in which they work, rather than by any overarching set of expectations and opportunities set by the systems in which they work” [18]. My study confirms this notion of in-service training both on a national and a local

level in Sweden. The implementation of requirements about learner autonomy in the most recent educational reforms for school, has been introduced in some of the schools in my study. However, a national or local framework for enforcing the recent school reforms in their entirety is non-existent.

5. Conclusion

New perspectives on the need for alignment between formative and summative approaches to assessment “requires a major shift in mindset for teachers, as well as fundamental changes vis-à-vis traditional classroom assessment practices”, as OECD argued [18]. To facilitate such a shift for qualified language teachers in school, in-service training is needed, but there may even be a need for developing alternative approaches to teaching – a mindset that can challenge ways of dealing with planning and conducting teaching so that assessment can provide scaffolding as well as challenges for progress.

When schools focus intently on testing and grading instead of on continuous assessment and careful planning of grading in the later stages of the teaching-and-learning process, then they hardly reflect current trends in a society such as Sweden in general. For example, a well-managed, wellorganised workplace in which various kinds of constructive support, negotiations, discussions and debates as well as reflection normally lead to motivation and optimal results. Such situations in business can involve challenging and progressive learning curves about scaffolding and how to provide comments for feedback and feed-forward, peer- and self-assessment as well as autonomy, accountability, transparency and adjustment. Successful business leaders, for example, often set high standards that are aligned with a vision; they motivate, and place demands on themselves and on their employees in various ways to support and challenge them to make progress so that targets can be, and are, achieved. Such leaders can be appreciated as facilitators, rather than authoritarian autocrats.

The majority of the student teachers, the teachers and the teacher educators in this study are committed to and enthusiastic about European and local regulations, recommendations and theories about goal-oriented teaching strategies that advocate alignment between a variety of formative strategies that will eventually lead to valid and reliable grading. In light of this promising fact, it is imperative that academics can offer proper training in assessment and grading as well as conduct and follow up research on AL on teacher training programmes and in schools. A bonus to these activities in the long term can be to convince all parties concerned about the importance of offering rightful professional development and interactive, tailor-made courses both to pre-service

teachers and to qualified inservice language teachers when implementing school reforms.

8. References

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