

# Self-Assessment of Writing in Learning English as a Foreign Language

A Study at the Upper Secondary School Level

Self-assessment practices are considered important to the development of lifelong language learning skills and the development of more comprehensive assessment practices. Modern communicative language learning involves both group interaction between students and individual work in accordance with set curricular goals. This thesis explores and discusses upper secondary school students' self-assessments of their writing on a group as well as an individual level.

The results of the study showed that at the group level students were well able to assess their general writing results. At the individual level the results were more variable, partly depending on the type of writing activity assessed and on the amount of practice students had had of self-assessment. The results also showed that the specific writing skills that students focused on in their writing are spelling and grammar rather than other skills such as vocabulary and punctuation. Students and teachers were positive to the incorporation of self-assessment activities in the EFL writing classroom. They regarded self-assessment as an important skill that underpins lifelong learning and contributes valuable additional information to more traditional modes of assessment.



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*Anne Dragemark Oscarson*

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*Anne Dragemark Oscarson*

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## Abstract

Title: Self-Assessment of Writing in Learning English as a Foreign Language. A Study at the Upper Secondary School Level

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The main aim of this study is to explore the role of self-assessment in EFL learning in developing lifelong language learning skills and in furthering the development of more comprehensive and thereby fairer assessment practices. The study explores how upper secondary school students perceived their own general and specific writing abilities in relation to syllabus goals and whether these perceptions are affected by self-assessment practices. It also explores students' and teachers' experiences of integrating self-assessment into everyday classroom practice. The study is based on the theory that metacognitive skills such as self-regulation and self-monitoring are important for the development of autonomous learning skills.

Two teachers and four groups of Swedish upper secondary students participated in the study during one school year. Using grades, students self-assessed the results of two written assignments, namely a classroom writing assignment and a written test task. The classroom writing assignment was also analyzed linguistically by the researcher. The two teachers and eight student focus groups were interviewed about their experiences at the end of the study.

The results of the study showed that at the *group* level students were well able to assess their general writing results in relation to the criterion (the teachers' grades). At the *individual* level the results were more variable, partly depending on the type of writing activity assessed and on the amount of practice students had had of self-assessment. Students' assessments of their writing ability in general showed a stronger relationship with teachers' grades than did students' assessments of their results in a particular classroom writing assignment. Students' assessments tended to become more realistic with practice.

The results also showed that the *specific* writing skills that students at upper secondary school focused on in their writing are spelling and grammar, rather than other skills such as sentence structure, vocabulary, paragraphing and punctuation skills. Students were self-critical with regard to these skills and tended to underestimate their performance in relation to the researchers' assessment of the same.

Students and teachers were positive to the incorporation of self-assessment activities in the EFL writing classroom and saw it as a transferable skill that underpins lifelong learning in other subject areas. The method used in a classroom assignment, where the writing process approach was coupled to self-assessment questions and non-corrective feedback from the teacher, was found to be a practical way of helping students become more aware of their language skills and language levels. Both teachers and students considered student self-assessments as contributing valuable additional information to ordinary tutoring and testing.

The implications for EFL writing are that syllabus goals that encourage student responsibility and autonomy are viable and realistic, but students need to practice self-assessment, preferably from an early age, to become adept at employing the approach effectively on a regular basis.

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Anne Dragemark Oscarson



## INTRODUCTION

*“Assessment tends to shape every part of the student learning experience”*

*(Orsmond, Merry, & Reiling, 2000, p. 24)*

The question of how students can develop a more active and responsible role in their own learning is part of the modern European educational discourse. Both international and European policy documents express the need for independent and lifelong learning skills for all citizens. At the centre of this discourse are democratic goals that aim at peaceful co-existence and understanding between all European countries and cultures, as well as an adaptation to the need for an increase in European mobility. It has been maintained that one way to realize these goals is for each European citizen to be able to speak at least two languages in addition to their mother tongue (European Commission, 2004a). As language learning and assessment are closely associated and often intertwined in practice, classroom assessment practices are consequentially also of importance in realizing these goals. In spite of the trend to find alternative forms of assessment to increase the validity and reliability of assessments, as well as to increase formative aspects of learning, the alternatives of self- and peer assessment are not what students and teachers are accustomed to at any level (Taras, 2002, p. 503). In Sweden, for example, both students and teachers seem to have little previous experience of them in the language classroom (Oscarson, 2008), as assessment has traditionally been the teachers' sole prerogative and obligation.

The motivation for the study, which concerns the students' own assessment of their EFL writing performance, is important for our deeper understanding of the students' own role in assessment, as well as for the elaboration of assessment procedures. There has been little research done on the conditions that govern adolescent students' participation in assessment. Much of the previous research done on formative assessment and self-

assessment in language learning has been concerned with adults learning a second language and not young adults learning a foreign language. Curriculum and syllabus goals in the Swedish school system encourage, and in some areas even demand that students work more independently and take responsibility for their own learning. While working to realize students' autonomous and self-regulating study skills, it is difficult for teachers to assess the students' language learning progress in all areas. Self-assessment practices need to be investigated if the implementation of this lifelong learning skill is to become a reality. There is also a need to understand the role and use of self-assessment in the language learning process.

The focus on writing in the teaching of English as a foreign language (henceforth EFL) was chosen because English is the language most students in Sweden learn, and writing has become more important in foreign language teaching than it used to be. As the role of writing in EFL learning increases, the students' ability to self-assess their EFL writing skills also become progressively more important.

The research described in the thesis has been carried out within the framework of a larger research project, *Self-assessment of Learning: the Case of Languages*, which is briefly described below.

## 1.1 The Project Self-assessment of Learning: The Case of Languages

The data in the thesis were collected through the researcher's participation in a research project entitled *Self-assessment of Learning: the Case of Languages (SALL)* (Oscarson, 2001) financed by the Swedish Research Council, 2001-2003. Its general aim was to investigate the role of self-assessment procedures in the EFL upper secondary classroom centered on the productive (oral and written) language skills. The reason for choosing English as the foreign language studied was, apart from it being the largest foreign language taught in Sweden, that students have many real-life opportunities to self-assess their skills in this language outside the classroom, especially when it comes to communicative language use.

One objective of the project was to investigate whether the students' self-assessment ability could be better taken into account as a complementary assessment resource in reaching broader educational goals of autonomy and independence in learning. As there are few hands-on educational directives on

the use of alternative assessment, the project developed instruments to illustrate practical methods of working with students' own assessment of language learning and in this way increase our knowledge about viable self- and peer-assessment strategies. A variety of different self-assessment and peer-assessment practices were coupled to different classroom tasks as well as national tests. These were used in the EFL groups to explore the students' self-assessment capabilities and development in order to see whether these were in agreement with current learning goals. Some of the results of the project have been disseminated at international and national conferences, but have so far mostly focused on the student's self-assessments of oral production.

The general aims of the SALL project and the extended research work presented in this thesis were largely the same and sought to increase our knowledge of the results with which language students may make independent assessments of their attained ability levels and their ongoing learning. However, the focus of the thesis is particularly on the students' self-assessments of their *written* production. Specific to the thesis work is also the investigation of the students' and teachers' understanding of their experiences of self-assessment practices.

## 1.2 Aim of the Study

The aim of the present study is to contribute to an understanding of whether the use of self-assessment in the subject of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in school can help develop lifelong language learning skills and further the development of more comprehensive and in this sense fairer assessment practices. To achieve this aim, the researcher investigated four classes of Swedish upper secondary school students and their self-assessments of learning results in writing. Modern communicative language learning involves both group interaction between students and individual work in accordance with set curriculum and syllabus goals. Therefore the study explores how the students perceive their own writing abilities collectively as well as individually. The aim is also to find out whether students' perceptions of ability in this area may be affected by their acquaintance with and practice of self-assessment.

The investigation concerns the learners' assessments of both their general and their specific levels of EFL writing skills. An attempt is made to determine to what extent the students' awareness, reflections and

comprehension of their learning and its results can be taken into account in the ordinary language classroom. Finally the students' and the teachers' reflections on the use of self-assessment of EFL writing skills are considered.

### 1.2.1 Research Questions

To be able to meet the broad aim set out above, the following research questions are posed:

- What degree of competence in estimating their own general level of writing in EFL do the students in the study possess, individually and as a group? Are there any differences in the students' competence when it comes to their perceived *general* ability in EFL, which is here termed "off-task" assessment, and their self-assessment in relation to a more *particular* EFL task, also called "on-task" assessment?
- What *specific* language skills do the students focus on when assessing their writing in EFL, and are the students able to realistically identify them as satisfactory or in need of improvement?
- How do students and teachers experience an attempt to incorporate the curriculum and syllabus goals, which to a large extent emphasize independent and lifelong learning skills, through the application of self-assessment practices in EFL writing?
- To what extent does the practice of self-assessment of EFL writing lead to more realistic learner views of attainment?

## 1.3 Organization of the Thesis

The subject of the thesis, students' self-assessment of EFL writing, has a broad background, which needs to be introduced to facilitate understanding of the final results. Following Chapter 1, which introduces the thesis and presents the aim and research questions that the thesis attempts to answer, the thesis is organised as follows:

Chapter 2 accounts for the Council of Europe's aims for lifelong and independent language learning as expressed in a number of policy documents and which constitute part of the background to present day language education and assessment. On a national level, a short description of the Swedish upper secondary school, including curriculum and syllabus goals regarding teaching, learning and assessing EFL is given. These situate the

research in its educational context, and facilitate understanding for readers who may not be familiar with Swedish language education.

Chapter 3 concerns the theoretical and historical background issues pertaining to language education and assessment, such as the concept of reflexivity, and important theories that underpin reflection and self-regulation in learning. Reflexivity is seen as a salient mechanism in learning. The fields of cognitive and social constructivism, as well as social cognitive theory, describe the self-regulated learner, and the role of metacognition in self-regulation. Commented on is also the notion of self-regulation as a form of empowerment but also as a steering mechanism.

Chapter 4 gives a short historical review of language education and assessment in general and in Sweden, as well as on the nature and role of EFL writing. Proponents of alternative assessment practices, such as self-assessment, are often influenced by a critical view of traditional assessment. For this reason critical theory, as it applies to language assessment, is briefly introduced.

Chapter 5 contains a review of related research on self-assessment issues. It continues with a brief account of summative and formative assessment, both of which have a bearing on self-assessment. Issues of great interest pertaining to language assessment such as the role of criteria, feedback and error correction are also dealt with.

Chapter 6 describes the type of study undertaken, the participants, the instruments, the sampling and collection of data, the overall procedures and rationale for the different methods used as well as ethical considerations. It also gives an overview of the sequence of events, deals with validity and reliability issues and discusses the limitations of the different quantitative and qualitative methods employed.

Chapter 7 presents the results of the study. First the students' general ability to assess their writing is presented, followed by the results of their ability to assess specific writing skills. After this an account of the results of the student and teacher interviews is given. A short summary and reflection follow directly after each sub section in the chapter.

Chapter 8 discusses the main results and tendencies presented in the previous chapter, as well as overall considerations. It draws tentative conclusions, and examines implications for EFL writing in language education.

Abbreviations and a short glossary of terms used in the thesis are found in the appendices, as well as unpublished self-assessment questionnaires.

## LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE SWEDISH SCHOOL SYSTEM

The prevalent educational discourse at any point in time forms a backdrop to what happens in the individual classroom in terms of learning and assessment. Global, European, and national policy documents underscore the importance of knowing several languages in the future and influence contemporary school practice. This chapter situates the topic of the thesis, that is the use of self-assessment, in a larger language learning context. Some of the policy documents affecting educational policy (2.1), as well as the Swedish educational system (2.2), are presented.

### 2.1 The Influence of Policy Documents

Policy documents are meant to influence practice. Ball (2006) speaks of the negotiation between policy documents and the types of discourse they represent. Global texts influence European texts and together these two influence national educational policy documents and practice. Certain research texts as well as traditional practices also influence current educational practice and discourse. In other words, global and national educational policies exist alongside research findings and everyday practice even when they do not concur. The global reality is also sometimes in opposition to national practice and individual interests. One should not assume, as Fairclough (1992, p. 90) puts it, “that people are aware of the ideological dimensions of their own practice” and he goes on to say that there is a

strong case to be made for a mode of language education which emphasizes critical awareness of ideological processes in discourse, so that people can become more aware of their own practice, and be more critical of the ideologically invested discourses to which they are subjected (Fairclough, 1992, p. 90).

Language policies are often explicitly stated in policy documents, at various levels of influence, but these policies are not always acted upon as intended, and other hidden agendas may be deduced by examining teaching and testing or assessment practices. There is often a tension between traditional practices and the new aims and demands of the European community (Krumm, 2007; Shohamy, 2007). The “language policies appear to follow the rules of pluralist democratic societies, including advocating that all citizens should have the opportunity to use a variety of languages” (Shohamy, 2007, p. 120) but many authorities and practitioners override the aims by using contradicting testing mechanisms. “Tests can be used as tools to privilege certain forms and levels of language knowledge” (op.cit. p. 120). For example, educational policy and communicative language learning theories may both stress the point that correct grammar is not necessarily crucial for the development of communicative competence (which does not mean to imply that correct grammar is unimportant) but if correct grammar is a requisite part of the assessment criteria, then tests are likely to work in the opposite direction. As Byrnes (2007) puts it, “testing is an inherently powerful dynamic of gatekeeping and validation” (p. 683).

### 2.1.1 The Concept of Lifelong Learning

The concept of lifelong learning is closely coupled to the notion of independent learning. It is also an important concept in European language education and is referred to in many policy documents on several levels. As such it also influences assessment practices. Boud (2000) even declares the need for what he terms ‘sustainable assessment’ as an “indispensable accompaniment to lifelong learning” (p. 151).

The many predictive statements found in the type of documents referred to have influenced national educational bodies. One such predictive ‘truth’ is the necessity of lifelong learning and its assumed dependence on autonomous language learning. Many policy documents with reference to lifelong learning and communicative language competence also speak of awareness as something positive. These types of statements are elements in what Fairclough (2003, p. 167) calls ‘futurology’ and the power of futurological prediction is significant. The expectations of what teachers and students ‘must do’ is legitimized this way.

On a global level, Delors et al. (1996) put forth in the UNESCO document *Learning: The Treasure Within* that the capacity for independent

learning is the key to continued individual growth, and this capacity is only possible after some period of interaction with an intellectual mentor, most often a teacher. This teacher-student relationship aims at developing the pupils' self-reliance. It helps to form individual judgement and a sense of individual responsibility to enable students to continue learning throughout their lives. It is through dialogue with the teacher that the student's faculty for self-awareness is helped to develop (p. 30). Delors et al. write:

The concept of learning throughout life thus emerges as one of the keys to the twenty-first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education. It meets the challenges posed by a rapidly changing world. This is not a new insight, since previous reports on education have emphasized the need for people to return to education in order to deal with new situations arising in their personal and working lives. That need is still felt and is even becoming stronger. The only way of satisfying it is for each individual to learn how to learn (Delors et al., 1996, p. 22).

*Learning: The Treasure Within* further states that having acquired the skill for autonomous learning constitutes one avenue to lifelong learning. Autonomous learning is seen as one way of combining young adults' education, individual growth and development, with the working population's need of further vocational education, but not only for enhanced employability (Ouane, 2009, p. 307). It is perceived to be an opportunity to meet the challenge of a changing world, not only by going back to school but by introducing a new way of thinking about how this need for further learning can take place.

Delors et al. (1996) also write that more emphasis should be placed on language teaching in order to learn both a national and another widely spoken language. Knowledge of an international language "will be essential" and "bilingualism for everyone is not an impossible goal" (p. 128). Encouraging language learning guarantees provision of the necessary skills in the future world.

*Learning: The Treasure Within* is directed towards national policymakers to take their responsibility for education in the future and also defends the formal education system and its teachers/teaching. It also establishes the concept of lifelong learning as the key to change and as a strategic investment, primarily for the individual but also for economic growth and democracy in the world. The Council of Europe has produced documents to a similar effect, directed at and influencing the European community. The increase in workforce mobility — which brings about a need for mutual understanding, co-operation, and the need to prevent prejudice and

discrimination — means that language learners have to be able to understand and use written and spoken language functionally. These skills include not only formal linguistic goals such as improved pronunciation, better command of vocabulary and so forth, but also social and cultural language skills, as well as the ability to use different compensatory communicative strategies when the available linguistic means are inadequate. Falchikov and Boud (1989) assert that, “life-long learning requires that individuals be able not only to work independently, but also assess their own performance and progress” (p. 395).

## 2.1.2 European Aims for Lifelong Language Learning

The lifelong language learning aims of the European Union are also of significance and are expressed in for example *Many tongues, one family – Languages in the European Union* (European Communities, 2004a) and *Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity. An action plan 2004–2006* (European Communities, 2004b). Both focus on language learning and address the European citizen. When it comes to communicative language skills, *Many tongues, one family – Languages in the European Union* states that:

The Union actively encourages its citizens to learn other European languages, both for reasons of professional and personal mobility within its single market, and as a force for cross-cultural contacts and mutual understanding. In an ever-growing and more diverse EU, it is important that its citizens can communicate with each other (European Commission, 2004a, p. 3).

And, regarding lifelong learning, the document furthermore states that “the Commission recognizes that the goal of mother tongue-plus-two is ambitious, but not beyond reach. Language learning has to be seen as a life-long activity” (European Commission, 2004a, p. 15).

*Many tongues, one family – Languages in the European Union* (European Communities, 2004a) seems mainly directed at influencing the people of Europe to consider the positive aspects of language learning. The need to be able to communicate in more than one language encompasses reasons of mobility, such as the increasing demands of the labour market, and for reasons of peace, which includes the need for increased tolerance and mutual understanding.

*Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity. An action plan 2004–2006* (European Communities, 2004b) aims even more specifically at

promoting language learning. As in the previous document, the same sort of arguments: personal, economic and democratic are put forward. Regarding communicative language skills it reads:

Member States agree that pupils should master at least two foreign languages, with the emphasis on effective communicative ability: active skills rather than passive knowledge. ‘Native speaker’ fluency is not the objective, but appropriate levels of skill in reading, listening, writing and speaking in two foreign languages are required, together with intercultural competencies and the ability to learn languages whether with a teacher or alone (European Commission, 2004b, p. 18).

With regard to the goals of lifelong learning, it further states that:

Language competencies are part of the core of skills that every citizen needs for employment, education and personal fulfilment, they are skills to be continuously updated and added to; gone are the days when language learning began and ended at school; it is a lifelong activity. This means that coherent and user-friendly systems and structures for lifelong language learning need to be in place (op.cit., p. 46).

The ideas behind these policy documents have influenced many research and development programs in all European countries. One of the best known is the *Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, teaching assessment* (henceforth CEFR). Even if it is considered controversial in some respects, it has a strong influence on the way in which national language education documents are being devised, as well as language learning and practical assessment, in most European countries (Alderson, 2007; Bonnet, 2007; Hulstijn, 2007; Little, 2007). The CEFR identifies and describes the diversity and characteristics of language learning in Europe and emphasizes the need for Europeans to be able to master their mother tongue plus two other languages.

### 2.1.3 The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

The CEFR, published by the Council of Europe in 2001, was written with two main aims: to encourage language professionals and language learners to reflect on language learning issues, and to help verbalize what language learners should be able to achieve and how to attempt to accomplish this (Council of Europe, 2001, p. xi). It is also concerned with improving “the quality of communication among Europeans of different language and cultural background” (op.cit.). It is an instrument developed by an international team of experts working for the Language Policy Division of the

Council of Europe and describes standards and competences to be attained at different stages of language learning, in a comparable manner, thus facilitating communication about language education and educational mobility. It is based on work undertaken in a Swiss research project (North, 2000) and is based on and contains contributions by other renowned researchers and language professionals. It is by no means an impartial document as it aims to influence and reaffirm political objectives, such as to equip all Europeans for international mobility and co-operation in education, culture and science and trade and industry as well as to promote mutual understanding and tolerance. It intends to provide “a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 1).

The CEFR is different from both the general European educational policy texts and the national curricula of the European member states. Even though the Council of Europe cannot intervene in educational policy and practice, the CEFR has exerted considerable influence on practices in the field of language education (Bonnet, 2007). It integrates a social constructivist, communicative language theory perspective and a ‘knowledge is power’ perspective.

The CEFR contains scales (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 24) of six general levels of language performance, A1–C2. These scales affect European language policy according to Shohamy (2007, p. 124) who also raises the issue that the scales are problematic as they define language learning as though there existed an inherent hierarchical order of language development and performance without there being sufficient empirical evidence for such a view. The CEFR has consequently also been misinterpreted by different bodies. Fulcher (2004) makes the point that the scales are experienced as prescriptive by teachers and authorities, and have also come to represent, for them, an acquisitional order rather than merely defining levels of language proficiency as intended. Shohamy (2007, p. 125) also states that as the scales in practice tend to serve as testing tools, but are detached from contextual variables such as assessment purposes, there are real doubts as to whether the scale descriptions can be seen as relevant and valid.

The CEFR has had direct influence in European language classrooms (and beyond), especially through the European Language Portfolio (ELP), which was developed parallel with the CEFR (Little, 2007, p. 649). One important feature of the CEFR, and of significance to the present study, is a set of scaled “can-do” statements in the form of a self-assessment grid

(Council of Europe, 2001, pp. 26-27). This grid can be used for intermittent summative self-assessments and has also been developed into formative self-assessment checklists in the ELP to make the learner more aware of the language learning process and “underpin the goal setting, monitoring, and self-assessment function” (Little, 2007, pp. 649-650).

All in all, global and European educational discourse together with modern language research (cf. 4.1) has had considerable impact on national school systems and policy documents.

A brief description of the Swedish school system at the upper secondary level follows in order to put the curriculum and syllabuses in proper perspective and to facilitate understanding of the research environment of the study as a whole.

## 2.2 On a National Level – EFL in the Swedish Upper Secondary School

In Sweden, upper secondary non-compulsory education is available to everyone. It provides general eligibility to all higher education. In 2002 for example, 97,8% of all students continued directly on to secondary school from compulsory school, which encompasses grades 1–9 (Skolverket, 2003). Subsequent years followed a similar pattern (e.g. year 2003, 97,7% and year 2006, 97,6%) (Skolverket, 2004c; 2007).

Even if it is the case that some experts refer to English as a second language, or something in between (Bentley, 2002; Eriksson, 1993), English must, according to the present researcher, be considered a foreign language in Sweden, and it is regarded as such in the present study. It may well be argued that English has a special status in Sweden, in the role of being the first foreign language, but not as a language that citizens in Sweden must have a command of in order to be able to function with administrative, legislative or educational bodies. Even though English is often used for some functions in the Swedish society (e.g. for international communication, academic writing, reporting) and most Swedish students hear and acquire much English through different media such as music, film and the Internet, it cannot be considered to permeate Swedish life to the same degree as a second language invariably does.

Other studies have also found English to be generally considered an important foreign language in Sweden (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005b), and as

Giota (1995) has pointed out, Swedish students develop a strong integrative motivation to learn English early on. In spite of this, it is not always apparent to *all* adolescent students why they need to learn English and especially why they need to learn *more* English than they feel they already know and master (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a; 2005b). In the results reported from the Swedish National Evaluation 2003<sup>1</sup> (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a, p. 66) between 80-90% of Swedish students believed themselves capable of using English to communicate “very well” or “quite well” in different practical communicative circumstances, for example when asking and/or giving directions, answering the phone, writing a letter, following written instructions.

EFL is most often studied from 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> grade depending on the school. Following compulsory school, at the upper secondary level there are three successive level courses: English A, B and C. English Course A<sup>2</sup> is a compulsory course, and deemed to be at the CEFR level B1 (upper bracket) but can also in general terms be called an Intermediate Level Course. English Course B is only compulsory for certain programmes and is a sequel to Course A. It is estimated to be at the CEFR level B1 (upper bracket) to B2 (lower bracket) and may be termed an Advanced Level Course. Course B may be given at any time after Course A is completed. English Course C is a non-compulsory Advanced Level Course for students aiming at for example EFL studies at university level and is estimated to be at the CEFR level of B2 (upper bracket) (Oscarson, 2002).

The comparisons to the CEFR scales are difficult as the Swedish levels and criteria refer to some language skills that the CEFR does not include, as well as the other way around. Generally speaking, the extreme levels A1 and C2 in the CEFR do not apply in the Swedish system even if there are, of course, individual students who may function at these levels.

At the upper secondary level, Swedish students do not ordinarily form a stable group or always follow their ordinary class on the same programme in non-compulsory courses, for example English Course B, but divert into different EFL classes or groups. Students may take or drop non-compulsory courses during their regular course of study.

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<sup>1</sup> Nationella utvärderingen av grundskolan 2003 (NU-03)

<sup>2</sup> The present study involved classes doing English Course A and English Course B

There is no general national matriculation examination at the end of the upper secondary education but there are national tests in a number of compulsory courses depending on the program followed, such as Swedish B, English A and B and Mathematics A to D with the aim of ensuring that grading will be fair and based on the nationally set criteria. The National Agency of Education is responsible for the testing programs, but the tests themselves are produced at various university departments across the country.

The current Swedish grading system consists of a four point rising grade scale: 1) Fail (*Icke godkänt*), 2) Pass (*Godkänt*), 3) Pass with Distinction (*Väl Godkänt*) and 4) Pass with Special Distinction (*Mycket Väl Godkänt*), based on set syllabus criteria.

The goal of lifelong and autonomous learning is also reflected in the Swedish national educational policy documents on both a general and a subject level, while the teaching methods employed to reach this end are left to the individual teacher to decide on and adapt to the individual school, subject and student group.

### 2.2.1 The Swedish Curriculum and Language Syllabuses

The national syllabuses in EFL and modern languages have followed the general trends in language education in the western world (cf. 3.1). The shift in focus when it comes to current ways of learning and teaching EFL has resulted in the need for an adjustment of focus and range of assessments. When learners are expected to assume responsibility for their own learning, they need to be able to reflect upon their own knowledge and further progress.

Radical changes came about in the 1990s when the school system was decentralized and the municipalities instead of the state became responsible for the schools. In 1994, a new curriculum was introduced by the National Agency for Education and in 2000 a new syllabus reform was launched. Among other things, a change of focus from teaching to learning was made, and the students' active role in their own learning was emphasized. Autonomous learning and strategic awareness were stressed.

The educational system as a whole became more goal oriented. At the upper secondary level all students were to attend a three-year program and were, when they had finished the required amount of courses, qualified for university studies. Students could choose among a larger variety of courses than before and a new grading system, based on performance criteria was also

introduced. The Swedish authorities raised the expected standard level of attainment with regard to language studies, and EFL in particular was strengthened. The reason was, above all, the importance of international influences (Malmberg, 2001a; 2001b). The impact of the European Commission's catch phrase of "mother tongue plus two" EU languages, the so called L1+2 formula, cannot be underestimated either. In the development of the Language Syllabuses 2000, there was a striving for a distinct progression of language level stages concerning the different language competencies in EFL, more or less aligned to the scale model of the Common European Framework of Reference.

There is no particular method for language teaching and learning that is exclusively endorsed by the Swedish curriculum 1994 but the emphasis is clearly on the functional and communicative view of language learning and use, not a formal one (and has so been since Lgy 65). The previous curricula, that is Lgy 65<sup>3</sup> and Lgy 70<sup>4</sup> were somewhat more prescriptive following the trends reflected by the times. The contemporary view may be regarded as more utilitarian and recognizes the fact that there are several different ways of reaching the same goal. It is represented in the syllabus document as an eclectic approach where features from different methods can be selected to meet the various needs of different schools and groups of students. The Lpf 94<sup>5</sup> curriculum text on the aim of the subject of English (EFL) is formulated as follows:

The subject aims at developing an all-round communicative ability and the language skills necessary for international contacts, and an increasingly internationalised labour market. [...] All pupils also need the ability to further develop their knowledge on completion of schooling. (Skolverket, 2000, §1).

The curriculum text on the structure and nature of the subject [EFL] in Lpf 94 also maintains that:

The different competencies involved in all-round communicative skills have their counterparts in the structure of the subject. Related to these is the ability to master a language's form, such as its vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, spelling and grammar. [...] An additional competence is an awareness of the process involved in learning a language. (Skolverket, 2000, §1).

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<sup>3</sup> Läroplanen för gymnasieskolan 1965 [Curriculum and syllabuses for the Upper Secondary School, 1965]

<sup>4</sup> Läroplanen för gymnasieskolan 1970 [Curriculum and syllabuses for the Upper Secondary School, 1970]

<sup>5</sup> Läroplan för de frivilliga skolformerna 1994 [Curriculum and syllabuses for the Upper Secondary School, 1994]

The productive skills of speaking and writing are naturally at the heart of communicative language learning (cf. 4.1.3). Writing especially has seen its role change from merely supporting and reinforcing the internalization of language patterns to being a worthwhile enterprise in itself (Cushing Weigle, 2002, p. 1). As its role in EFL learning has changed, assessment practices of EFL writing also become progressively more important. The writing process methodology as developed by the Bay Area Writing Project (cf. 5.4.2) has influenced both first, second and foreign language teaching, and especially the teaching of EFL in certain regions of Sweden, due to a broad undertaking of teacher-training courses in the 1980s by regional school boards.

The writing process makes use of metacognitive functions in learning, such as planning, monitoring, reflection, revision and self-assessment. These processes are also of vital importance for independent and autonomous learning, and at the foundation of lifelong learning skills. The development of these skills in language education is, as shown previously, stressed in both global and European policy documents as well as being reflected and encouraged in the Swedish language curriculum and syllabuses, from the early 1960s on.

### The Metacognitive Features of the Swedish Curriculum and Language Syllabuses

As early as in Lgy 65, one of the first curriculum texts for the non-compulsory upper secondary level, study skills such as planning, cooperation and autonomous ways of working were endorsed, with the aim of preparing students for independent language study. Assessment was to be seen as an aid for self-assessment (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1967, pp. 54-59, 128). The next curriculum, Lgy 70, expected students to be active and responsible agents, capable of acquiring the necessary knowledge leading to the required goals (Skolöverstyrelsen, 1983). The current curriculum, Lgy 94 reaffirms that the student should be seen as able to acquire knowledge and language independently, and also be able to learn how languages are learned (Skolverket, 2000).

Both the curriculum for the compulsory (Lpo 94) and non-compulsory (Lpf 94) level, as well as Syllabus 2000, envisage students that are able to take responsibility for their own learning. School should endeavour to help students “develop an insight into their own way of learning and a capacity to evaluate their own learning” (Lpf 94, p. 29) as well as “assessing their study

results and development needs, appertaining to the requirements set out in the curriculum” (Lpf 94, p. 35).

In the Syllabus 2000 text, which concerns goals and grading criteria for EFL at the upper secondary level, it is reaffirmed that the schools’ aim is to ensure that pupils take on increasing responsibility for the development of their own language ability. The goals that pupils should have attained on completion of the English A course include being able to consciously use and evaluate different approaches to learning in order to promote learning. The grading criteria further state that for a passing grade, pupils must take responsibility for planning, carrying out and evaluating their work, as well as using appropriate aids. The goals for English B are similar, that is students should be able to evaluate their work in order to adapt and enhance their learning. The grading criteria also state that for a passing grade the students must have developed the ability to plan, carry out and evaluate their work in an effective way. Finally the goals for the highest level, English Course C, are that the students should be able to review, describe and analyze their needs in EFL from tertiary and vocational education perspectives. Again, the criteria for a passing grade include the requirements that the pupils can work methodically and *consciously* (my italics) to develop their own language (Skolverket, 2001b).

The syllabuses may be said to presuppose that the students are able to work in this manner. The educational implications for teachers and the learning consequences for students therefore need to be investigated more fully than has been done in regard to language learning in general, and teaching and learning EFL in particular. There is a need to understand better how the adolescent learner of EFL perceives his or her own language competence, in relation to the curriculum and syllabus specification of goals (Oscarson, 2001).

Of special interest to this study is, of course, the syllabuses’ view of assessment in relation to independent learning, and how and to what degree the adolescent learner is in fact able to assess his or her own language learning.

## 2.2.2 Consequences for EFL Assessment Practices

A holistic view of learning means concentrating on the totality of meaning and cohesion in teaching and the learning environment. As teaching does not necessarily imply learning, this is also an important feature in the assessment

of learning. The document *Bedömning och Betygsättning* [Assessment and Grading] published by the National Agency for Education expresses it thus: “It is also important that the student, as part of his or her learning, is encouraged and has the chance to practice assessing his or her knowledge and learning, as well as assessing the value and meaning of what is learned”, (Skolverket, 2001a, p. 17) (my translation).

As previously stated, modern trends in language learning focus on functional, communicative competence, and not as before, predominantly on the formal aspects of language mastery. The formal skills relating to the control of grammar, spelling, pronunciation, and so forth are traditionally assessed by a teacher using summative tests while the communicative ability may be more difficult to appraise (Bachman, 1990). According to many teachers, this is especially so when having to deal with the practicalities involving large groups of students (Dragemark, 2002). Gipps (1994) expressed the difference in outlook in the following manner:

The underlying assumption of most traditional psychometrics is one of fixed abilities and therefore limitation; in educational assessment performance is seen to be dependent on context and motivation and is essentially interactive and elastic. Thus the concept is a positive one with the corollary that in assessment all pupils must be given the opportunity to show what they can do, that it is possible to maximize learning, and that assessment should try to get the best performance out of pupils (Gipps, 1994, p. 165).

The syllabuses stress the students’ ability to learn autonomously and evaluate their work as a method of enhancing their learning. The students need instruments in order to be able to independently and with their teacher’s help take charge of their own learning as well as the assessment of their learning.

The aim in the steering documents is consequently for more authentic and direct language assessment. The goal is to involve students in communicative performance tasks that they would normally be occupied with at, for example, a future workplace, such as expressing opinions, giving information, writing reports, and so forth. The assessment in such situations is highly formative, as the feedback is often direct. In this way, assessment can be a part and a method of supporting the learning and teaching process. Self-assessment is seen as one strategy and one way of helping to develop insight, on the part of the student, into his or her strengths and weaknesses within different areas of knowledge. It is also one way for the student to understand how it is possible to learn more effectively through assuming responsibility for one’s own learning (Skolverket, 2001b). It can be an empowering tool,

allowing students to be involved at what can be seen as the centre of power, that is, assessment (Falchikov, 1997; Heron, 1988). Self-assessment is seen by Boud (1995, p. 13; Boud, 2000, p. 159) as a “necessary skill for lifelong learning”, and Boud, Cohen and Sampson (1999) go so far as to say that unless assessment fosters self-assessment, it “acts to undermine an important goal of lifelong learning” (p. 419).

On several levels, policy documents and the discourse they represent influence language learning and language assessment. This is the case in Sweden, where joint international efforts have traditionally played an important role in what is attempted to be accomplished at the national level, a prime example being curriculum development (Andered, 2001; Malmberg, 2001b).

## BACKGROUND THEORIES OF SELF-REGULATION AND THE SELF-REGULATED LEARNER

Chapter 3 deals with some of the theories suggesting that autonomy and self-regulation in learning is something worthwhile and necessary to strive for in education, including language education. It also accounts for the view that self-regulation can also be used as a way to govern the learner.

Reflexivity is a central concept to self-regulation and self-reflection and thus self-assessment, and can be traced back to the writings of Dewey. The idea of the need for reflexivity in education is therefore presented first (3.1). The psychological fields of cognitive and social constructivism, and social cognitive theory also offer descriptions of the function and rationale of self-regulation and the role of metacognition to the learning process, including student and teacher beliefs (3.2). There is also the notion of self-regulation as a steering mechanism as described by modern sociological theories, offering an explaining why self-regulation has come in focus in present day education (3.3).

### 3.1 The Concept of Reflexivity

Reflection is and has been a key concept dealt with by many philosophers from the Enlightenment to modern times, where a fast changing world forces people to make decisions without tradition for support (Dyke, 2006, p. 105). Because of this, it is argued that a more reflective approach to learning helps people respond and cope better in different situations in life.

John Dewey's historical significance in relation to today's concept of reflection (Erlandson, 2007, p. 20) as well as autonomous student learning cannot be ignored. Dewey questioned philosophy that sought absolute truth

and saw it rather as an instrument of change. According to Dyke (2006, p. 106), Dewey also saw knowledge as something which should enable people to deal with future problems. Dewey thus advocated a ‘pedagogy of experience’ in which students’ individuality and autonomy were to be developed by giving them the opportunity to learn according to their own needs and interests. It is from this tradition that student-centred, process-oriented, and discovery-based curricular innovations such as problem based learning (PBL), process writing, and so forth originates. Reflective thinking, or what is commonly referred to as ‘thinking to learn’, is considered essential for these learning directions. “While we cannot learn or be taught to think, we do have to learn how to think well, especially how to acquire the general habit of reflecting” (Dewey, 1933, p. 35).

Dewey saw the purpose of education as that of individual intellectual, moral and emotional growth and at the root of a democratic society. He was speaking of a type of learning that would count in the future, or in other words be lifelong. He wrote that “the most important attitude that can be formed is that of desire to go on learning” (Dewey, 1998, p. 49) and “only by extracting at each present time the full meaning of each present experience are we prepared for doing the same thing in the future” (op.cit).

According to Rodgers (2002, p. 842) Dewey’s view is characterized by four criteria, which make it possible to talk about reflection in teaching, learning, assessment and research, even if what Dewey meant by reflection is not clearly defined in his works. Dewey (1933) writes about reflective thought as the “active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends” (p. 9). Rodgers (2002) distils the following aspects of Dewey’s view on reflection:

a) reflection is a meaning-making process to deepen our understanding of one experience with other experiences and ideas. Essentially it is a means to moral ends,

b) reflection is a disciplined and systematic way of thinking, done in interaction with others and with an attitude that values growth of the self and the other (op.cit., p. 845). Through interaction with the world the self changes but the world is also in turn changed,

c) each new experience helps “to prepare him [the child] for the future life means to give him command of himself; it means so to train him that he

will have the full and ready use of all his capacities;" (Dewey, 1897/1963, p. 143).

On the whole, Dewey says that "education must be conceived as a continuing reconstruction of experience" (op.cit., p. 148). It is the meaning that the learner construes from experience that is of value, and it is the function of reflection to create relationships between experiences.

The reflective learner is then disciplined in thought but also open to potential meanings within the experience, can thus interpret the experience, name the problem or question, generate possible explanations and select a hypothesis. For Dewey this also involved a consequent action, which need not be definitive according to Rodgers (2002). The action can then become cyclical as it becomes a new experience, if the learner had expressed it to others. The interaction with others through formulation was necessary to test the strengths of reflection. It was a matter of getting outside the experience and through the eyes of the other extract its meaning (Dewey, 1916/1944, p. 6). Dyke (2006, p. 112; p. 114) points out that Dewey emphasized this need of critical scrutiny, the need of the 'other' to sharpen one's own thought through dialogue. Rodgers (2002) highlights the benefits of collaborative reflection, the affirmation of the value of one's own experience, the reflection of something "new" as others broaden the perspectives of understanding, and the support needed to engage in the self-discipline required.

According to Dyke (2006, p. 107), Dewey was also aware of the affective dimensions of learning, and believed that a reflective attitude included single-mindedness or whole-heartedness in wanting to learn; a directness or confidence in one's own ability to learn; an open-mindedness and willingness to entertain different perspectives including an acceptance of the need to change one's own perspectives and willingness to grow; and an intellectual and moral responsibility to the self and to society.

Being autonomous in learning includes the ability to reflect, and therefore Dewey's attitudes can be seen as central elements in reaching self-regulation. Reflection is the analytical tool the students can use to better be capable of understanding their own learning through self-assessment practices. In self-assessment it is also the kind of reflection demanded of the student in the end, and it is also the reflective practice that is conveyed through the writing process model. The idea of the students' need of experience, and the experience leading the individual on to further knowledge is also the basis of the constructivist learning theory, where the individual

construes and governs him- or herself. This is further developed in social constructivism where knowledge is construed together with others, and through the scaffolding help of a teacher/tutor or mentor (cf. 3.2.1).

## 3.2 Perspectives and Theories of Learning

The self-regulating learner is described as being competent to set his or her own goals, accurately self-monitor behaviour and capable of adequate strategic thinking, in other words, a learner who is in control of his or her own learning. Most self-regulation theorists view learning as a multidimensional process but there are several contrasting learning theories behind the concept of self-regulation, based on how one views the nature of learning and the learner. Still, there is considerable common ground, such as viewing learning as an open-ended process.

### 3.2.1 Cognitive and Social Constructivism

The cognitive constructivist view of self-regulated learning is based on the work of Piaget, among others, who advanced the notion of a cognitive schema underlying all bases for human learning and recall, and ascribing logic and conceptual coherence as the basis for these schemas (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 29). The constructivist view presupposes the active role of the learner and that it is inherent in man to construct meaning from experience. Self-awareness develops when the child reaches the level of what Piaget calls the cognitive level of “formal operations”. Flavell (1979) describes this level as *meta*-cognition to describe the level where the cognitive functions are monitored and controlled.

The constructivist view of learning implies that the learner actively construes knowledge from the surrounding world and in interaction with others, because as Glasersfeld (1995) writes “all knowledge is instrumental [...] and meaningless in isolation” (p. 177). Therefore, as Williams and Burden (1997) say, “education becomes concerned with helping people to make their own meanings” (p. 51). There is no such thing as absolute knowledge. Different individuals will have different understandings of experiences and create meanings that are personal to them when knowledge is internal and personal to the individual. Being aware of one’s own learning should then foster both better and autonomous learning.

The social environment, but also language, was emphasized by Vygotsky who believed the development of self-regulation was dependent on social interactions through the mediation of inner speech. McCaslin and Hickey (2001) point out that there is “considerable common ground between the inherently social nature of learning in a Vygotskian perspective and the social modelling features of social learning theory” (p. 234), but the essential difference is collectivism versus individualism. In other words, self-control is “Vygotsky’s path to socially meaningful activity; while in contrast, socially meaningful activity is social learning theory’s path to self control and personal freedom” (p. 235).

The individualistic constructivism is rejected by Paris, Byrnes, and Paris (2001, p. 254). They refer instead to the second wave of constructivism, which sees cognitive development as dependent on mediating constructs. The learner is “object as well as subject, shaped by others as well as an agent of self-regulation” (p. 256).

Different forms of constructivist theory, in particular social constructivism, understand knowledge as something that grows and develops in the encounter between the learner and the teacher in a social environment. Knowledge can therefore not be “taught” per se, the teacher can only mediate and guide the learner on the road to learning. In the constructivist theory there is a need for the learner to be aware of his or her own learning so that the learner is able to regulate and evaluate the learning process him- or herself. The development of metacognitive skills is of importance to this procedure. The social constructivist perspective on learning puts the student at the centre of the learning process and the metacognitive functions are accorded an important role in individuals’ building of new knowledge (Gipps, 1994; Allwood & Jonsson, 2001).

### Metacognition

According to Rivers (2001, p. 279) researchers in disparate fields see metacognition as essentially different from cognition, and describe metacognition as consisting of two functions: self-assessment, being able to assess one’s own cognition, and self-management, the ability to manage further cognitive development. Further, Rivers (op.cit) speaks of self-assessment as the most salient skill for self-regulation and self-directed learning to take place. Self-directed learning requires the learner to accurately assess learning outcomes, and in a review of the literature Wenden (1999)

drew the conclusion that self-directed and good language learners exhibited metacognitive behaviours. Rivers (2001) even goes so far as to say that,

the accurate use of metacognitive, affective and social strategies to control the language learning process and the learning environment is the hallmark of self-directed language learning. In order for such learning to occur, learners must be able to determine accurately what their needs are, and they must have the freedom to take action to meet those needs. In the absence of either accurate self-assessment or genuine autonomy, self-directed language learning will not occur (Rivers, 2001, p. 287).

The metacognitive function thus plays an important role in the construction of new knowledge, as it has to do with planning, understanding, and the control of learning (Allwood & Jonsson 2001; Purpura, 1997; Zimmerman, 1990). Both general strategic metacognitive knowledge, as well as domain-specific knowledge is essential. Strategies such as procedural knowledge<sup>6</sup> and conditional knowledge<sup>7</sup> are often referred to as metacognitive (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 31). Many researchers (Garner, 1987; Gipps, 1994; Hartman, 2001a; Flavell, 1981) believe that these strategies can be taught and when used extensively become automated.

The role of the metacognitive function can be related to Vygotsky's (1978) notion that the learner's capacity for independent strategic functioning can evolve through social interaction with an expert (e.g. mediated by the teacher). This was developed further by Wertsch (1998) who asserted that the student may be coached through a task that is slightly too difficult to be done independently but within the student's "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). Qualified learning can thus be seen as learning in advance of actual development. "What children can do with the assistance of others might be in some sense even more indicative of their mental development than what they can do alone" (op.cit., p 85). The mediated learning a student experiences this way actually influences his or her further development. Vygotsky was also concerned with how speech, both inner speech and face-to-face dialogues, in institutions such as formal schooling provided a framework for conceptual development (Wertsch, 1991, p. 47). According to Gipps (1994) training in introspection and "access to metacognitive processes for pupils can come from a process of guided or negotiated self-assessment, in which the pupil gains awareness of his or her

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<sup>6</sup> Procedural knowledge: how knowledge, e.g. language or a strategy, is used (compared to declarative knowledge which describes e.g. a language rule, or what strategies are).

<sup>7</sup> Conditional knowledge: how and when language or a strategy should be used for example

own learning strategies and efficiency” (p. 28). Students need to have strategies explained and modelled as well as be provided with guided practice and feedback, as all students do not develop these skills independently.

Metacognition can also be facilitated by co-operative learning, according to Hartman (2001a, p. 38). Because teachers tend to give students unguided practice, Garner (1987, p. 110) argues that explanations about strategies should include:

- a) why the strategy should be learned,
- b) what the strategy is,
- c) how, when and where to use it and
- d) how to evaluate strategy use.

“Explicit teacher explanation produces student awareness, which in turn stimulates student achievement” (op.cit., p. 109). An important part of metacognitive knowledge is knowing when to use different strategies. Students need to be aware of the fact that the learning process is often an intellectual struggle, and should not always expect learning to be easy, even when they are motivated and interested. On the other hand, students with inert knowledge may be unmotivated or not have enough self-confidence to try to perform a skill they need to carry out. There are students who may not realize what they need to do, even if they have the capacity or knowledge to do so. Examples of this are language students who after having practiced specific grammatical rules are unable to use them in real communication, cannot correct their own written work or, while being aware of different registers and genres of language use, still do not conform to the appropriate or the expected linguistic norms. “They have not acquired the habit of questioning themselves to lead to effective performance on intellectual tasks” (Hartman, 2001a, p. 35).

Metacognitive strategy training has been reported to be effective in EFL (Nakatani, 2005; Wenden, 1999). Aiding the students to become aware of their own mental learning processes and giving them an opportunity to become more independent and autonomous learners helps both teachers and students regulate their planning, monitoring and assessing. According to Hartman (2001b, p. 153) teachers should emphasize problem solving, the verbalization of thinking strategies, as well as modelling techniques and discussions. When monitoring and assessing, constructive feedback such as helping students understand why they are wrong so that they can learn from

their mistakes, either in the form of individual errors or patterns of errors, seems most effective (Hartman, 2001b, p. 153). It may seem self-evident, but “mistakes are part of learning” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 24). Here there is great potential for the improvement of student performance, especially in the case of the so-called “poor” students, according to Garner (1987, p. 105). To be able to self-assess the learner has to use metacognitive skills, to become aware of *what* has to be learned, *how* it may best be learned, and to *what degree* it is possible to fulfil these requirements.

However, metacognitive skills are not sufficient learning tools in themselves. Metacognition is only one facet of the self-regulated learner, where also issues such as learners’ and teachers’ beliefs, play a part (Hartman, 2001a, p. 34; Pintrich, 1999, p. 5; Zimmerman, 1995, p. 217).

### 3.2.2 Social Cognitive Theory

Many other theories of self-regulation focus on the question of how students sustain learning both individually and socially.

Bandura’s (1986) social learning theory, most recently called Social Cognitive Theory, subscribes to the notion that individuals have a system of beliefs about themselves that enable them to control their actions. It has been influential in research on social factors in self-regulation, which focuses on interdependent personal, behavioural and environmental influences (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 19). An individual’s behaviour is determined by the interplay between these factors. Behavioural outcomes form future expectations. Self-regulation can be seen as a cyclic process which includes three major phases; forethought, performance or volitional control and self-reflection (Zimmerman, 1998; 2001). Forethought includes goal setting, strategic planning, goal orientations, and intrinsic interest. Performance includes attention focusing, self-instruction and self-monitoring. The self-reflection processes are self-assessment, attributions, self-reactions and adaptivity and it is thus the practice of self-reflection that is the most influential mediator in human agency.

Social cognitive theorists do not believe that the capacity to self-regulate automatically develops or that it is a general trait, it is rather situationally specific and context dependent. As Pintrich (1999) expresses it in a research review, self-regulated learning is “neither easy nor automatic” (p. 7) and involves more demanding engagement from the students in terms of time and effort than normal.

## Learner beliefs

The individuals' beliefs about their ability to produce desired results in a particular area, or "students' beliefs about their capabilities to apply effectively the knowledge and skills they already possess and thereby learn new cognitive skills" (Shunk, 1989, p. 129), are thought to influence learning. The notion of learner beliefs is one way of looking at the difference between capability and performance, and why some students believe themselves capable of mastering content, a subject area or a language, while others do not. According to Pintrich (1999) learner beliefs are "positively related to self-regulatory strategies such as planning, monitoring, and regulating" (p. 465). Low beliefs of one's own abilities are generally associated with poor strategies (Lemos, 1999). There are also research studies that have found that "beliefs, which are highly task and situation specific, correlated with school performance" (Pintrich, 1999, p. 548). Studies of skillful, self-regulated learners have shown that they perceive themselves more capable according to Zimmerman (1998).

The motivation to self-regulate involves positive beliefs about the capability of the self and expected goals (Zimmerman, 2001, p. 20) and the success is dependent on the accuracy of self-observation as it provides information for further self-regulation efforts. Self-observation is considered best when context specific and can motivate behavioural change (Shunk, 2001, p. 131). It has been maintained that self-regulated learners are more often intrinsically motivated, more metacognitively aware and have a higher general level of belief in their own capabilities, and as a consequence these students may also achieve higher grades (Bernardo, 2003; Pintrich, 1999).

Earlier studies by for example Shunk and Swartz (1993, p. 337) and Zimmerman and Risemberg, (1997, p. 95) found that students' beliefs were highly predictive. Feedback is a form of self-efficacy information to the learner, by suggesting that the learner is competent and progressing in learning. The Shunk and Swartz (op.cit., p. 352) findings support the suggestion that learner beliefs are not merely a reflection of performance but that performance also influences beliefs about one's own capacity to learn. The writing process approach to writing (cf. 5.4.2), emphasises the cyclic feedback loop where writers monitor the effectiveness of self-regulating strategies, continuing or changing writing strategies depending on its success (Zimmerman & Risemberg, 1997, p. 77). Learners who have a strong belief in their writing competence, will set higher goals and persist longer when faced

with difficulties, as well as achieve higher results than students with lower expectations of themselves (op.cit., p. 80).

There seems to be ample research support for the fact that learner beliefs affect school performance in different ways. According to Mills, Pajares, and Heron (2007, p. 418) students with high academic self-efficacy self-regulate better, demonstrate more accurate self-assessments, and have greater intrinsic interest in school subjects. Consequently they achieve higher grades, and learners' positive beliefs of their own capabilities are often said to predict success better than actual capacity (op.cit.).

### **Learner beliefs and language learning**

There are few studies on learner beliefs and language learning, but Hsieh and Schallert's (2008) findings suggest that students' beliefs about their results reflect their general beliefs about their capability to learn languages, that is, the students' belief that success or failure is within their control, due to for example lack of effort. Students' beliefs in their language learning capability "can be sustained at a high level even for unsuccessful students when failure is attributed to internal, controllable, and unstable factors" (op.cit., p. 16). It is an important factor to consider when students do not believe themselves to be successful learners, as it does not necessarily need to be de-motivating. The study points out that "even when students report having low self-efficacy, helping them view success and failure as an outcome that they can control may increase their expectancy for success and lead to actual successful experiences" (op.cit., p. 17).

Students' beliefs about language learning are not unexpectedly thought to influence students' self-regulatory learning, their language learning strategies and their ability to self-assess their language learning. If learners believe that there is a best way to learn a language they will quite likely be positive towards the type of teaching that endorses this strategy (Benson & Lor, 1999, p. 459). Certain attitudes and behaviours may be more enabling than others but it is generally acknowledged that language learners can learn equally well by following their own preferences and styles. Learners may state their beliefs both explicitly and implicitly, and it has consequently proved difficult to identify and classify these beliefs systematically. Beliefs are most often found in relation to a task or situation and the same beliefs may not be held under all circumstances (Benson & Lor, 1999).

Horwitz (1999) reviewed representative studies of how beliefs may differ across learner groups but did not find any clear-cut cultural differences. According to Horwitz the differences were more likely to have to do with the relative status of language learning and this indicates that social, political, and economic forces influence learner beliefs. Learning circumstances and the level of language were also important factors. Horwitz maintained that there were several differences within the same culture group. The conclusions reached were that while there is some tendency among group members to share a particular belief, there seems to be a world culture of language learning, which makes learners perceive language learning very similarly.

The belief systems learners have or develop help them to adapt to new situations, to define what is expected of them and to act in accordance with those understandings. Cram (1995) found that one obstacle to self-assessment in the language classroom could be learner attitudes of clinging to traditional power roles (with the teacher as the sole assessor of the student's learning). This attitude could be due to various reasons, such as a poor command of the language, or low self-esteem (p. 273).

### The role of teacher beliefs

While learners' beliefs influence how learners learn, teachers' beliefs influence the whole of the learning environment, especially the ways in which success and failure are interpreted and assessed in the classroom. The explicit and implicit messages that teachers convey about what they consider important and successful learning, affect their learners' developing thoughts of themselves as learners as well as their progress (Wigfield & Harold, 1992). Gardner and Miller (1999) suggest that teachers' beliefs are constructed by their own experiences of language learning, their experience of what works, established practice, personality, as well as researched and method based principles (p. 38). Teachers who believe that their students are able to learn the subject matter they are teaching often have more successful and motivated students than those with the opposite view (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek & Guillet, 2002).

Teachers may also reflect the assumptions the students bring with them to the classroom. One such assumption is that some students are predestined to fail through their innate (and therefore fixed) abilities rather than that failure to achieve is associated with different degrees of effort. According to Black (1998, p. 134) teachers' manifestations of this may affect the students' self-image as these assumptions are projected back on to the students. Teacher

feedback enables the learner to monitor his or her own progress and evaluate the effectiveness of the learning strategies used. It also gives the learner essential information on which to base and establish their beliefs in their own capabilities towards the learning task and generally become more metacognitively aware (Mok et al., 2006, p. 417).

There is also the possibility of a discrepancy between teacher and student beliefs, which may prove detrimental to learning, especially to autonomous learning and self-assessment practices. As Lemos (1999) points out, “students’ goals do not always match teachers’ goals” (p. 478). Students may for example misunderstand teachers’ goals, which can cause the students’ own attempts at planning and goal setting to be unsuccessful by the teacher’s definition. This may lead the students to believe that it may be useless to try to attain their own aims and goals.

It seems apparent that teachers need to be aware of their beliefs and how these views were formed. The empirical evidence is that both students’ and teachers’ beliefs influence what happens in both traditional classrooms and self-directed learning situations. Therefore it is reasonable to expect that these beliefs may have consequences for the students’ learning.

### **3.2.3 Self-regulation in Society and Education**

The construct of self-regulation in education can be seen from several different perspectives. In most psychological perspectives, as presented previously, self-regulation enhances the development of the individual. It is thus a form of empowerment to ‘free’ the individual. At the same time, there is another perspective, brought forward in the field of sociology, which sees self-regulation in pragmatic terms of helping individuals cope with challenges of accelerating change, or as freeing the state from responsibility for the individual through generating individuals who ‘control’ themselves. The first line of reasoning may be understood by looking at the structure of modern society as seen by Beck (1986/1998) and Giddens (1991), and the second by some of the concepts discussed by Foucault.

The description of modern society as a risk-society, or a risk-culture has been put forth by both Beck (1986/1998, p. 50) and Giddens (1991, p. 3) as the notion of the capacity of the welfare state to take care of the individual has become questioned. Thus, the political and social importance of knowledge and education as a means for the individual to cope with these surrounding conditions increases (Beck, 1986/1998, p. 65).

Beck regarded education as a key to the possibility of employment for the individual, and saw mass education as something that developed a minimum of the necessary reflexive processes in the individual. As Wain (2009) points out, lifelong learning and lifelong education are not the same thing even if often confused, and therefore self-regulation can be a way of combining young adults' education with the working population's need of further education for, among other values, increased employability. It is one way of monitoring risks, and to cope with what is predicted to be tomorrow's need of knowledge in a changing world. It introduces a new way of thinking about how this need for further learning will take place. It also underpins democracy and the potential for individual emancipation and freedom.

Another position brought forth by several researchers (Lemke, 2000; Olssen, 2006; Pontgratz, 2006; Tuschling & Engemann, 2006) is the notion of voluntary self-control, or 'governmentality' to describe and explain why lifelong learning and the self-regulating learner have recently become focused.

### Voluntary Self-control

The concept of voluntary self-control has to do with the notion that there is a political rationality structuring lifelong learning and self-regulation (and thus also by extension, self-assessment practices). As European educational policy both expects and wishes to develop in the individual, the capability of self-assessment skills in language learning it focuses on the "alignment of governmental interventions with self-regulative capacities of individuals" according to Tuschling & Engemann (2006, p. 451). Lifelong learning and self-regulating practices can then be seen as a way to govern individuals and constitute a technology of control, as Olssen (2006, p. 216) maintains.

The concept of inner regulation or 'biopolitics', rather than coercive power from outside sources, are based on Foucault (1978, pp. 91-92), who relates to the three classic types of government: the art of self-government, the art of economy and that of ruling the state, and how they interconnect. This concept, also termed governmentality, shows how wished for means may be achieved without outer force or coercion (Foucault, 1978, p. 95). The individual governs himself. As Foucault used the term, government meant the "conduct of conduct", and according to Gordon (1991) he saw the western societies' trend go toward a government of 'all and each', "designed to observe, monitor, shape and control the behaviour of individuals" (p. 3). In other words, a form of self-control needed in society, and its institutions, such

as for example its schools. This art of government finds principles of rationality that reflect reality. Further, continuing education, as well as additional language learning can be said to increase the individual's personal sense of fulfillment and understanding of life as one's own enterprise. These ideas can be seen to be reflected in the policy documents that focus on lifelong learning, self-awareness and self-realization (cf. 2.1).

The form of power manifest in voluntary self-control has been described as a new 'pastoral power' (Foucault, 1982) and "cannot be exercised without knowing the inside of people's minds, without exploring their souls, without making them reveal their innermost secrets. It implies a knowledge of the conscience and an ability to direct it" (p. 783). This reasoning regarding power has consequences for how the power relationship between students and teachers can be understood, especially regarding the 'power' of self-discipline in matters of evaluation. Power is seen as part of all social relations, and following this reasoning, education and school can be used as tools in order to reproduce existing spheres of power but do not necessarily in themselves constitute power. A pre-requisite for the execution of power is also a free individual. Looked at this way, power does not exist in itself, but rather as relations between individuals or groups. It shifts, only existing in execution and practice. Power is no longer identified with a person such as a teacher who possesses or exercises power, rather it "becomes a machine that no one owns" (Foucault, 1977b, p. 156). The individual subject, for example the learner/student, is "subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. This suggests a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to" (Foucault, 1982, p. 212). As seen by Erlandson (2007, p. 15) the reflective theme in education transforms into a reflective 'technology'. Following this line of reasoning, reflection can be an indirect technique of power in the classroom. The growing use of self-regulation in European language education can be seen in such facilitators of trans-national mobility as the Europass, the European Language Portfolio (ELP) as well as in general assessment practices such as portfolios, self-reports and self-assessment. All of these involve a self-inspecting and reflexive 'gaze',

which each individual under its weight will end by interiorising to the point that he is his own overseer, each individual thus exercising this surveillance over, and against, himself (Foucault, 1977b, p. 155).

According to Tuschling & Engemann (2006) there is an overt risk that "the individual becomes the subject of its own documentation" (p. 464). This is

not necessarily to be interpreted as inherently good or bad. Self-reflective awareness can create a potential for learning as the ability to observe the self is a pre-condition for effective pre-planning of activities, but may on the other hand also be a way for the individual to restrain him- or herself. Lemke (2000) expresses it in this manner: “The techniques of the self are integrated into structures of coercion and domination” (op.cit., p. 4). Putting the learner in the role of being his or her own assessor can be a way of having the learner accept and condone the power the teacher in the end has over the student in the form of summative assessments, such as grades. The reverse side of the participation the learner enjoys is that he or she may risk not being able to measure up to his or her own demands. The self is in this way constructed and modified by the self.

In this manner, self-regulation can be seen as a ‘pastoral power’, where the teacher through knowledge given to him or her via learner participation can use the information to bind the learner to his or her own judgement. It may be easy to see how the traditional asymmetrical relationship of the teacher and learner easily refers the learner to a state of being dominated, in the name of self-regulation. Taras (2001) writes that the teacher’s control is not in fact challenged when students are excluded from what they experience as most important, namely summative assessment. As the teacher is most often the one to validate the truth of the student’s self-assessment, and to legitimize it, it may in effect be reinforcing a subject/object relationship between them. Such a mechanism of intervention, it can be argued, cancels the participative and empowering function of self-regulated assessment practices.

To summarize, in Europe the political discourse from the 1970’s on asserts a change in the delegation of power between state and individual, from a relatively rigid framework of welfare states, to a focus on how the individual should maximize his or her own life chances at minimal state costs, often termed neo-liberal strategies. According to Tuschling & Engemann (2006, p. 451) the concept of lifelong learning plays a special role in the revision of education to accomplish this. As Pontgratz (2006, p. 474) sees it, education and schooling acquires greater significance in recoding power relations after this shift. Self-regulation functions through the individual learner being placed in a dual position, experiencing “themselves as subjects of processes of which they simultaneously remain the objects” (op.cit., 477). Pontgratz further maintains that the self-regulating discourse is at the heart of the ‘power/knowledge’ complex, linked with neo-liberalism and the economic

rationality of education with systems of constructivist theory to assimilate education in a “network of governmental strategies of control, the ‘voluntary self-control’ of individuals” (op.cit. p. 477).

As the review of background theories of reflexivity and self-regulation in learning show, they are recurrent themes in the fields of both the philosophy and psychology of education. As such they are important for our understanding of the development of current language and self-assessment practices, and how teachers and students experience these.

## THE BACKGROUND TO CURRENT LANGUAGE EDUCATION AND ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

Traditions of language teaching, learning and assessment, as well as the previously described global, European, and national policy documents and theories of learning and self-regulation, influence present day assessment practice. Chapter 4 gives a brief overview of language learning and assessment practices to place self-assessment in its historical context. The development of different assessment practices is coupled to different language learning methods (4.1). Critical language theory and its importance and role for the development of alternative assessment practice are also briefly accounted for (4.2).

### 4.1 A Brief Historical Perspective on Assessment Practices in Relation to Language Education

The general trends in language education and language assessment have followed the same common pattern in the western world, most often strongly influenced by research in adjoining fields such as linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology and sociology, as well as specific needs of the times. A brief and somewhat simplified recapitulation follows, as a means of setting self-assessment of EFL in relation to its background. The above trends are not as linear as they may be perceived in this presentation, but sometimes develop parallel to each other, and many have cyclical tendencies.

Prevalent theories and beliefs about learning in general, and about the way languages are learned, are intimately related to predominant testing and assessment practices. Beliefs about learning influence the ways teachers and students think about measuring progress and judging end results. In the overview the tendencies and developments in language education and assessment practices are therefore presented jointly in order to illustrate how

they have affected each other. To focus the development of assessment and testing practices related to language learning, the overview has been divided into three sections, based on Spolsky's (1976) view of three stages of language testing history: the pre-scientific period (4.1.1), the psychometric-structuralist period (4.1.2) and the psycholinguistic-sociolinguistic period, also called the integrative approach (4.1.3). As Spolsky clearly states, "the trends follow in order but overlap in time and approach. The third picks up many elements of the first and second and all three co-exist and compete" (op.cit., p. 11). These classifications provide a framework for understanding current practice in both language teaching and assessment in each section. Some of the most well known language learning methods are presented first, followed by how languages were believed to be best assessed.

#### 4.1.1 The Pre-scientific Period

During the time period that Spolsky (1976) called the pre-scientific period there was usually no special theory or research tradition behind general language teaching or testing practice.

During this period, what became known as the traditional *Classic* or *Grammar-Translation Method* was mainly used in the learning of Latin and Greek and thereby became the model for all other forms of language teaching. This approach dominated 19<sup>th</sup> century language teaching and focused mainly on the study of grammar and on translation exercises. Language learning at this time can be said to have met the needs of a cultural elite, the church and the upper social classes.

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century the *Direct Method* became popular in Germany and France. It was based on the belief that foreign and second languages were learned in much the same way as one's first language, or mother tongue. To achieve language learning goals only the target language was used in the classroom. Understanding without translation, and thinking directly in the new language was the ultimate aim. Then followed a *Modified Direct Method*, where translation of, for example, vocabulary was allowed in the classroom and this method became fairly common. The *Reading Method* was used in the United States during the 1930s where the majority of American students only studied foreign languages for two years. The students were taught to read the new language with direct comprehension, inferring meaning without the use of translation, while the other language skills were deemed rather less important.

During this period, teachers as well as language testing experts constructed their own tests from general principles of testing taken from the humanities or social sciences, and depending on the particular method they were using (H. D. Brown, 1987, p. 227). The assumption behind this practice was that regarding assessment one can and must rely on the judgment of the teacher.

#### 4.1.2 The Psychometric-Structuralist Period

Psychometric-structuralist language testing became common in the early 1950s to the late 1960s, largely influenced by the work of Lado (1961) and Carroll (1961; 1965; 1968). Language learning and teaching had during this time been influenced by structural (or descriptive) linguists such as Bloomfield (1933), Sapir (1921), Hockett (1960) and Fries (1945) as well as behaviouristic psychologists such as Watson (1930) and Skinner (1948; 1957) in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

The *Audio-lingual Method* or *Aural-Oral Method* evolved in the late 1940s from the American military during World War II whose service personnel were in dire need of quickly acquiring good comprehension and speaking skills at that time. According to this method, the language should be heard and spoken before it is read and written. Language learning was seen as a process of pattern formation, often by means of memorizing dialogues and so called pattern practice. Imitation and reinforcement of correct language use were seen as the best way to learn languages. The motto was “teach the language, not about the language”. The use of the language laboratory became one way of serving a growing middle class in need of language skills. When language learning problems arose, it was the differences between L1 and L2 that were focused, using contrastive analysis (Corder, 1967; Lado, 1957).

In the 1960s cognitive psychology took a contrasting position, and sought to discover underlying motivations and deeper structures, focusing on meaning and understanding. Piaget (1970) suggested that the individual learner constructed new knowledge from previous experiences, incorporating the new knowledge into existing frameworks. The cognitive constructivist view of learning meant that language learners reconstructed language rules for themselves, trying them out and altering them according to degree of success. The generative-transformational school of linguistic analysis emerged, spearheaded by Chomsky (1957, 1965/1985), who elaborated a distinction between the deep and surface structures of language similar to Saussure’s

(1916/2006) concepts *langue* and *parole*. Chomsky claimed that language was not a habit structure and instead spoke of the existence of a Universal Grammar and that children have an innate ability to acquire language, a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). To a certain degree the influence of the generative-transformation grammarians resulted, partly on false grounds, to a return to the learning of rules. This approach was defined as the *Cognitive-code Learning Theory* by Carroll (1965) (cf. also Rivers, 1981).

The corresponding period in testing built on the notion that language ability could be broken down into isolated skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing. Within each of these skills, isolated segments such as morphology and syntax could be tested separately in an item-by-item fashion and it was consequently termed discrete-point testing. It was popular due to its assumed objective character and its often easily demonstrated high reliability features. Objective test formats, such as multiple-choice questions, and concentration on aspects of formal language, such as structure and form, were common.

#### 4.1.3 The Psycholinguistic – Sociolinguistic Period or The Integrative Approach

With respect to the testing of language learning, Spolsky called the third period the integrative, or psycho- and sociolinguistic period, as the ideas of how languages were learned had changed through research in these areas.

As the need for an educated labour force increased, and larger groups of young people entered further education, demands for democracy and emancipatory learning grew. In the 1970s and 1980s the trends in psychology focused on interpersonal relationships and group work, as well on collaborative and social dimensions of learning (cf. 3.2). Piaget had argued for the importance of cooperation and social interaction. He had early seen these aspects of human life as necessary elements for cognitive development. The works of Vygotsky reinforced Piaget's ideas but emphasized the importance of discourse with others and language mediation to reach a higher level of understanding. Vygotsky's well known concept, the "zone of proximal development" (1978) described how learners should be challenged in close proximity to, yet somewhat above, their current level of understanding. Through prompting and scaffolding from teachers (or others) the learner could learn to master concepts he or she would not be able to reach on his or her own, as well as gain confidence and motivation for learning.

The theoretical school of social constructivism placed the responsibility of learning more on the student and emphasized the importance of the student being actively involved in the learning process (von Glasersfeld, 1995). The learner's own metacognitive awareness and strategic ability became important features of learning more autonomously, and the learner's experience of mastery and internal feelings of competence and self-efficacy were seen as central to sustaining motivation. The importance of social relationships and interactions for learning in general came into focus, emphasizing language, culture and context for the learner to be able to construct his or her own knowledge.

The interactive process of language (the nature of communication and communicative competence), and the importance of socio-cultural rules (being able to create utterances that are appropriate to the context in which they are made) was investigated by Hymes (1971/2004; 1972). Likewise, Halliday (1973) studied the interrelation between language use and social context but from "the view of language as semantic options derived from social structure" (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 21). Labov (1972) discussed variation in language use in terms of linguistic and non-linguistic variables. These theories as well as new concepts regarding language learning, such as inter-language and Krashen's Monitor Model (which distinguished between conscious learning processes and less conscious but equally important acquisition processes), became influential in the 1970s and early 1980s (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982; Stern, 1983/1990, pp. 330-331; Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p.35). Other theories, such as Comprehensible Output (Swain, 1985) for example, emphasized language output as a means for the learner to test acquisition, as language output generated feedback, and enhanced fluency. Some researchers also claimed that the first language had less effect on the second language syntax than previously thought (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982, p. 5) whereas others argued for the use of contrastive analysis as a means of avoiding the inevitable adverse influences of the first language on second language acquisition.

*The Communicative Approach* to language learning, which grew out of the more modern theories on learning and language development, involved more implicit language learning. On the whole it meant having students communicate with each other in meaningful situations in a variety of contexts but not withholding explicit formal instruction (Canale & Swain, 1980, p.18; Widdowson, 1978, p. 19). The Communicative Approach is characterized by combining functional and structural aspects of language (Littlewood,

1981/1990, p. ix) and is sometimes also referred to as the *Functional-Notional Approach*.

There are several different theories of communicative competence, only differing in the emphasis they place on different communicative features according to Canale and Swain (1980, p. 8). van Ek's (1975) work with the Threshold Level described categories of language skills that the learner should be able to perform, and language activities they should be able to engage in to function independently in the language at a basic, "threshold" level. This was later developed further in the Common European Framework of Reference (cf. 2.1.3.). Another was a model developed by Cummins (1979; 1999) that marked the difference between cognitive/academic language proficiency (CALP) and basic interpersonal communication skills (BICS). The work of Widdowson (1978), Stern (1983/1990), and Nunan (1991/1998) reflected a more integrative theory of communicative competence. Nunan's list of elements of communicative language teaching for example, included an emphasis on communication through interaction in the target language, the use of authentic texts, learner focus on the learning process, and the contribution of elements of the learners' own language experience inside and outside the classroom.

Generally one can say that peer and group work requiring negotiation and collaboration are typical features of the communicative language classroom. It also often involves features of more untraditional forms of classroom work, like self-directed learning or Learner Autonomy and Problem Based Learning (PBL) where students are stimulated and often even required, to take a more active role in their own learning.

Researchers such as Oller (1979) began to investigate ways of testing communicative language competence. As language competence was now seen as a unified set of interacting abilities it was assumed that they should not, and could not be separated into different testable components. Integrative or global (rather than discrete-point) tests were preferable as they attempted to assess the language learners' ability to use several skills and language segments, including formal and sociolinguistic aspects at the same time, and in this way were supposed to measure the individual's total proficiency. Canale and Swain (1980) continued and examined grammatical, sociolinguistic, strategic and discourse aspects of communicative competence. Bachman (1990, p. 87) divided the communicative competence concept further into the broader "organizational competence", which included both

grammatical and discourse competence, and "pragmatic competence", which included sociolinguistic and illocutionary competence.

In light of the above, as Rivers (1981, p. 357) writes, integrative language tests need to involve the assessment of functional language and meaningful discourse that engages several skills. Emphasis should be on communication skills, authenticity and context. Communicative tests have accordingly to be both direct and pragmatic, and test the learner in a variety of language functions (H. D. Brown, 1987, p. 231). Communicative tests should also, according to Canale and Swain (1980), build on a theoretical framework, concentrate on motivating, interesting and substantive content, do everything possible to elicit a good performance from the students and work for a positive washback effect. The point that testing methodology must integrate all aspects of communicative competence was emphasized by Canale and Swain (*op.cit.*). Furthermore, Canale and Swain stressed that assessment instruments should be designed to address communicative performance in real situations for authentic purposes. In the assessment of writing skills for example, a valid task would be to ask the learners to combine elements of what they have learned, and write something to express their own meaning, thus combining an authentic communicative purpose with the demonstration of the language level attained. Problematic for this approach is of course the fact that individuals' communicative language competence may vary from one task to another (Douglas, 1986) and that non-linguistic factors can have an effect on proficiency performance (McNamara, 1995, p. 165).

Various alternative modes of assessment, peer and self-assessment for example, have increasingly come into focus (cf. e.g. Gipps, 1994; Gipps & Murphy, 1994; Hamayan, 1995; Paris & Ayres, 1994; Worthen, 1993) due to the attention social constructivism, and, more recently, self-regulated language teaching methods assign the student's own role in learning (cf. 3.2). Therefore the role that response and feedback has been found to have in the writing process, not only in developing the students' writing ability but also in learning in general (Dysthe, 1996; Dysthe, Herzberg & Hoel, 2000), has also had impact on the character of both writing assignments and tests. Yet, Shohamy (2001a, p. 24) warns that even writing performance assessment is controlled by factors such as time, content, scoring rubrics and raters who are trained to agree to ensure reliability. And, as it is not an authentic writing situation, these aspects may instead, according to her, result in questionable validity.

The development of alternative modes of assessment has been enhanced by endeavours to help all students reach goals that were previously reserved only for the privileged. Both international and national policy documents, as well as projects endorsed by the Council of Europe, emphasize the democratic aspects of language learning, both on an individual and a global level (cf. 2.1). As Shohamy (2007) states, high-stakes language assessment such as tests have come to be “connected and embedded in political, social and educational contexts” and are judged “in relation to their impact, ethicality, fairness, values and consequences” (op.cit., p. 117). Traditional, high-stakes language tests have power to influence actions and policy, not always to the learner’s advantage (Gipps & Murphy, 1994). Other ways of assessing language learners’ competence need to be developed, given the “power” language tests may have. The development of more self-reflective as well as collaborative assessment models is one way to do this.

## 4.2 The Critical Perspective on Language Assessment

Alternative assessment, and thus self-assessment, is to a large degree based on the critical perspective, as applied to language assessment by for instance Pennycook (1999; 2001) and Lynch (2001). This is briefly described in this section, as it is part of the theoretical background to self-assessment practices.

Classic Critical Theory strove to “link thought with emancipation” (Lynch, 2001, p. 352). In educational research for example, it raised important ethical questions, and the Critical Theory paradigm saw thought as mediated by socially and historically situated power relations. It did not isolate facts from values. Social inequality and social transformation were central. Certain groups were more privileged than others, and mainstream research practices were implicated in the reproduction of oppression.

On the other hand, Critical Theory could be seen to “be as oppressive as some of the forces it seeks to confront” (Lynch, 2001, p. 354). Much done in the critical domains relating to critical applied linguistics and emphasizing emancipation and rationality was found by Pennycook (2001, p. 7) to be limited.

Like other critical applied linguists (e.g. Fairclough (1995, 2003) Pennycook (2001, p. 8) saw the critical applied linguistics approach (CAL) as having an interest in everyday categories of applied linguistics such as for

example language learning and assessment, as well as a resistance to the normative. In other words, CAL embraced transformative pedagogy while at the same time taking a self-reflexive stand on critical theory (Lynch, 2001, p. 356). Pennycook saw several ways of responding to issues of inequality and oppression, and Lynch (op.cit., p. 357) characterized the critical approach to applied linguistics by:

- a) its interest in the ways in which language related issues are interconnected with other domains,
- b) its research ambition to consider paradigms beyond the dominant ones,
- c) its concern for social justice and equality, and
- d) its requirement to be self-reflexive in itself. This view was not committed to a fixed theoretical framework, and thus allowed researchers to be open to new perspectives to deepen understanding.

Shohamy (2001a; 2001b) expanded on the characteristics of the critical perspective to include questions about which and whose agendas assessment, particularly summative assessment such as tests, serve. Further she questioned the nature of knowledge that language assessment and tests are based on, as well as challenged the standpoint that language assessment and tests serve to democratically represent the needs of multiple groups in society. She also endorsed active and critical responses from language test takers.

Critical language pedagogy thus raised the question if learning outcomes can be assessed in different ways, and maybe even in different ways for different learners. As McGroarty (1998) expressed it: “If learners are to be assessed on goals and activities they themselves select, which may differ among them, what could serve as acceptable evidence of learning, for them and for others—teachers, parents, policymakers?” (p. 615).

Lynch argued that the critical perspective could have elements to offer language research in assessment, as an additional approach to looking at individual language ability. Lynch saw the paradigms underlying alternative assessment as different from those of testing. Testing, according to Lynch, is mainly concerned with measuring objective entities while alternative assessment takes the view that language use can best be understood in social life and does not exist independently. He argues that the differences lie mainly in the conceptualization of validity and its criteria (Lynch, 2001, p. 362). It is the “assumptions of the research and practice with which they are

embedded that determine their critical potential or alternative paradigm character” (op. cit., p. 364) the validity framework must integrate with ethics. Fairness in the critical alternative assessment perspective here means that the *learner’s perspective* is taken into account, and that the assessment is so structured as to maximize ethical behaviour so that the power relations between the assessor and the assessed are shifted. The assessment practice should also actively enable the construction of the self as subject, rather than the object of assessment. Here the notion of power relations is salient in the determination of ethics (Lynch, 2001, p. 366). Language assessment and especially summative assessment in the form of language tests can, as Shohamy (2001a, p. 374) warns, be misused as forceful, undemocratic and unethical tools by different groups in authority. They can also be used as a way of controlling knowledge, in respect to what is right/wrong, true/false and so forth.

The critical perspective aims at establishing an assessment context where the learner’s voice is give more room for expression, “a context in which traditional power relations are recognized and made more reversible and flexible” (Lynch, 2001, p. 368). As both Lynch and Shohamy maintain, the critical perspective needs to be self-reflexive in itself. The procedure needs to be continually scrutinized so as to not become in itself normative, and the expert status of traditional language assessment in the form of summative tests reconsidered in a more democratic approach, giving learners a more active role in assessment.

Alternative models of assessment can, through collaboration, lead to shared power, and thereby empower rather than subjugate the learner. But the complexities of the nature of self-assessment can also require the learner to ‘confess’ in the evaluation of their own performance. It is believed that this can occur in and through discourse associated with both summative and formative assessment and creates knowledge about the individual student.

As Tan (2004) points out, “power should be appreciated for its productive pedagogical potential” (p. 660). This is also the case for the power inherent in different assessment practices, be they alternative or traditional. Power is always present and the focus should be, first of all, on how it may be used to benefit learners. Thus, lifelong self-regulated learning and self-assessment practices should be seen as a means to learning ends. If these means are not apparent, they are not going to be taken seriously. As many learners and teachers bring with them real life experiences other than that of the prevalent educational discourse, calling attention to the forces at work is

needed. Students need help to develop self-regulating techniques. Lifelong learning, self-regulation and self-assessment seek among other things to give students tools that help them learn to learn. It represents a shift in practice, which is a part of a broader discourse.

Both the empowering and the disciplining potential of self-regulated learning and adherent self-assessment practices exist, but the question is how this power is exercised in practice, which is important. As such, it can be seen as part of Messick's (1989) concept of consequential validity, that is, validity related to its consequences. Messick claimed that the consequences of assessment should be integrated into a wider and unified concept of validity, taking into account the washback effects of assessment on teaching and learning in addition to the usual kinds of validity considerations. Boud (2000) calls this sustainable assessment. Needless to say, assessment practices should contribute towards learners' ability to learn, not venture or undermine learning.



## RELATED RESEARCH

As described in Chapter 4 language teaching and learning methods, and language assessment have influenced each other in different ways, depending on the dominant learning theory of the time. Theories behind the concept of the self-regulated learner, which is a major aim in modern education, are also dealt with in Chapter 4.

As stated by Gipps (1994) assessment has undergone a paradigm shift during the last couple of decades “from a testing and examination culture to an assessment culture” (p. 1). One reason, she claims, is that the traditional psychometric model dominated by discrete point items was found inadequate in dealing with additional purposes of assessment, other than that of comparing individual performance or knowledge with that of others. Tests designed for purposes other than to support learning may, as maintained by Gipps (1994), result in unwanted effects for the individual and for the educational system as such. Different forms of assessment give a backwash effect on different ways of learning. The present chapter takes a closer look at the relevant research done and which the present study can be related to. It starts by looking at formative assessment (5.1). It goes on to present previous research done on self-assessment in general, as well as the role which assessment criteria play (5.2). The chapter then focuses on self-assessment of language learning (5.3.) and the research on self-assessment of writing, the nature of writing and importance of feedback and correction effectiveness as far as these bear relevance to the study (5.4). A short summary (5.5) ends the chapter.

### 5.1 Formative Assessment

Summative assessment, or assessment *of* learning, has traditionally been used to sum up end results of achievement. Formative assessment, on the other

hand, is often referred to as assessment *for* learning, and is primarily used to improve learning by giving the student information on his or her learning progress while still learning. Formative assessment can be given either by one-way communication from the teacher to the student, or in conference with the student. The major difference between the two, according to Gipps (1994), is their purpose and effect (p. 125). Major arguments for developing formative assessment practices are democratic in essence, that is to promote and improve learning for all students, and leading to empowerment and self-regulation.

Formative assessment includes all activities that provide information that is used as feedback to adapt teaching and learning in the classroom to student needs, and to promote student learning (Black, 1998, p. 25; Black, Harrison, Lee, Marshall & Wiliam, 2003; 2004; Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 140). In an extensive survey of the research literature Black and Wiliam (1998) and Black et al. (2003) concluded that formative assessment raised standards, and that there was evidence that it helped low achievers more than other students, reducing the range while raising achievement overall. Frequent assessment feedback helped both groups enhance learning. Formative assessment can be a powerful weapon to create a “culture of success” in the classroom, negating low self-esteem, low self-efficacy and inadequate learning approaches, so that all students are able to achieve (Black et al., 2003, p. 46; Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 142). Feedback should be about the students’ work, in relation to previous performance and set criteria, not about the *self* or amount to a comparison with others. It should consist of concrete advice on how to improve.

Self-assessment practices are considered an essential component of formative assessment, the reason being that “the desired goal, evidence about present position, and some understanding of a way to close the gap between the two” (Black & Wiliam, 1998, p. 143) must be apprehended by the student in order for the learning to improve. Classroom assignments and tests should also reflect learning goals and be a means of promoting feedback and learning (cf. further the role of criteria and feedback, 5.2.1 and 5.4.2). Out of a number of subjects investigated by Black et al. (2003, p. 73) foreign language teaching was the most challenging for formative assessment practices. Whatever the approach used to assess performance in learner-directed language learning the challenge is, Bachman (2000) maintains, “finding the means for including and representing the perspective and discourse of the learners or test-takers themselves, while meeting standards of reliability and

accountability” (p. xiii). Exclusion of students in the assessment process may lead to a discrepancy between a test score and the actual communicative ability of a language learner (Ekbatani, 2000, p. 2).

A number of formative motives for self-assessment practices have been suggested by Oscarson (1989). Among others these are that self-assessment promotes learning, raises learner awareness, improves goal orientation, improves learner autonomy in a lifelong perspective, is conducive to democratic learning processes and needs analysis. As indicated by Oscarson (1999, pp. 181-183) these motives can be subsumed under four main arguments for the introspective effort:

a) the pedagogical-educational argument (i.e. giving the student real autonomy),

b) the practical-pragmatic argument (i.e. giving the teacher and the student shared responsibility for assessment),

c) the logical-philosophical argument (i.e. considering the language learner to be in a unique position to judge that which is difficult to reach by external observation) and

d) the empirical argument, based on research that supports the notion that (language) students are, under certain conditions, capable of realistically assessing their own performance levels.

## 5.2 Self-assessment

Self-assessment accuracy is according to Blanche and Merino (1989, p. 313) a precondition for learner autonomy. Students need to be able to appraise their performance accurately for themselves so that they themselves understand what more they need to learn and do not become dependent on their teachers. A fundamental reason for self-assessment is then to help the learner become aware of achievement reached at any given time and over a longer term, and in this way enhance learning.

There are several studies on self-assessment in various content areas. These studies will be presented first and are then followed by a review of studies with particular focus on language learning (cf. 5.4).

Two classic meta-studies, those of Shrauger and Osberg (1981) and Falchikov and Boud (1989), summarize the investigations of the *comparative* studies. Students’ self-assessments have here been related to external

assessments, often in the form of test scores, and teacher grading has frequently been used as validity criteria. The self-assessments have usually been elicited through using rating scales and questionnaires.

In the first of the two, Shrauger and Osberg (1981) reviewed 50 studies in psychological assessment and found that the validity of self-assessment was comparable to that of other assessment methods: “At both the empirical and conceptual levels, there seems to be substantial support for the notion that self-assessors frequently have the appropriate information and motivation to make as effective judgements about their own behavior as can be made by any other means” (op.cit., p. 347).

In the second, a meta-analytic study of 57 quantitative student self-assessment studies in different course subjects, Falchikov and Boud (1989, p. 395) compared “self-assessed marks and teacher marks”. They found that the outcome varied in terms of correlation coefficients ( $r$ )<sup>8</sup>, but that self-assessment tended to provide concurrent validity with criterion variables. The researchers reached the conclusion that the level of the course was a significant variable, with better agreement at advanced levels. Another aspect the study suggested was that assessments were more accurate when criteria were explicit and well understood. In the better controlled studies, in terms of carefulness in design and methodology, there were closer correlations between student and teacher assessment. On the other hand, their meta-study found few studies investigating whether self-assessment improved over time, or with practice, and they speculated whether the nature of the assessment task influenced the accuracy of self-assessment (op.cit., p. 419). Falchikov and Boud concluded that the benefit of involving students in self-assessment resides in the improvement of learning.

Other individual studies show varying results. In a study with university biology students, Stefani (1994) observed that students had realistic perceptions of their abilities and made reliable assessments. She reported that students said that self-assessment made them think more, and consequently made them learn more in spite of the fact that it was more time-consuming and difficult.

On the other hand, in a study of disadvantaged tertiary science students Kirby and Downs (2007) established that these students were not able to

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<sup>8</sup> The correlation coefficients varied between  $r=.05$  and  $r=.82$  with the mean value being  $r=.39$  (Falchikov and Boud, 1989, p. 420).

accurately self-assess in relation to the standards set by their teachers, but it was also pointed out that the students were probably not aware of the need to fulfil the criteria, or did not understand what in fact meeting the criteria at the specified level meant (p. 486). They conclude by stating that practice will contribute to more accurate self-assessment, and they focus the need to integrate feedback as part of the progress (op.cit., p. 491).

Beginners and students with elementary skills generally seem to have a tendency to overestimate their abilities, while students who are more proficient are liable to underestimate them (Boud, 1995, p. 163; Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Prohaska & Maraj, 1995). A study on self-perception and competence by Giota (2002) is of special interest in relation to this. She found that negative/critical pupils underestimated their competence and believed that they were less competent than their results showed.

Investigating the effects of training self-assessment on narrative writing skills, Ross, Rolheiser and Hogaboam-Gray (1999) found that teaching self-assessment skills both increased accuracy, especially for those who tended to overestimate, and had a positive effect on achievement among low achievers as it helped them better understand teacher expectations. Ross et al. (1999) stressed that language students have to be taught to self-assess their work correctly. Mok et al. (2006) used self-assessment in teacher education, having student teachers self-assess themselves at the beginning, middle and end of learning sequences. The students found self-assessment supportive and they reported having become more aware of their own learning at the end of the study.

In another small research study with education students, Sullivan and Hall (1997) also discovered good agreement between student and teacher results, but that the students who overestimated their grades were unclear as to the expected criteria (e.g. the criteria were too general, students had not read them) and also unclear as to how to evaluate their work. For example, many students tended to place emphasis on the effort invested rather than on the actual standard of their work. They concluded that time for proper introduction of self-assessment is important, as is practice.

Self-assessment practices in the classroom also had an effect on teachers in that they involved “making explicit what is normally implicit” and required the students to become more active and aware of their own learning, as noted by Black et al. (2003, p. 60; 2004, p. 16). In their project, which encompassed many different subject areas, they found that students started to

demand a different type of learning environment than before, namely a classroom that emphasized learning.

In reviews of results in this area Oscarson (1997, p. 177; 1999, p. 166) noted that empirical work up to this time had two main aims: a) to explore the reliability of results and b) to investigate ways of involving the learner in assessment. The validity of the approach has mostly been investigated by comparing subjective and objective measures of ability. There has also been some research done on related aspects of self-assessment outcomes associated with self-esteem, self-confidence and self-perception.

### 5.2.1 Role of Assessment Criteria

Students must understand the goals to be reached in order to learn, and they also need to understand the goal to be able to assess what they need to learn. In other words, students need to learn to assess their performance against understandable criteria. Assessment criteria must be shared, so that there is a consensus on the learning goal of a course or of a task and the standards to be achieved (Sadler, 1989, p. 121; Stefani, 1998, p. 346). Learners are then able to measure their achievement against targets. To enhance student learning in the assessment process, the students must be able to reflect on their current level; from an improvement perspective in the case of formative assessment, and from a reached target level in the case of summative assessment. “Assessment should be another episode in learning and it can be argued that a shared understanding of the learning task and the assessment criteria are keys to this ideal” (Stefani, 1998, p. 346). Orsmond et al. (2000) express it thus: “Developing an appreciation of criteria may enhance the quality of the assessment practice and have a major impact on student learning” (p. 24).

Criteria were identified by Boud (1995) as salient components of self-assessment, both identifying standards and criteria for evaluating the quality of the work, and the judgement as to what extent the criteria have been reached. He maintains that both are equally important but that teachers and students often focused on the former (*op.cit.*, p. 12). It is when identifying criteria that the learner develops a deeper understanding of the learning task and learning goals, according to Mok, Lung, Cheng, Cheung and Ng (2006) and in this way develop an individual benchmark for quality. This is especially so when the understanding of criteria is attempted collaboratively.

In a study with high school students, Andrade and Boulay (2003) established that simply giving and explaining assessment criteria gave the

students a deeper understanding of the qualities evaluated. In another study with undergraduate students, Andrade and Du (2005) found that the students experienced that knowing what was expected of them helped “identify strengths and weaknesses in their work when used to give feedback” (p. 3) and also made them understand their final grades. Having a good grasp of the criteria made the students able to self-assess their work in progress.

Eighty-four percent of the students in a study by Orsmond, Merry and Reiling (2000) who self-assessed their progress in relation to set criteria thought that the exercise had been beneficial and made them better critical thinkers (p. 29). In the study Orsmond, et al. also found that a direct comparison between teacher and student grading could be misleading in respect to validity and value of self-assessment. They established that faults were related to the students’ lack of understanding of some of the criteria, at a basic level. The results of the study also indicated that discussing grading criteria before an assignment enhanced the students’ understanding of the relationship between the different criteria (op.cit., p. 31).

### 5.3 Self-assessment of Language Learning

Foreign language students may have extra difficulties self-assessing their language level according to Blanche and Merino (1989, p. 314). In a review of self-assessment literature they found that many foreign language learners were not able to compare themselves to native speakers of the language. They go on to say that students in foreign languages may be at a disadvantage when it comes to self-assessment, because the process of language learning is so complex and so many other factors, for example student beliefs, may play a role. The largest part of research done has also been concerned with concurrent validity issues, that is, a check of the validity by means of correlational studies with relevant criteria (Oscarson, 1998, p. 141).

Much of the literature on self-assessment of language has been concerned with university or adult students learning EFL or French as a second language, and varying conclusions have been reached. Studies concerning elementary, high school and upper secondary school students, as well as immigrant populations are somewhat less frequent.

The issue most often focused on in the literature is the *accuracy* of self-assessments. Peirce, Swain, and Hart (1993) could only find weak correlations between self-assessments and test results of listening, reading,

speaking and writing skills in a Canadian study of French immersion classes. Comparable results were obtained in an investigation of immigrants' assessments of their skills in Dutch as a second language, carried out by Janssen-van Dieten (1989, 1992). Janssen-van Dieten draws the conclusion that these results in themselves "plead *for* the application of self-assessment rather than *against* it" (op.cit., 1989, p. 44) and concludes that training can have a positive effect (op.cit., 1992, p. 220).

In one of the earliest reviews of studies in the field, Oscarson (1980) reported that the relationship between adult language learners' self-assessment and other criteria, such as teacher ratings and written test scores tended to be quite strong: "Formal test results correlated no higher than self-assessment scores with the instructors' judgements (coefficients ranging from .40 to .60). Self-assessment scores and formal test results correlated around .50" (op. cit., p. 5). Likewise von Elek (1981, 1985) found strong agreement between student assessments of own ability levels and corresponding assessments by their teachers.

The validity of self-ratings was investigated by Bachman and Palmer (1989), using confirmatory factor analyses, and they found that "self-assessments can be reliable and valid measures of communicative language abilities" (p. 22). Overall, Blanche and Merino (1989) state that,

the emerging pattern is one of consistent overall agreement between self-assessments and ratings based on a variety of external criteria. The accuracy of most students' self-estimates often varies depending on the linguistic skills and materials involved in the evaluations, but these estimates are generally *good* or *very good* (Blanche & Marino, 1989, p. 315).

In the literature reviewed by Blanche and Merino (1989) quantitative comparisons in the form of correlation coefficients were also included. Values ranging from  $r=.50$  –  $r=.60$  were found (op.cit., p. 315). In a meta-analysis of self-assessment studies in second and foreign language testing by Ross (1998) the by far most common metric used was the product-moment correlation. In other words, the most common approach involved self-assessment scales correlated with outcome measures according to specific skill areas, such as reading, writing, speaking or listening. Ross concluded that "the range of the self-assessment correlations suggests that there is considerable variation in the ability learners show in accurately estimating their own second language skills" (op.cit., p. 5). The range of correlations was from the lower hinge of  $r=.39$  to the higher hinge of  $r=.65$ , and from a minimum of  $r=.09$  to a maximum of  $r=.80$  (op. cit. pp. 4-5). Ross' results concur with Blanche and

Merino in that “self-assessment typically provides robust concurrent validity with criterion variables” (Ross, 1989, p. 16) and that “the degree of experience learners bring to the self-assessment context influences the accuracy of the product” (ibid.). Blanche and Merino (1989) point out that self-assessed scores can be affected by subjective errors in the form of past grades, lack of practice, varying degrees of self-esteem and self-confidence, cultural and gender factors. Some of the studies in the Blanche and Merino review did not, for example, take into consideration the nature of the language curriculum, and many did not use validated questionnaires or examinations as a basis for the comparison.

When LeBlanc and Painchaud (1985) looked at self-assessment as a placement instrument they found that students showed a moderate faculty to self-assess their language ability (a correlation of  $r=.53$  between a standardized proficiency test and the self-assessment, but also high correlations in the order of  $r=.80$ ).

The type of descriptions of situations where learners can decide what they “can do” in behavioural terms seem to have yielded the best self-assessments according to Blanche and Merino (1989). Higher correlations were obtained when these were used, compared to global self-appraisals of skills, such as reading or writing in general. General assessments may in fact be done in relation to specific skills and may therefore be misleading (Blanche & Merino, 1989, p. 325). The meta-study by Ross (1998) also found evidence that

learners will be more accurate in the self-assessment process if the criterion variable is one that exemplifies achievement of functional (‘can do’) skills on the self-assessment battery. When the battery contains items of a more abstract nature, which may assess language proficiency, learners can be expected to have had less direct experience in practising those language skills, and the resulting self-assessment may be less accurate [...] using particular skills in the classroom experience would enhance the accuracy of self-assessment (Ross, 1998, p. 16).

On the other hand, Bachman and Palmer (1989, p. 23) propose that “foreign/second language users may be more aware of areas in which they have difficulty than they are of the areas they find easiest”, which they interpret as a ‘cannot do’ appraisal.

Examining the validity of Korean elementary students’ self-assessments of their skills in oral EFL performance, Butler and Lee (2006) found that students assessed more accurately in specific (on-task) contexts as

compared to more general (off-task) contexts, and that they were less influenced by attitude and other factors on these tasks than they were on the holistic (off-task) assessments (p. 506).

The attitudes to self-assessment as an alternative measurement approach in EFL in Israel was investigated by Smith (1997), who focused on the attitudes of learners to self-assessment compared to teacher and examination grades. Smith established that “Pupils in 12<sup>th</sup> grade perceived self-assessment as having greater validity than teacher assessment” (p. 2). Students trusted their own assessments best, claiming they knew more about their language competence even when accepting summative examination results. The students also addressed the risk of overrating their language competence in high-stakes situations. Her conclusion was also that self-assessment was just as valid as some traditional assessment approaches, and recommended it as a complementary assessment method. Andrade and Du (2007) also looked at students’ attitudes toward self-assessment, and found that students reported positive attitudes toward self-assessment after extended practice. They also pointed to the need for clear criteria, the continued use in revision to improve work quality and thus grades, and commented on increased motivation and learning.

The research on self-assessment has not only focused on correlations between self-assessments of language proficiency and teacher given results. Factors affecting the self-assessment process have also been discussed in the literature and some research conducted. The question most often examined in respect to language self-assessment, as with self-assessment in general, seems to be if learners over- or underrate themselves in regard to other forms of assessment, for example teacher grading.

One such finding seems to be that more proficient language students tended to underrate themselves while the less proficient students tended to overestimate their performance (Blanche & Merino, 1989, pp. 324-325; Heilenman, 1990; Janssen-van Dieten, 1989; Oscarson, 1984). This seems to be in accordance with Taras’ (2001) findings in a study with college students, that is that there were “few notable differences between tutor and students’ self-assessed marks, with students generally underestimating or undervaluing their performance” (p. 611). The reason for this kind of underestimation was suggested by Heilenman (1990) to be that “The more experience that learners have in a domain, [...] the more likely they are to be aware of the limits of their skills and knowledge” (p. 51). This is supported by the results reported by Oscarson (2006) within the Swedish National Evaluation where

correlations between final grades and self-assessed grades were ‘moderate’ ( $r=.67$ ) and where the most accurate self-assessments made were by the students receiving a passing grade. Eighty-three percent of these students received the grade they had estimated.

Work in the field of social cognition suggests that affective factors may bias self-assessments in languages. In a study with English students studying French for example, MacIntyre, Noels and Clément (1997) found that the more anxious students not only tended to achieve weaker results, but that they also tended to underestimate their ability. The less anxious students had on the other hand, a tendency to overestimate their ability.

The results of several of the reviewed studies also established that self-assessment practices in the field of languages had increased student motivation (Blanche & Merino, 1989; von Elek 1981, 1985).

In a review on some of the issues, Oscarson (1998, pp. 137-138) points out that much of the research that has been done in the field previously has centred on self-regulated learning and learner autonomy in language education, for example Eriksson (1993) and Huttunen (1986), and not so much on student focused assessment. Therefore, there is a further need for elaboration of methods and materials in this area. The work done has mostly concerned the development of different types of scale levels and questionnaires consisting of behavioural “can-do” statements (cf. for example the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages<sup>9</sup>) (Oscarson, 1999). It is especially the conditions surrounding student involvement in assessment, the validity and the effects on motivation, which are still fairly un-researched. Oscarson (1997, p. 183 ff.) points to several areas of interest, such as students’ perceptions of subject, goals, criteria and assessment. Also the mapping of the relationship between background-, process- and result variables and possible practical procedures are areas for further research. Boud (1995) indicates that the methodology used in some of the previous studies are problematic, and points for example to the lack of specification of assessment scales used, and the use of different criteria by students and teachers.

The need for practice in autonomous learning and self-assessment has been emphasized by Oscarson (1980, p. 17; 1998, p. 137) as well as Oscarson, Gustafsson, Franke and Arvidsson (1999) in the Swedish National Evaluation

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<sup>9</sup> CEFR: [www.cefr.int](http://www.cefr.int)

of School Achievement 1998<sup>10</sup>, and Janssen-van Dieten (1989). Gottlieb, (2000) confirms that, “Multiple opportunities for self-assessment within instruction allow second language students to develop as independent learners while acquiring English” (p. 97). Taras (2001) concluded that self-assessment should be introduced in the first year when students are more receptive, and self-assessment practices may have greater cumulative value. She saw early introduction of self-assessment as a long-term investment, if used regularly and systematically. In their study across school subjects McDonald and Boud (2003) found that “self-assessment training had a significant impact” and students with training in self-assessment outperformed students without similar training. Black (1998, p. 129) and Black et al. (2003, p. 52; 2004, p. 14) reinforce this by pointing out that because it takes time and practice, teachers need to help their students, especially the low achievers, to develop self-assessment skills.

To summarize, the language focused studies reviewed report self-assessment practices as favourable in one way or another. The “accuracy” of self-assessments appears to depend on context and purpose, and the need for training seems recurrent, while little research appears to have been done on this aspect. Comprehension skills seem to be self-assessed more accurately and higher than productive skills. It looks as if it is easier for a student to self-assess specific tasks than global understandings. The more experience the student has had of what is to be assessed, the more likely the accuracy of the self-assessment ratings. The present study will explore some of these issues further in relation to EFL writing.

## 5.4 Self-assessment of Writing

On the whole, there are few studies on the impact of self-assessment on EFL writing skills. Criterion-referenced tests and performance objectives, typical of writing assessment tasks, facilitate an adaptation to the learners’ own language learning goals, and the possibility of helping the learner “form a clear conception of how he is progressing” (Oscarson, 1980, p. 19). Ross (1998) found in his meta-analysis of different self-assessment skills that writing revealed a “relatively lower average correlation between self-assessment and the criterion” (p. 9) than the other language skills. Ross speculated that as the methods of assessing writing may not result in interval

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<sup>10</sup> Utvärdering av skolan 1998 avseende läroplanernas mål (US 98)

scaling it may be supposed that the correlation between self-assessment and writing “would be higher than the overall average correlation observed in this meta-analysis” (op.cit). The lower hinge he found concerning writing was  $r=.42$  and the higher hinge  $r=.64$  (with a minimum of  $r=.16$  and a maximum of  $r=.68$ ).

In her intervention study, which focused on training self-assessment of writing with a group of adult immigrants learning Dutch, Janssen-van Dieten (1992) concluded that “training can have a positive effect on the quality of self-assessment, provided it is conducted in the way intended” (p. 220). She hypothesized, although convincing results were not obtained, that the teachers’ belief in learner autonomy, consistency, and adequate materials might be conditional for the successful implementation of the approach.

Feedback is argued by both Sadler (1989) and Taras (2001; 2002; 2003) to be important in the self-assessment process. Taras also endorses the use of summative assessment when writing, to let students in on the underlying processes, and to practise them. Taras maintains that this is the way to bridge the students’ path to independent learning as grades are linked to criteria (Taras, 2002, p. 506). She concludes: “For assessment to be formative, assessment and feedback should initially be separate from grading. Students need to be allowed to develop their own judgements before being presented with grades from other assessors” (op.cit., p. 508). Several researchers (Black, 1998, pp. 28, 34, 104-128; Black et al., 2003, p.55; 2004, p. 16; Rea-Dickins, 2006, p. 183) also point out that summative tests can and should be used as a positive part of the learning process, and that formative and summative assessments are not as different as sometimes proposed. The problem may be that students in general are not aware of the purposes embedded in the different assessment procedures (Rea-Dickins, 2006, p. 182).

There are three features which allow students increased access to assessment procedures to help them carry out self-assessment from an informed position according to Taras (2001). These are first of all to use summative graded work for self-assessment, secondly to receive tutor feedback to understand and identify errors prior to self-assessment, and thirdly that students do not receive grades until after they have worked with formative self-assessment practices for learning purposes (op.cit., p. 605). In one study Taras (2001) let students prepare written translation texts that were corrected and returned, but with grades withheld. The students were then to work through tutor feedback, for example in class or groups, and then self-assess. They were asked to judge their work against set criteria, to explain

how it could be improved and to grade themselves. After this the students received tutors' comments relating to how well the criteria were in fact assessed, as well as the final grade. Self-assessment is here dependent on tutor feedback, and the students work with this feedback while the summative grade is withheld. The only critical student reactions reported in Taras' (2001) study were concerned with the self-assessing of grades. Some students felt they had neither the experience nor knowledge necessary, and some felt that this was the teacher's job. Positive reactions reported by the students were that feedback and self-assessment helped them to focus on criteria.

In a subsequent investigation Taras (2003) found that "minimal integrated tutor feedback" allowed the students a high level of independence to consider their errors, understand assessment procedures including criteria and feedback, as well as realize what their strengths and weaknesses were before being given a grade. Taras concluded that "SA without tutor feedback cannot help students to be aware of all their errors" (op.cit., p. 561) and that "student self-assessment with integrated tutor feedback is one efficient means of helping students overcome unrealistic expectations and focus on their achievement rather than on the input required to produce their work" (op.cit., p. 562).

There does not seem to be much literature on self-assessment that deals with how a written EFL task performance can be effectively and reliably self-assessed. A. Brown (2005) affirms that "there is little written on global self-assessment of task-based performance" (op.cit., p.185). In a small study of students on an independent learning program, she used annotated learner-produced texts to reflect communicatively oriented criteria (e.g. content and sociolinguistic appropriateness, text structure, organization and coherence) for students who assessed their own performance by comparing the annotated texts with their own. She found the method "both reliable and useful" (op.cit., p. 174) for student self-assessment of writing, as well as for learning specific language skills. The students gained perspective on their own specific tasks in relation to the work of others, perceived the learning of different skills taking place, could identify and correct their own mistakes, and felt that the annotated texts made them more aware of certain areas which actually helped them to see problems in their own writing. Some students were frustrated because they were aware that they could not self-correct, but the researcher A. Brown believed that the students had developed a growing awareness of how to assess written work and what to think about. A. Brown (2005) reported that

self-assessment became a learning tool, not just an assessment tool for these students.

In contrast Andrade and Boulay (2003) examined the impact of self-assessment on high school students' written essays during a two-month period. Criteria specifications were given to the students, but no feedback, and there were no resulting effects reported on the students writing during this time period.

The present thesis is largely in line with the same set of assumptions and procedural model as Taras' study (2001, 2003) and takes into account the same considerations as A. Brown (2005).

The nature and the role of writing in EFL has not always been evident or focused. The following short summary takes a closer look at the importance of language writing skills and the rationale behind the approach to EFL writing used in the present study.

#### 5.4.1 The Nature and Role of EFL Writing

The skill of writing, once considered primarily as the domain of the well educated, is today essential for everyone (Cushing Weigle, 2002, p. 1). Improving the learner's ability to articulate thoughts, ideas and responses in writing is also about access to further education and employment, as well as empowerment. Freire's (1970) notion of 'reading the world and reading the word' is an acknowledgement of the relationship between literacy and power, and writing is a key tool of that relationship according to Myhill (2005). Compared with the other productive skill of speaking, one has to be taught writing in one's native language, as it differs from spoken language in both form and use. It is also, with the exception of trivial everyday writing tasks, associated with professional and academic success (Cushing Weigle, 2002, p. 4). This naturally applies foremost to the learner's first language, but also more and more to EFL.

In EFL, writing has become more important and "teaching language as a system of communication rather than as an object of study" (Cushing Weigle, 2002, p. 1) has become more recognized. In light of this the former view of the purpose of writing as mere reinforcement of pattern drill has been abandoned. The process of learning to write in another language also implies that the learner needs to know something about the structure and vocabulary of the language (op.cit., p. 7).

## 5.4.2 The Writing Process

The writing process approach to writing has changed the way the skill is taught by educational institutions in both first, second and foreign languages. Influencing not only North American schools but also European education, the Bay Area Writing Project (BAWP) began in 1974 at the Graduate School of Education, University of California, Berkeley. James Gray and his colleagues established a university-based program for K–16<sup>11</sup> teachers in partnership with Bay Area school districts interested in improving the teaching of writing and the use of writing as a learning tool across the curriculum. This led to the development of the National Writing Project (NWP) in the USA, a professional network serving teachers of writing at all levels and in all subjects.

The objective behind the NWP was to improve student achievement and learning by strengthening and improving the teaching of writing. It is an approach, not a set method to teaching writing. A core principle for the NWP is that writing is fundamental to learning in all disciplines, and that writing is a process that needs both response and revision. Writing should be taught, not just assigned, at every grade level. Knowledge about the teaching of writing comes from many sources: theory and research, the analysis of practice, and the experience of writing (Bay Area and The National Writing Project, n.d., Leiberan, 2007).

In short, the writing process approach involves the following steps:

- pre-writing which includes generating and gathering ideas and facts through for example talking and reading
- multiple rough drafts
- sharing drafts through reading own or peer work
- feedback and revision to improve content and organization on the drafts
- editing for formal language errors (i.e. spelling and grammar) at the final stage
- last version to be published, posted and/or graded.

Until the editing phase, formal language is not discussed. Feedback is often in the form of discussions and questions from peers on content, and from teachers the emphasis is often on finding and celebrating positive aspects of

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<sup>11</sup> Kindergarten to age 16 (i.e. normally the end of compulsory schooling)

the text. There will also be further questions on vague expressions, as well as suggestions for improvement. According to Keh, (1990) it is “through feedback, the writer learns where he or she has misled or confused the reader by not supplying enough information, illogical organization, lack of development of ideas, or something like inappropriate word-choice or tense” (p. 295). All forms of feedback may be given either in conferencing or through written comments. During the reflection that revision entails, the student has to rethink ideas and improve his or her writing through other additions or deletions (Hedge, 2000, p. 306). This reflection may, in certain contexts, also promote metacognitive awareness in, for example, planning and self-assessment practices when deciding whether the objective is met.

The process approach may be contrasted to the traditional method of teachers assigning a set writing topic, with students writing and handing in without revision during a regulated time period. Conventionally, teachers also use direct correction and grade the text before returning it. The traditional way of working, according to Hedge (2000, p. 313), also tends to give the students the impression that it is the teacher who is responsible for improving the written text.

Traditional writing tests and assessment of writing consequently do not take full account of the learner’s prior knowledge of content or genre. The writing process approach advocates allowing the writer to develop his or her writing by writing, and to develop the use of the learner’s own voice. As a non-interventionist approach, it has been claimed to favour middle-class students who already understand and grasp the code, and may also perpetuate disadvantage through its avoidance of direct instruction. In response to this critique, a focus on genres in writing has developed through, for example, extensive reading in relation to writing. School genres such as composition and essay writing otherwise have a tendency to emphasize asymmetric power relationship between teacher and writer, according to Myhill (2005).

The degree to which the process writing approach is used in Swedish schools is not well known, as the question does not seem to have been looked into in a systematic way. There are some indications that point towards less use than could be expected, as for example a small interview study by Wikman (2005) which found that teachers expressed many difficulties with working according to the writing process in the subject of Swedish. Linnarud and Thoursie (2008) also found that the process-oriented approach to writing was not practised by the Swedish teachers in their study on writing performance in English and German.

### 5.4.3 Considerations in FL Writing and Assessment

As the role of writing in language learning increases, classroom assessment practices of writing also become increasingly important. Both summative and formative writing assessment may be given through different forms of feedback, and/or direct or indirect error correction. Language research is not unanimous on the effects of different modes of feedback, yet the form of feedback received may have consequences for the students' own assessments of their performance.

Writing outcomes are, as Sadler (1989, pp. 123-125) states, complex in the sense that qualitative judgments are involved, as student development is “multidimensional rather than sequential, and prerequisite learning cannot be conceptualized as neatly packaged units of skills or knowledge” (p. 123). In for example essay writing, students have to synthesize and integrate ideas, concepts and skills to produce the end result. Coherent and appropriate writing is something that many students never learn in their first language, and learning to do so in a second/foreign language is often even more difficult (Nunan, 1991/1998, p. 99). In the writer's process of expressing him- or herself in writing, the effort involved in deciding what to say and how to say it, can be assumed to be more difficult for the L2 writer. To organize ideas into a comprehensive text, L2 writers “seem to devote much attention while they write to decisions about the form of the second language or to finding resources such as appropriate words” as Cumming (2001, p. 5) says.

Second language writers may also, according to Cushing-Weigle (2002, p. 36) devote so much of their cognitive resources to language issues that the content and organization of their writing will be lacking either due to limited linguistic knowledge or to the effort involved. Social and cultural factors that students may not be aware of can also put them at a disadvantage. More recent research by Roca de Larios, Manchón and Murphy (2006) points out that the literature is contradictory regarding the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. They claim that the notion that “L2 constrains the formulation of ideas may be regarded as a sweeping generalization” (op.cit., p. 102). Still, Roca de Larios et al. did find in their study that it took L2 students twice as much time to deal with problems of formulation in their L2 writing compared to L1 and that language proficiency did not make any difference in respect of the time spent (op.cit., p. 110).

Recent educational and linguistic researchers have come more or less to the consensus that neither oral nor written language is superior to the other,

something that was a moot point traditionally between linguists and educators (Cushing Weigle, 2002, p. 15). Oral and written language vary in for example: textual features, socio-cultural norms and patterns of use, the cognitive process involved in production, as well as comprehension being used in different settings, for different purposes and goals. Coherence of a text, for example, can be seen as the writer's accuracy in understanding what the reader will be able to infer from the text. According to Cushing Weigle (op.cit., pp. 21-22) this has a definite cultural component, and as long as there is a match between the expectations of the reader and the writer, the reader is able to interpret the text.

As in other matters, a writer's beliefs and attitudes may also influence a writer. If writing ability is seen by the student as possible to attain through hard work and effort, those who experience failure will not give up, something that on the other hand is not uncommon if learners believe success is due to an inherent ability (Dweck, 1986, p. 1042; Palmquist & Young, 1992, p. 137). Writing in a second or foreign language is dependent on two aspects as is pointed out by Cumming (1998); first the writer's proficiency of expression and interpretation, and secondly that although similar to writing in one's own language, L2 possesses unique characteristics which vary both socio- and psycho-linguistically (p. 61). This is also so in the educational contexts in which foreign language writing functions, that is with respect to conventions, demands and discursive practices (op.cit., p. 62). All these features play a role in the assessment of the writing produced. As Cumming states in a review of the research on assessment practices of writing, standards differ in different socio-cultural groups and countries (op.cit., p. 67).

The exact knowledge one needs when writing, necessitates a precision or accuracy in understanding, and is therefore a good way to learn a language, according to Linnarud (1986). She believes that "writing is an important integrative and creative task which should have a prominent place in language teaching and testing" (op.cit., p. 120). One problem with writing in a foreign language is that the learner does not control or master the different register and genres of more formal language, and cannot produce a text that would have been produced by a native speaker of the same age. In Linnarud's study of Swedish students she found that they wrote shorter compositions, repeated themselves more often, had a more restricted vocabulary and were less original in approaching the subject than native speakers the same age. She concluded that it is not fair to concentrate entirely on correctness in writing in a foreign language, as content and method need to be focused on as well. The

process-oriented writing method (cf. 5.4.2) gives the right order of response, with comments on language only after the content has been revised.

Today direct assessment of writing is the norm (Kroll, 1998). An important aspect of a writing test's validity is that it should elicit complete writing. A reliability problem, on the other hand, can be the increased focus on inter-rater reliability, that is the extent to which two or more raters give a piece of writing the same score (op.cit., p. 221.) Interaction variables also influence writing, and writers are agents in their own right and interpret tasks differently. Different rhetorical and discursive patterns may influence scores as do genre and discipline (op.cit., pp. 225-226). Rating scales that can be holistic or analytic, small or large, or different types of portfolio assessment, all have effects on writing assessments and performance.

Self-assessment of writing is advocated by Schendel and O'Neill (1999) as it encourages self-awareness of one's own writing, gives student control and "a certain amount of rhetorical agency" (p. 205). Self-assessment is most often carried out either as a diagnosis or in the form of a personal achievement test. Students need to diagnose their strengths and weaknesses to see what more they need to learn and also to infer how well and/or to what level they have reached their goals for an assignment or a course.

One of the most important functions of self-assessment techniques as seen by Black and Wiliam (1998) and Oscarson (1980) is that of giving individual learners continuous feedback on what they have learnt. The role of feedback and error correction in EFL writing and assessment is therefore briefly dealt with below.

#### 5.4.4 Feedback and Correction Effectiveness

Immediate feedback is an approach to formative assessment that several researchers (Butler, 1987; Gipps, 1994; Stefani, 1998; Taras, 2001, 2003) advocate to develop self-regulated behaviour. "Feedback is information that provides the performer with direct usable insights into his/her current performance, based on tangible differences between current performance and the learner's hoped for performance" according to Stefani (1998, p. 348). And, Orsmond et al., write, "Tutor feedback and student learning *should* be inseparable. If they become decoupled, the formative aspect of assessment is lost" (p. 24). Students usually know the importance a teacher gives to a task, by how much time is assigned and how much emphasis is put on it, as Taras

(2001, p. 609) claims. If students are to self-assess from an informed position, they need to “take feedback onboard” (op.cit.).

Through feedback, the student has the opportunity to understand what positive qualities his or her work has, or what needs to be worked on more. In this way the student is helped to develop towards autonomy. When feedback is given before the assignment is graded, the student’s reflective ability is believed to develop further. It is a way for the student to learn how to assess his or her work realistically, while at the same time being given a sense of control of the learning situation. In the end, the student should be able to become both responsible and self-sufficient in learning and not dependent on the teacher’s guidance (Taras, 2001, p. 609). Too many teachers believe that a grade, a comment, or a word of praise or blame are enough, when in actual fact students want information specifically linked to their performance and guidance on what they should do to improve (Stefani, 1998, p. 348). According to Gipps, the most effective feedback will

focus the pupils’ attention on their progress in mastering the required task. This emphasis tends to enhance self-efficacy, encourages effort attribution, and reduces the focus on comparison with peers; it should take place while it is still relevant, i.e. soon after the task is completed; it should be specific and related to need, i.e. simple information about results should be provided consistently, with more detailed feedback only where this is necessary, to help the student work through misconceptions or other weaknesses in performance. Praise should be used sparingly, and should be task-specific. Above all, criticism is usually counter-productive (Gipps, 1994, p. 39).

The fairest step, Taras (2002) suggests, would be to let students revise and resubmit work for assessment after self-assessment and feedback, as this would let the students internalize the feedback given. As formative feedback implies a dialogue between the teacher and student, Taras does not consider formative feedback as complete until the students can produce a new piece of work where the “issues have been addressed and remedied” (Taras 2002, p. 506). Taras (2005, p. 466) goes so far as to say that all assessment begins with summative assessment in the sense that summative assessment is a judgement, and that formative assessment is really summative assessment plus feedback used by the learner. She further advocates that the students’ grades be withheld until feedback has been “understood and absorbed” by them (Taras, 2001, p. 609) because “experience has shown that the grade interferes with students’ judgements and prevents them from focusing on their work” (p. 609). Grades given to the student together with, or as the only feedback, may in fact be detrimental to formative assessment and its purposes

and, according to studies discussed by Black and Wiliam (1998), lead to lesser learning than comments without grades.

To focus on the task or assignment in feedback, not on the student, was found important by Butler (1987). As Boud (2000) expressed it, to “focus on the *task*, not on the *self*” (p. 157). The effect of feedback in the form of comments was extinguished, when the student task was also graded. Students who received feedback in the form of individual comments developed an ability to see their success related to their work, not their own person. The effect of giving grades together with positive feedback, on the other hand, had the opposite effect, that is, to reinforce the fact that ego-involving factors were central, without helping performance to improve. Brophy (1981) found that teacher praise cannot automatically be equated to reinforcement. Praise needs to be experienced as trustworthy, specific and genuine as well as within the receiving person’s own control so that it cannot be attributed to factors such as intelligence. If used for learning purposes, praise needs to be given after the student has worked with a task. Brophy (op.cit.) came to the conclusion that praise may help motivation if given rarely. But, praise may also cause student dependence on teacher’s judgement (Brophy, 1981; Sadler, 1989, p. 142).

In accordance with this, Butler (1987, p. 481) found that student results did not improve when feedback was focused on the student, in the form of grades and/or praise. Instead, she found that achievement improved when specific task progress was focused. Grades may in fact shift attention away from the criteria and be counter-productive for formative purposes according to Sadler (1989, p. 121) and Gipps (1994, p. 125). Similar experiences were reported by Taras (2001; 2002) when grades were given back together with a task or assignment. Taras (2002) consequently argues that students should receive their grade only after they have completed their formative learning (p. 606).

Feedback cannot, in other words, automatically be seen as formative assessment. Feedback is only formative if it actually helps the student improve (Black et al., 2004, p. 16; Rea-Dickins, 2006; Taras, 2002, p. 506; Wiliam and Black, 1996, pp. 543-544). Intention does not replace real effect. Negative feedback, especially to low achieving students only leads them to believe that they lack ability and reinforces the feeling that they are not able to learn (Black et al., 2004, p. 9). To enhance learning, teacher feedback should concentrate on what the students need to do to improve, and how this is best achieved, not on how well they have achieved, especially if compared

to peers. Students need to understand that they can improve through effort (Butler, 1987, p. 481), that “mistakes are an inevitable part of learning, and that they have control over their own learning” (Black, 1999, p. 125). To know if feedback has been useful and effective, students must be able to produce improved work, through for example revision (Boud, 2000, p. 158). The introduction of self-assessment methods can potentially strengthen the link between feedback and learning (Orsmond et al., 2000, p. 24).

Sadler (1989) argues that the transition from feedback to self-monitoring needs three conditions to be satisfied. The first is that the student realizes what quality is looked for, that is that the student understands the criteria set through, for example, descriptive statements and/or exemplars. The second is that originality and creativity develops through the understanding of the transcendence of normal boundaries, that is that the student needs to be familiar with the discipline or genre to go beyond it. Thirdly, students themselves are able to choose appropriate strategies to bring their performances closer to the goal, that is to self-assess their work.

Two factors that inhibit formative assessment, and thus self-regulating and autonomous learning are, according to Sadler (1989, p. 141), the use of a norm-referenced grading system and continuous assessment. The norm-referenced grading system can give the students the wrong message, since it is more concerned with grades than with learning. Also Taras (2002) points out that grades “have serious repercussions on learning” (p. 508). This is the case even for smaller classroom assignments, as Black et al. (2004, p. 12) report from research experiments they carried out. Sadler (1989) rebuts the arguments that continuous summative assessment reduces anxiety levels experienced by students, and that summative assessment permits a wider sampling of student skills as well as providing feedback. Sadler takes the position that if summative assessment is continuous and cumulative, it rather tends to reinforce “extrinsic” learning and makes the student unwilling to invest further work in a specific task. Sadler (1989, p. 143) advocates helping students to develop self-assessment skills of their own work, during the process of production. He further argues that “providing direct and authentic evaluative experience is a necessary (instrumental) condition for the development of evaluative expertise and therefore for intelligent self-monitoring. It is insufficient for students to rely upon evaluative judgments made by the teacher” (Sadler, 1989, p. 143) but they may need to be given help in interpreting the feedback given (Sadler, 1998, p. 78). According to Sadler, it is the quality of feedback that is important (op.cit., p. 88).

One of the difficulties with measuring the results of feedback is of course that the results may be delayed or influenced by other factors, such as the long-term conditioning of the students to incoherent or inconsistent patterns of assessment (Sadler, 1998, p. 2).

There exists a general misconception that communicative language teaching does not aim for a high standard of formal correctness. However, risk taking and the making of errors, by some associated with such teaching (on questionable grounds), are not incompatible with correctness as the ultimate goal. Together with the view that language learning is a process comes the view that errors are inevitable and part of the positive developmental process. Conflicting views on the role of error correction, either that it makes no difference, based on Krashen's view of language acquisition, or that the lack of correction fosters fossilization of faulty language and that mature learners can process error correction, are not fully resolved (Hedge, 2000, p. 15).

A brief résumé of the different standpoints on error correction in the field of language education follows in the section below (for a definition of mistakes and errors, cf. Abbreviations and Glossary of Terms Used, Appendix 1).

### Language Error Correction

The use of feedback for learning entails the conviction that the feedback leads to an understanding of the errors made on the part of the students, as Sadler (1989, 1998) implies. Grammar correction, for example, is common in most second and foreign language classrooms (Ferris, 1999, p. 1; Truscott, 1996, p. 327; 1999, p.111). Teachers and students often take the value for granted, assuming the practice is effective as an avenue to grammatical accuracy (Ferris, 1999, p. 2; Truscott, 1996. pp. 328-329, 1999, p. 111).

In an extensive and controversial review of the research on the effect of first as well as second and foreign language grammar correction, Truscott (1996) found that it was quite the opposite, that is, correction was clearly ineffective. Ineffectiveness included indications that correcting all errors was no better than correcting only those that produced communicative problems and that in some cases correction was not only unhelpful, but also hindered the learning process (op.cit., p. 333). Where significant differences were found, these always favoured the uncorrected students (op. cit., p 335). Truscott admits that extensive, even if somewhat debatable research on the

order in which learners acquire for example, grammatical structures, raises the possibility that research on grammar correction has encountered problems or failed, because the instruction the students received did not follow these sequences (op. cit., p. 337). He hence concludes that none of the studies that supported the practice of grammar correction actually did so (Truscott, 1996, p. 341). In this Truscott is supported by Sachs and Polio, (2007, p. 69) who refer specifically to the context of L2 writing. Truscott explains the reason for why grammar correction does not work due to both theoretical and practical problems (Truscott, 1996, pp. 342-49; 349-354). He gives for example the reason that the acquisition of language structures is a gradual process (op.cit., p. 342) and that learners are distracted by comprehensive correction (rather than selective) at stages for which they are not prepared (op.cit., p. 345), do not understand the corrections they receive or are not motivated enough to pay attention to them (op.cit., p. 351). He goes even further and says, as indicated above, that due to its stressful and de-motivating features, grammar correction can be harmful to learning (op.cit., 354). In spite of this, both teachers and learners often believe that corrections are useful (op.cit., 359).

A strong rebuttal of Truscott's arguments is made by Ferris (1999), pointing out that Truscott defines grammar correction in vague terms and cites much research evidence that selective, prioritized and clear error correction can, and does help some student writers (Ferris, 1999, p. 4). She argues that Truscott overstates evidence to support his own claims, regardless of contradicting research, that the research studies are not comparable and that the research paradigms and strategies varied widely (op.cit., p. 4). Ferris and Truscott are in agreement that there is no single form of correction that can be effective for all areas of language (op.cit., p. 5). Truscott (1999, p. 117) argues that students may be discouraged from using more complex language and resort to simpler expressions as a form of avoiding correction, thus hampering challenging writing. Ferris (1999, p. 4) suggests that students can be taught to self-edit if focused and trained. In accordance with other pieces of research, Ferris preferred indirect identification of errors<sup>12</sup> compared to direct teacher correction of student errors<sup>13</sup>. She also addressed the issue of motivation by stressing the importance of raising awareness on the importance of accuracy and the need to develop independent self-editing skills (op.cit., p. 7).

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<sup>12</sup> Indirect correction: the teacher indicates that an error has been made, but does not provide the correct answer.

<sup>13</sup> Direct correction: the teacher identifies an error and provides the correct form.

Producing written language and negotiating the linguistic forms needed to fulfil a required communication, helps the learner to understand the limits of their current level and thus raises metalinguistic consciousness to recognize what needs to be learned further (Swain, 1995). The communicative language classroom needs meaningful language activities integrated with language focused instruction to help learners move forward also in accuracy.

Significant effects for the type of feedback, which combined written feedback with short individual conferences were found by Bitchner, Young and Cameron, (2005, p. 191). They also saw improved accuracy of certain error categories in new pieces of writing by many migrant students, but as in the process of acquiring new linguistic forms learners may perform with varied accuracy, this was not so for all. In a review of the research Bitchner et al. (2005) also stated “that different linguistic categories should not be treated as if they were equivalent because they represent separate domains of knowledge that are acquired through different stages and processes” (p. 194) and referred to Ferris’s (1999) distinction between “treatable” (rule governed) and “untreatable” (idiosyncratic) errors. Bergström (1987) established that grammatical correctness was correlated with communicative ability in both speech and writing, and Köhlmyr (2003) states that as grammar errors can lead to communicative failure, grammar correction may “pave the way for and thus promote language awareness” (p. 344). The learner needs to become aware of mistakes through feedback to be able to “readjust and refine their knowledge of L2” (op.cit., p. 356). She found in her study of Swedish 16-year-olds that they made a large number of errors, which impaired communication or made them appear less competent than necessary. Further she concluded that for example process writing was “well worth exploring in order to raise learners’ awareness of language form *and* function” (op.cit., p. 347).

The mental processes of generating and assessing written text might help learners monitor and improve their linguistic expression according to Sachs and Polio (2007). They go on to raise the point that even research which speaks *for* written feedback, may question the form (op.cit., p. 69). Sachs and Polio did not find any difference in terms of long-term effectiveness with various different types of feedback conditions. One of their conclusions is that awareness of errors made may actually be due to the fact that the learner is developmentally ready rather than explained by the quality of the method of feedback and /or error correction (op.cit., 90).

The belief that positive reinforcement promotes desirable behaviour, and the effects that teacher beliefs and expectancy effects may have on students behaviour, are two possible explanations (Dweck, 1986, p. 1045) for the common practice of “praise in the writing process model” (op.cit.). Students who are encouraged by feedback in the form of praise and grades (i.e. ability focused comments) which encourage performance goals will, according to Dweck (1986, p. 1043), avoid challenges and in effect avoid learning in comparison to those students who are encouraged to have learning goals, and receive feedback in the form of formative assessment. If a student believes that a writing task is a threat to his or her self-esteem, the ultimate goal is to preserve self-esteem, at any cost, which may include for example avoidance of the task altogether, or resorting to plagiarism. If one believes that ability is unalterable, and effort will not help, it is often more rational and palatable to be regarded as lazy by the teacher than it is to be regarded as stupid. One can say that belief in the *possibility* of success is more conducive to learning than anything else.

## 5.5 Summary

There is no consensus on many of the issues with respect to self-assessment in general, or self-assessment of languages or writing in particular. The research finds no conclusive evidence pointing in any one direction even if there are certain trends. The research field is as yet fairly unfocused, but with certain recurrent themes.

To summarize, formative assessment is also referred to as assessment *for* learning (i.e. to help learning). It is intended to improve learning by giving the student feedback on his or her progress, in distinction to summative assessment which primarily is undertaken in order to measure, or sum up, what has been learnt. The general difference between summative and formative assessment can thus be defined in terms of purpose and effect, but summative assessment may also be used for formative purposes. Self-assessment is considered to be able to play a key role in formative assessment. It is believed to have the potential to promote learning, raise learner awareness, underpin learner autonomy in a lifelong perspective, and to be conducive to democratic learning processes and needs analysis.

Much research supports the theory that under certain conditions students are capable of realistically assessing their own performance levels. In studies regarding self-assessment in general, research results have varied, but

there is evidence that it can be reliable and, under certain circumstances, even comparable to other assessment methods. The level of learning was also found to be a significant variable, with better agreement at advanced levels. Some research also pointed to the fact that student self-assessments were more accurate when criteria were explicit and well understood. In some studies it was found that self-assessment accuracy improved with practice, especially for the low achievers as it helped them understand expectations better. Students with elementary skills and students with low self-esteem tended to overestimate their abilities, placing emphasis on effort for example, rather than achievement. Students who were more proficient tended to underestimate their abilities. Other research found that the nature of the assessment task influenced accuracy.

Regarding student attitudes, some research has indicated that students practicing self-assessment became reflective and more aware of learning goals. Student self-assessment also seemed to have an impact on teachers.

Concerning self-assessment of language skills, most research has focused on adults and higher education. Studies concerning younger learners and adolescents are less frequent. The research has also come to varying conclusions, and as in the more general studies, weak, moderate and strong relationships have been found between teacher ratings (through grades, etc.) and student self-assessments of their language skills. Higher correlations were obtained using can-do statements and in on-task contexts compared to more global self-assessments of language skills, in off-task situations. In at least one study students felt they could judge their language competence better than their teachers. The level of achievement seemed to influence the accuracy of the assessments.

The question most often examined seemed to be if students tended to over- or underrate themselves, at least in comparison with, for example, teacher grading. Language research, as much other research on self-assessment in general, found that more proficient language students also tended to underrate themselves while the less proficient students tended to overestimate their performance.

Also, the question of what degree of competence in estimating their own general level of EFL the students possess, and if there are any differences in the students' competence when it comes to assessing their perceived general ability in EFL writing, is further investigated in the present study.

Several studies concluded that training could have a positive effect on the accuracy of self-assessments and that self-assessment should be introduced early as it takes time and practice to develop self-assessment skills. In some studies students reported positive attitudes toward self-assessment after extended practice, and commented on increased motivation and learning.

In language research on self-assessment the conditions surrounding student involvement in assessment, including students' perception of criteria and assessment, and the relationship between background-, process- and result variables and practical procedures, were found under-researched. There were few studies on EFL self-assessment of writing.

Language research is not unanimous on the issue of the effects of different modes of feedback in writing, yet the form of feedback received may have consequences for the students' own assessments of their performance. Many studies see feedback as an important aspect of the self-assessment process and there are studies where students report that it helped them focus on criteria.

It is widely believed that in order to enhance learning teacher feedback should concentrate on what the students need to do to improve. To let students revise and resubmit work for assessment in accordance with the writing process, after feedback and self-assessment, but with grading withheld, is seen as one way for the student to improve learning. Several researchers assert that grades may in fact be detrimental to formative assessment and lead to less effective learning.



## METHODOLOGY

The study investigates four classes of students learning EFL at the secondary level, two classes doing English Course A and two classes doing English Course B. It focuses on the students' own understanding of their EFL writing level in relation to set curriculum and syllabus goals. This is done to gain insight into how the use of self-assessment in the classroom can promote lifelong language learning skills, as well as to further the development of more comprehensive and, in this way, fairer assessment practices.

The methodology and the rationale behind certain choices made in the study are presented in this chapter. The first section (6.1) deals with the nature of the study. In the second section, the participants and the school environment are presented (6.2). The instruments used are described in section three (6.3). In section four (6.4) the procedure and methods of data collection are presented, with reference to both the pilot study, which took place in the spring term of 2002 and the main study, which took place in the school year 2002-2003. An overview of the sequence of events and the data is presented in section five (6.5). Ethical considerations are then discussed in section six (6.6) and validity and reliability concerns in section seven (6.7). Section eight (6.8) discusses the limitations of the methodology used, and the chapter ends with a short summary (6.9).

### 6.1 Type of Study

The present study cannot easily be defined using conventional terms. It has characteristics of several research approaches, due to the fact that the SALL project (cf. 1.1) used a grounded theory type of approach, where the students' self-assessments of productive language skills were investigated alongside the development of suitable self-assessment materials to be used in the classroom. In grounded theory the researcher moves back and forth between data,

emerging tendencies and possible explanations. The researcher is in this way in a position to consider general units of meaning and broad themes and issues that recur frequently in the material, and can base decisions for further study on them (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989/1995).

The use of self-assessment in the EFL writing study can be said to have used a multiple method approach, which is common in language education research (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). It has features typical of an explorative study, an intervention study as well as a descriptive case study, but does not conform strictly or exclusively to any one of them. A multiple method approach allows the researcher to consider the research questions from different angles, and the information gathered can be cross-referenced so as to lead to plausible assumptions in answer to the research questions (Wollcott, 1988). This is not an uncommon way of dealing with the complexity involved in the field of language education research, and according to Seliger and Shohamy (1989, p. 22) it may not even be possible to study language learning from any single perspective.

Thus, the study has characteristics of a small-scale exploratory case study, as no set hypothesis behind the research questions was set up to be tested, the group was not randomly chosen and there was no control group used. The possibility of comparing certain findings with the Swedish National Evaluation of School Achievement 1998 (*Utvärdering av Skolan: US 98*) (Skolverket, 1999) and a similar evaluation launched in 2003 (*Nationell Utvärdering: NU 03*) (Skolverket, 2004b) as well as the Swedish Research Council project: The Teacher's Extended Assessment Role (*Lärarens Utvidgade Bedömarroll: LUB*) (Oscarson, 2008) were on the other hand seen as assets in the final analyses of the outcomes. The results can thus be related to findings obtained in a larger student and teacher population. A typical feature of an intervention study, which the present study also bears resemblance to, is that the researcher has intervened through implementing a method of working with self-assessment of EFL writing, and the results of this method are part of the outcomes. Features of an instrumental case study can also be traced in the study, as this approach examines a particular case, namely a specific group of upper secondary EFL students, to gain insight into a certain issue or theory. One may not be able to generalize to a large population from this study, yet the approaches used are all likely to provide insights and deeper understanding of the assumptions and practices studied (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). These may not be possible to generate in any other way.

The present writing study can furthermore be described as practical rather than basic (i.e. theoretical) or applied (Selinger & Shohamy, 1989). The borderlines between these categories are not clear-cut either, but the research is empirically based and is of practical relevance for the classroom context.

## 6.2 Selection and Description of the School, Students, and Teachers

The school, students and teachers in the study were the same as in the SALL project. As the selection was not made for a large quantitative study but for a small study that involved various methodological features, there was no reason *per se* to make a random choice (Svenning, 1996, p. 103). Secondary schools in the region that were not profiled according to any special educational pedagogy that could influence the results, were approached. The selection was made so that the focus of research, self-assessment of EFL, was possible to investigate, yet could be expected to yield relatively unbiased results. In this sense it was a ‘critical case’ choice with strategic importance to the general problem (Flyvbjerg, 2006) where it was possible to find a range of experiences and conceptions of language assessment. As everyone’s knowledge and experiences are unique, even a smaller group of people within the same culture are likely to represent qualitatively different understandings of opinions and attitudes. The school and the classroom are of course authentic arenas for the study of students’ reflections on their own learning process and assessment.

### 6.2.1 The Educational Setting

The school selected was a small<sup>14</sup> vocationally and technically oriented upper secondary school in a large city in Sweden. The school is jointly owned by the community and a large manufacturing company. It started in 1998 and is run by a board of governors representing both of these partners.

The school has a good reputation (GR utbildning, 2007) and students apply for admission on their grade point average from compulsory school. The school can generally be said to attract an articulate and responsive group of students while they are not commonly considered to be particularly high achievers in general core subjects, or in English in particular. The school was

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<sup>14</sup> 380-400 students, with an average of 32 students per class

interesting to the study because of its technical and vocational profile and the fact that it represents a group seldom studied in language research contexts. According to Korp (2006) “the framing and classification of the core-subjects vary in such a way that different schools, programmes and classes offer students profoundly different conditions for reaching the curriculum-goals and meeting performance-standards” (p. 272). There is a risk that language teachers teaching vocational programmes do not give their students the same instruction in core subjects such as EFL, as students doing pre-university programmes. The level of instruction in core subjects is, as evidenced by Korp’s findings, “set in relation to presumed abilities and motivation of different groups of students and to the demands of other courses in the programme” (p. 272). The choice of school therefore gives an added insight into the ways in which self-assessment of language learning can work in a technical and vocational context, where foreign language learning has not had a strong position traditionally. This factor was prioritized above other considerations such as having an even gender distribution. It would of course have been interesting and added to the value of the study to have had access to a more proportionate number of male and female students, but the circumstances did not allow for this.

It should also be mentioned in this context that the school administration had an open attitude to educational research and was of great assistance in helping the researcher to gain free access to the school environment and school activities, as well as to information on the students’ previous records.

## 6.2.2 The Students

The students were between 17 and 20 years of age. During the two years of the SALL project, a total of 127 students participated. In all, 111 students started the 2003 school year, but only 102 students actually participated in the present EFL writing study. There was, in other words, an attrition of 9 students due to their having left the programme or course during the school year, something that is not uncommon as the students choose different vocational directions or strands of interest, which may require them to change classes from year 1 to year 2.

Of the total group of participating students ( $N=102$ ), 82 were male and 18 were female (82% and 18% respectively). Such an uneven balance is not uncommon for vocational technical and industrial upper secondary

programmes in Sweden (Skolverket, 2002/2003). The fact that males dominate the participating student group makes it particular in certain ways, as research on gender differences in language learning and on assessment show the tendency for male students to receive lower grades in EFL and EFL writing than female students. On a national level (based on SCB<sup>15</sup> data) the male population received fewer high grades, that is, Pass with Distinction<sup>16</sup> and Pass with Special Distinction in EFL 2000/2001 and 2001/2002 (Skolverket, 2000/2001; 2001/2002) when leaving compulsory school. The male population also received fewer high grades at the end of Course A and Course B 2002/2003 (Skolverket, 2004a) than the female students did, as shown in Table 6.1 and 6.2. At the compulsory school level, the grade Fail is not given. Instead the student is said not to have reached the educational goals *yet* and the student is instead given a written comment showing his or her development in the subject. This is here, for the sake of simplicity, referred to as Unsatisfactory (U).

*Table 6.1 Gender differences in national final grade statistics from compulsory school in EFL 2000/2001 (n=102 926) and 2001/2002 (n=105 315) in percent.*

	Final English Grade 2000/2001				Final English Grade 2001/2002			
	U	P	PwD	PwSD	U	P	PwD	PwSD
	Male students	7.4	47.0	34.0	11.5	7.0	46.4	33.9
Female students	4.6	35.5	40.2	19.6	4.8	35.6	40.0	19.6

Note: U=Unsatisfactory, P=Pass, PwD=Pass with Distinction, PwSD=Pass with Special Distinction

*Table 6.2 Gender differences in national final grade statistics in EFL 2002/2003 from Course A, (n=75 017) and Course B, 2002/2003 (n=55 975) in percent.*

	Final English Grade Course A				Final English Grade Course B			
	F	P	PwD	PwSD	F	P	PwD	PwSD
	Male students	2.8	38.3	41.5	17.4	4.5	36.7	40.5
Female students	1.7	29.6	45.7	23.0	3.8	32.6	42.2	21.4

Note: F=Fail, P=Pass, PwD=Pass with Distinction, PwSD=Pass with Special Distinction

<sup>15</sup> SCB [Statistiska Centralbyrån] Statistics Sweden

<sup>16</sup> For an overview of the Swedish grading system at the upper secondary school level, cf 3.2

At the compulsory school level, year 9, the National Test of English Part C (writing) showed the same tendency (Table 6.3), based on the responses of nationally representative samples (Erickson, 2001; 2003) (Table 6.3).

*Table 6.3 Gender differences in national test grade statistics in EFL 2000/2001 (n=10 058) and 2001/2002 (n=9 765), (no decimals reported) from compulsory school (year 9) in percent.*

	Grade National Test of English, (writing), 2000/2001				Grade National Test of English, (writing), 2001/2002			
	U	P	PwD	PwSD	U	P	PwD	PwSD
Male students	6	51	33	10	6	50	34	10
Female students	3	43	41	14	3	40	42	16

Note: U=Unsatisfactory, P=Pass, PwD=Pass with Distinction, PwSD=Pass with Special Distinction

The same tendency is also seen in the National Test of English (Table 6.4), Writing for Course A (Åhs, 2002/2003). At the Course B level the differences in writing seem to even out (Börjesson, 2002/2003).

*Table 6.4 Gender differences in national test grade statistics in EFL 2002/2003 Course A, (n=7 979) and Course B, (n=5 246), (no decimals reported) in percent.*

	Grade National Test of English, Writing Course A				Grade National Test of English, Writing Course B			
	F	P	PwD	PwSD	F	P	PwD	PwSD
Male students	13	44	29	14	12	42	33	13
Female students	7	41	37	16	10	41	37	13

Note: F=Fail, P=Pass, PwD=Pass with Distinction, PwSD=Pass with Special Distinction

The participating students attended ordinary EFL classes. Classes 1 and 2 (henceforth called Course B students) took part in the pilot study while doing English Course A (cf. Timeline, Figure 6.1) during the spring term of 2002. These were the same students who participated in the writing study the following school year while doing English Course B, and they were in this way introduced to self-assessment work two terms before the participating students in Classes 3 and 4. Classes 3 and 4 (henceforth called Course A students) took part in the study while doing English Course A. The main study included 57 Course A students, and 45 Course B students.

Like the majority of Swedish students, these learners had come into contact with English outside school, and had a good comprehension of current spoken English according to both their teachers, and the researcher's own classroom observations. The students had all received at least the grade Pass

in English from year 9 at the compulsory school level. The percentage of each course group who had not reached the educational goals and thus not received a grade (here referred to U), as well as students who had received a Pass, a Pass with Distinction and a Pass with Special Distinction respectively at compulsory school, are shown, in Table 6.5. Table 6.5 also shows a comparison between the two groups and the percentage of students who attained these grades on a national level (Skolverket, 2000/2001; 2001/2002).

*Table 6.5 Distribution of grades in English from compulsory school (year 9) in comparison with national population test results for Course B and Course A*

	U		P		PwD		PwSD	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Course B	0	0	9	20	26	57	10	22
National population test results 2000/2001 (N=102 923)	-	6.0	-	41.4	-	37.1	-	15.5
Course A	0	0	5	8,8	21	36,8	31	54,4
National population test results 2001/2002 (N=105 315)	-	6.0	-	41.1	-	36.9	-	16.0
Total Group	0	0	14	13,7	47	46,1	41	40,2

Note: U=Unsatisfactory, P=Pass, PwD=Pass with Distinction, PwSD=Pass with Special Distinction

As shown in Table 6.5, the Course B students have a lower achievement profile compared to Course A students. A higher proportion of Course A students than Course B students received the grade Pass with Special Distinction as their final grade in English from compulsory school while more Course B students received the grade Pass compared to Course A students. The grade mean for the students in Course A was 3.46( $SD=0.66$ ) and for Course B students 3.02 ( $SD=0.66$ ). A small-sample (independent) t-test showed that the difference in means between the two groups is statistically significant ( $p<0.5$ ). As the students in Course A have higher grades in EFL from the compulsory level this has to be taken into consideration in the analyses. Also the fact that Course B students have studied EFL for two terms longer than Course A students has to be taken into account. Both these factors can influence the results. One also has to bear in mind that both student groups have a higher achievement profile than the national population, as can be seen in Table 6.5. The mean grade from compulsory school, on a national level, was 2.62 for year 2000/2001 and 2.63 for year 2001/2002.

For certain analyses, the students' final grades in English from compulsory school were used to divide the students into achievement groups.

The choice to base these achievement groups on the students’ final grades was made so that all the grades would be related to the same syllabus and grading criteria (i.e. year 9). Another consideration was to have different teachers’ evaluations of the students’ proficiency in English, and not the teachers participating in the study. Having more than one teacher’s evaluation of the student’s achievement level should give a more reliable picture of the student’s proficiency in EFL.

The final grades that the students received in 2003, at the end of Course A and Course B respectively, and the percentages of students who attained the different grades on a national level (Skolverket, 2004a) are shown in Table 6.6.

Table 6.6 Distribution of grades among students at the end of English Course A and Course B in comparison with national population test results.

	F		P		PwD		PwSD	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Course A	0	0.0	9	15.8	28	49.1	20	35.1
National population test results 2002/2003 (N=75 017)	-	2.5	-	34.7	-	43.0	-	19.8
Course B	5	11.1	18	40.0	15	33.3	7	15.6
National population test results 2002/2003 (N=55 975)	-	4.1	-	34.4	-	41.5	-	20.0

Note: F=Fail, P=Pass, PwD=Pass with Distinction, PwSD=Pass with Special Distinction

As can be seen in Table 6.6 the Course A students received higher grades than the national average, while Course B students received lower grades.

The correlation between final course grades and the final grades from compulsory school are  $r_s=.66$  for Course A and  $r_s=.67$  for Course B.

Other characteristics of these groups were that the students were found to have a positive general self-efficacy profile (i.e. belief in their own ability), and a tendency towards what may be labelled a deep approach to learning<sup>17</sup> (Dragemark Oscarson, 2008). These results add important information to the background description of the students in the study, but are not presented here, due to the need to limit the scope of the thesis.

<sup>17</sup> Deep approach to learning: an intrinsic learning style where the students direct their attention to the meaning of that which is to be learned, as opposed to a surface approach which would be more extrinsic and instrumental in nature.

### 6.2.3 The Teachers

Both the two female teachers, here called Teacher A (TA) and Teacher B (TB), had five years' teaching experience, and they both taught the subjects English, Swedish, and Speech. TA taught the Course A students in the study, and TB taught the Course B students. The two teachers were selected because they had independently stated their interest in participating in the study when approached by the school administration. They saw participation as a form of further education, a stance that may have been underpinned by the researcher's additional role as teacher trainer. Neither had any previous experience, or preconceived conception of self-assessment practices. Both of them were familiar with the writing process approach (cf. 5.4.2) through their teacher training but did not actively use it at the time of the study.

The teachers' level of English was professionally adequate, according to the researcher's field observations, and if lacking anything according to what they reported themselves, it would be current knowledge of language practice amongst younger native speakers. Their contact with the English language was mostly through the media such as music and films, but they differed in as much as TA also had had some in-service training and further education courses while TB travelled at least once a year to an English-speaking country and had regular contact with English friends abroad. Both teachers upheld, again based on the researcher's field observations, a high level of language teaching in the classroom.

### 6.2.4 The Role of the Researcher

The researcher was introduced into the school through personal contacts with the school administration, which ensured a positive reception from the staff and students at large. It also enabled access to all the school facilities with the same status as that of the ordinary staff. The two teachers and the researcher did not know each other previously, but her background in language testing, and as a language teacher, was also known to the involved teachers beforehand, but not to the students.

The initial information, as well as the strategy lessons with the students, were given by the researcher. She also made her own classroom observations and field notes during the two years of the project. These are not analyzed or reported separately in the study, but do add to a deeper understanding on the part of the researcher for the students' comments and the other results. All of the student interviews, with one exception, were carried out by the researcher.

To be able to utilize the time as efficiently as possible, one of the interviews was made by the SALL project leader in a parallel session. In this way the researcher participated in normal classroom life with the students at least once a month for almost two years. The students reported not having had any experience of participating in educational research before, so it is difficult to know how they understood the researcher's role and function. It may be supposed that the students regarded her as a classroom researcher. Some of the students may also have regarded her as another EFL teacher from whom they could receive help.

The researcher's role in this study can be called what Wolcott (1988) refers to as the "privileged observer", someone known, who is trusted and easily gets access to information about relations and facts at the administrative and teacher level. To a certain degree the role may also be described as that of a "restricted observer", someone who observes and questions and builds trust in time but does not have any other social role other than that of the researcher at the student level.

It is a moot point if it is positive or negative to be familiar with the field of study, and be an insider to the school environment. Kullberg (1996) points out that being familiar means that the researcher does not have to spend time getting to know the field but can instead focus on the matter of research. At the same time, it is important that the researcher can "bracket" him- or herself and see the known research field in a new perspective (Kullberg, 1996, p. 100). The researcher had taught EFL at both the compulsory and upper secondary level for twenty years, as well as being involved in language teacher education, before the study took place and can therefore be said to be familiar with the field. However, she had not been a teacher at the particular school and had also worked with other projects since teaching, which ensures the distance necessary to see the field of study in a new perspective.

## 6.3 Instruments and Materials

The central question of the present study, that is how adolescent learners perceive and assess their writing competencies in English in relation to set goals, is a multifaceted one involving many different aspects of the students' language learning process. Four questionnaires, two sets of interviews and two written assignments were used to capture these as well as possible. Some of the instruments were developed by the researcher, in cooperation with the two teachers involved, in line with both the study aims and the syllabus and

curriculum goals. The other established research tools in the form of questionnaires and tests were developed by outside agents, such as the National Agency for Education.

A short description of all the instruments follows below. A list of the abbreviations used for the instruments is given in Appendix 1, and the complete unpublished questionnaires, interview guidelines and written assignments used in the study are to be found in Appendix 3 - 5.

### 6.3.1 Questionnaires

Four main questionnaires were used in the study: A Self-Assessment Questionnaire of Writing (SAQw), two Self-Assessment Forms (SA1 and SA2), and a Self-assessment Questionnaire: National Test of English (SAWT). The questionnaires were mainly used to establish the students' beliefs in their own ability to write EFL, both on- and off-task, as well as to compare the student's assessments with their teacher's.

#### The Self-Assessment Questionnaire of Writing (SAQw)

The part of the Self-Assessment Questionnaire concerning writing, abbreviated SAQw, contains five global questions. These have been used in the present study. They consisted of an adapted form of "can-do" statements, where the student is to mark the continuation of the statement: "I think that this statement matches my level of English...". This was done on a 6 point Likert scale ranging from "Not at all" to "Perfectly".

The Self-Assessment Questionnaire is part of the Swedish Self-assessment material (Skolverket, 2002), which was developed by researchers at the University of Gothenburg on commission from the Swedish National Agency for Education. It was developed specifically for English, Course A at the upper secondary school level and it refers to Swedish syllabuses and curriculum. The complete material consists of three parts: a) an English Usage Checklist, b) a Student Background Questionnaire, and a c) Self-Assessment Questionnaire used in the present study. Apart from writing, the questionnaire also concerns reading, listening, speaking and cultural awareness.

#### Self-assessment Form 1 and 2 (SA1 and SA2)

The two self-assessment questionnaires, a) Self-assessment Form 1 (Appendix 3.1.2 and 3.2.2) and b) Self-assessment Form 2 (Appendix 3.1.3 and 3.2.3), were developed by the researcher. The language used was Swedish

to avoid any misunderstandings on the part of the students. The syllabus goals and grading criteria concerning writing were specified for each course and passed out together with the questionnaire. The students were asked to answer a variety of questions pertaining specifically to the classroom writing assignments. In Self-assessment Form 1, for example, the students could indicate how satisfied they were with their specific writing skills such as Grammar, Vocabulary, Spelling and so on, and whether they felt that they could improve or had made mistakes in the same areas. In both Self-assessment Form 1 and 2 the students predicted their grades on the classroom writing assignment and gave reasons for their self-assessments. The two questionnaires were worded slightly differently in order to catch different aspects of the writing process as the students progressed (cf. 5.4.2).

### Self-assessment Questionnaire: National Test of English (SAWT)

A short self-assessment questionnaire was used after the National Test of English (Appendix 4.1). The questionnaire, used for both English Course A and English Course B, was developed by the researcher in Swedish to avoid any misunderstandings due to language. The questionnaire consisted of a set of multiple choice questions, where the students marked the grades they thought they had achieved on each part of the test. The students predicted their grades on the National Test of English, directly after completing the test.

### 6.3.2 Written Assignments

Two different written assignments were given to the students in order for the researcher to be able to analyze how well they fulfilled the syllabus goals set for writing at their course level. The written assignments were of two types, and included, a) a classroom writing assignment and b) the National Test of English Writing task. Course A and Course B students had different topics to write about on both of these, as they were related to the specific syllabus for each course. The goals for writing for Course A states for example that “pupils should [...] be able to formulate themselves in writing in order to inform, instruct, argue and express feelings and values” (Skolverket, 2001, p. 91) and for Course B “be able to present contents in writing in a clear and well-structured way, as well as be able to express themselves in a varied and personal manner with respect to the audience and situation” (Skolverket, 2001, p. 94).

## Classroom Writing Assignment

The classroom writing assignment, which was part of the two teachers' ordinary school year plan for EFL instruction, was developed by the researcher in close cooperation with the them. Two topics were created, reflecting the specific syllabus goals for each course group. Both were expository and argumentative in nature.

The classroom writing assignment for Course A (Appendix 3.1) was to write a letter to a person that the students had come into contact with through reading a short story from the Commonwealth Countries. The students could choose either a character or the author to write to, and they were asked to reflect upon different cultural differences they had either read about or experienced on their own. The students were given a model letter to help structure their own letter. The classroom writing assignment for Course B (Appendix 3.2) was to write an article on the significance of media and the significance of one medium in particular on daily life. The students were given questions to help them structure their essay.

## National Test of English: Writing Task

At the time of the study, the spring term of 2003, the National Test of English: Writing, for Course A, had the topic "Looking at Sweden — A Letter to the Editor". In the writing task the students were asked to take a stand, and defend or rebut two to four statements on a given list of opinions about Sweden and Swedes (Åhs, 2003, p. 63). The students were given 80 minutes to complete the test task. The National Test of English: Writing Course B task was to write a "Letter of Complaint" after having listened to a recorded conversation. Key words were also given as a help to the student (Börjesson, 2003, p. 72). The students were allowed 70 minutes to complete the test task.

### 6.3.3 Interviews

To understand how the students and teachers experienced working with self-assessment in the EFL classroom, they were interviewed about their experiences. Eight student focus groups (41 students in all) were interviewed after their classroom writing assignment was finished, as were the two individual teachers after the SALL project had come to an end. The interviews and the interview questions were in Swedish.

The student interviews (Appendix 5.1) were based on four questions, relating to the students' experiences regarding self-assessment practices coupled to the classroom writing assignment, as well as different forms of assessment in general. The students were interviewed as close to the experience as possible to elicit their immediate responses.

The teacher interviews (Appendix 5.2) comprised nine questions. The first four questions concerned attitudes to language, teaching focus, student responsibility and influence. Similar questions were asked in the Swedish National Evaluation 1998 (Oscarson et al., 1999). The remaining five questions related to students' ability to self-assess their learning in foreign language learning education. The teachers were interviewed at the end of the project to minimize the possible alteration of behaviour or opinions due to their awareness of being part of the success of the study.

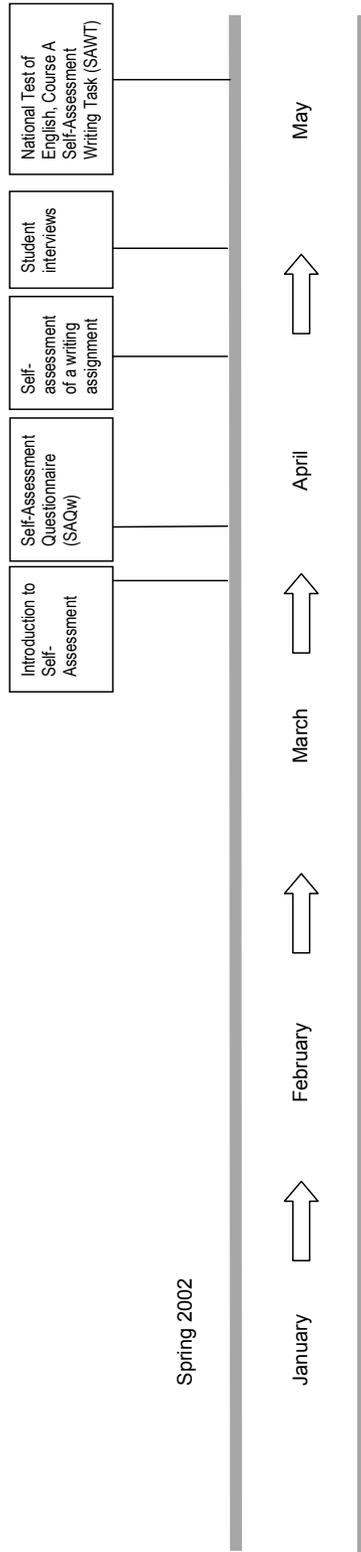
#### 6.3.4 Timeline

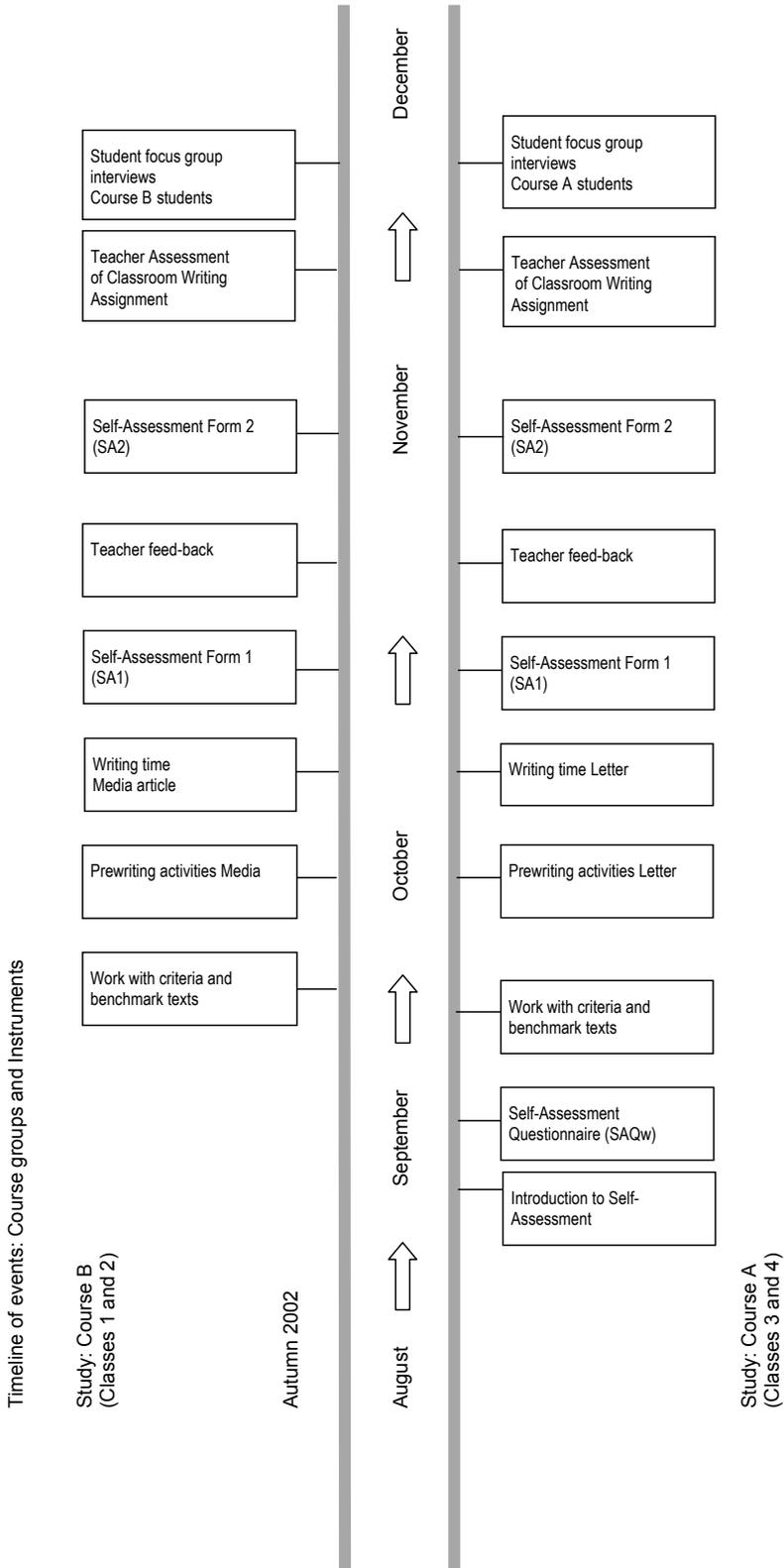
In Figure 6.1 a timeline is presented to illustrate at what point in time during the study each of the instruments was used, and how they relate to each other in time in each of the course groups. An overview of the data collected is also listed chronologically in section 6.5.

*Figure 6.1 Timeline showing sequence of events.*

Timeline of events: Course groups and Instruments

Pilot Study: Course B students (Classes 1 and 2)





Timeline of events: Groups and Instruments

Study: Course B  
(Classes 1 and 2)

National Test of English,  
Writing Course B  
Self-Assessment Writing  
Task (SAWT)

Spring 2003

January



February



March



April



May

Study: Course A  
(Classes 3 and 4)

National Test of English,  
Writing Course A  
Self-Assessment Writing  
Task (SAWT)

Teacher B  
Interview

Spring 2004

January



February



March



April



May

June

Teacher A  
Interview

## 6.4 Method of Data Collection

As already mentioned, a combination of methods was used and different sets of data were collected to enable a broad analysis of outcomes of the study. This is a type of “methods triangulation” according to Hitchcock and Hughes (1989/1995, p. 324). Possible convergence of various outcomes gives stronger credibility to findings (Bryman, 1992/2004, p. 507; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 146). The advantages of triangulated types of design lie in the increased validity of the data, as information about the same research question is sought from different sources (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989, p. 123). Especially as the study is concerned with only four classes of students (N=102) at one school, an eclectic approach can be seen as necessary to give a deeper understanding of the results.

Both qualitative and quantitative data were generated through the use of the different types of student questionnaires, semi-structured group interviews of students and individual interviews with their teachers as well as written products produced by the students themselves. These are described in the previous section (6.3).

In the following section the pilot study is presented first, followed by the method and procedure used in the classroom writing assignment and the written test task. Following this the student and teacher interviews are presented.

### 6.4.1 The Pilot Study

During the spring term of 2002 Classes 1 and 2, (i.e. the students referred to as Course B students in the main study), were introduced to self-assessment and given the whole Swedish Self-assessment material to fill in, including SAQw. At this point in time these students were doing Course A. Both Class 1 and Class 2 self-assessed their results after a summative written test on different English cultures. Class 1 also self-assessed after an ordinary classroom writing assignment where they had written about a film, and were interviewed by the researcher afterwards. Both classes also self-assessed directly after each of the four parts of the National Test of English, Course A in the same manner as was later done in the main study. On the basis of these experiences and the students’ views as expressed in the interviews, the researcher and the two teachers collaborated and developed the writing assignment that was to be used in the main study. An important aspect when developing the classroom writing assignment was that students should be able

to go back to their texts and improve their work in light of their own assessment, before the teacher gave them a grade on it. The self-assessment of both specific skills and perceived resulting grades was to be used as a means of learning to improve their writing in EFL.

#### 6.4.2 Method and Procedure Used in the Classroom Writing Assignment

On the basis of the experiences from the pilot project, a writing assignment was developed for each course (cf. 6.3.2) and an adapted model of the writing process method was used (cf. 5.4.2). Data from these writing assignments were used to answer the research questions regarding both the students' general and specific self-assessment competence in EFL and is therefore presented first.

The classroom writing assignment had the same sequence of events for all the students, who did it sometime between week 39 and week 48, 2002. Both course groups used between 3-5 weeks depending on how the lessons were planned according to their timetable.

Prior to the classroom writing assignment, the students studied the relevant course syllabus for English and the grading criteria for English writing in discussion groups consisting of 3 to 5 students in each. They then practised grade setting on some benchmark texts, from teacher instruction material on assessment of writing from a previous national test that had been released from its classified status. The students first graded the texts on their own and then discussed their grading in the same groups as before. Following the group discussion, they were given the national test experts' grade of the same texts, as well as the written rationale behind the grades. After this there was a class discussion where the grading criteria in relation to the texts and the student grades were considered.

In accordance with the principles of the pre-writing phase in the writing process (cf. 5.4.2), the students read, discussed, and prepared their writing during a few teacher led lessons, before the actual writing took place. They were allowed to help each other on their assignment, but had no organized response groups except for the "base groups" which were used throughout the year at the school for different purposes.

The actual writing took place both in the classroom, during so-called *Joker* time<sup>18</sup> at school, and/or at home, but was possible to complete during normal class time during the four-week period. The assignment was to be written and printed out using a computer before handing in and the computers, which all had access to spelling and grammar control programs, were available to all students both during class time and after school.

The participants were informed during class, before they started writing, that they would not receive immediate grades on their classroom writing assignment, as they would normally expect. The students' regular teacher and students also discussed how the response would be given instead, in the form of an uncoded response. They were given a handout, an assessment guideline (Appendix 3.1.1 and 3.2.1), as a reminder. During the same class, the teacher reviewed linguistic language concepts, such as sentence structure and punctuation.

The teachers who had been specifically briefed for the task, administered Self-assessment Form 1 (SA1) during regular class time, on the same day that the classroom writing assignment was due to be handed to them the first time. The researcher was present to collect the Self-assessment Forms.

The students were then given their classroom writing assignment back from their teacher, not with the usual direct corrections of their mistakes in English, but instead with generalized uncoded feedback (sometimes referred to as indirect marking). Only certain words or sentences were underlined, and/or commented on. These comments were most often in the form of neutral questions, for example: "Did you mean to say that....?". The learner was to discover and correct the error him- or herself, or revise the whole sentence independently. This method of feedback differs from the prevalent writing process structure of giving specified positive feedback as well as recommendations for improvement. Here the objective was that the response from the teacher should be as neutral as possible, to minimize the learners' dependence on the teacher and in order to encourage autonomy. Subsequently, the students revised their written work and handed it in again, a few weeks later, this time for final grading. The teacher returned the classroom writing assignments with grades and comments on the rationale behind the grades. In this way the process was recursive and generative, with

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<sup>18</sup> *Joker* time: a free study period during the school day designated for student work on anything related to any school subject.

participants re-reading their work, assessing it, reacting to the teachers' comments and then moving on.

Self-assessment Form 2 (SA2) was in the same way administered by the students' teacher the day that the final version of the assignment was to be handed in to the teacher, and again the researcher was present to collect Self-assessment Form 2. Both Self-assessment Form 1 and Form 2 were handed in to the researcher who made copies, and the original was given back to the students

### 6.4.3 Collection of the Students' Self-assessments of Off- and On-task Writing Performance

The students' responses to the given questionnaires were used to answer the question of the degree of competence in estimating their own writing performance in EFL that the participants possessed, as well as three different sets of teacher given grades.

#### Collection of Student Self-assessments

The first set of student self-assessments collected was from the Self-Assessment Questionnaire Writing (SAQw). These were predictive and off-task in nature. At the beginning of the study all the students estimated their own holistic writing skills by filling in the SAQw. There were five questions on writing, where two (SAQ 2 and SAQ 4) were of specific relevance as they concerned the kind of genres that the students were asked to use in both their classroom writing assignment and their writing test task. Course B students filled in SAQw during the spring term of 2002, and Course A students during the fall term of 2002. All the participants filled in the questionnaire in connection with a lesson where the term "self-assessment" and the present research study were introduced and discussed. The students were specifically asked by the researcher to be honest in their answers, and were informed that their teacher would not see their answers and that, therefore, they could not prejudice her in any way towards them. The completed questionnaires were handed directly to the researcher who photocopied them herself, and gave them back the following lesson.

The second set of self-assessments was from Self-assessment Form 1 and 2 (SA1 and SA2). These were predictive and on-task. The students filled in these two questionnaires in connection with handing in their classroom writing assignment during the fall term of 2002.

As already mentioned (6.4.2), the students were given Self-assessment Form 1 (SA1), before handing in their classroom writing assignments to their teacher on the first occasion. In one of the questions (Question 4 of Self-assessment Form 1) they were asked to predict the grade they believed they would receive on the classroom writing assignment, in relation to how well they believed that they had fulfilled the criteria of the course they were doing. In the same manner, before handing in their final version of the writing assignment to their teacher for grading, the students were given Self-assessment Form 2 (SA2) where they were asked to predict the grade they believed they would receive on their revised classroom writing assignment (Question 3 of Self-assessment Form 2). These questionnaires were handed directly to the researcher.

The third set was from the self-assessment questionnaire which was given directly after the writing task in the National Test of English, and which was retrospective and on-task. On completion of the test for Course A, May 6th, 2003, the Course A students filled in the SAWT where they predicted their results. Course B students filled in the questionnaire in the same manner after having completed the test for Course B on May 15th, 2003. Only the answers that constituted the students' prediction of their grades for the writing part of the test were used in the main study. The questionnaires were given to the supervising teacher who immediately put them in a sealed envelope and gave them to the researcher.

### Collection of Student Grades

The students' final grades in English from the compulsory level, year 9, were obtained from the Municipal Board of Education, with permission from the students. These were used to organise the students into achievement groups for certain analyses. The students' final grades on their classroom writing assignment and the students' final grades on the National Test of English: Writing Course A and B, were determined by their teachers and forwarded to the researcher.

### Summary of Students' Self-assessments of General Off- and On-task Writing Performance

An overview of the data collected and used to answer the question of the students' general ability to assess their competence in EFL in relation to their teacher's grades is given in Table 6.7. A complete overview of all the data collected in the study is presented in Table 6.8.

Table 6.7 Overview of collected student self-assessments and teacher grades.

Student Self-assessments:	Teacher given Grades:
SAQw	Final EFL grades from Compulsory School (Year 9)
SA1 and SA2 on writing assignment	Final grade on writing assignments
SA writing test	Final grade on National Test of English, A and B

### Statistical Analyses of Data Regarding Students' Self-assessments of General Off- and On-task Writing Performance

The students' responses, in the form of predicted grades, and the teachers' set grades were analyzed statistically using SPSS (v 17). According to Bachman (2004) more recent and less rigid views on the use of statistical analyses say that "the appropriate use of a given statistical procedure is not a matter of rigid statistical assumptions, but depends on how meaningful its results are for the kind of data that is analyzed" (p. 38). (See Bachman, 2004 for a discussion on these issues). The statistical methods used in the thesis are considered robust to possible violations of underlying assumptions. Correlations were calculated using Spearman ( $r_s$ ) as data in the form of grades are ordinal in essence (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2005, p. 434). Spearman ( $r_s$ ) does not assume that variables are normally distributed and it is appropriate to use this coefficient when investigating relationships among variables in relatively small sample sizes (Bachman, 2004, p. 91). When comparisons between two means were made, a small-sample t-test, "to test hypotheses about differences between two means when samples are small" (Bachman, 2004, p. 235) was used. For the purpose of checking the significance of differences between several means, *F*-tests were performed. Reliable statistical analyses of the data from the achievement groups *within* Course A and *within* Course B were not deemed appropriate to perform (due to the fact that the number of students in the Pass-group was only 5 in Course A and 9 in Course B).

#### 6.4.4 Collection of the Students' Self-assessments of Specific Writing Skills

To be able to answer to the question of the students' ability to assess their specific writing skills in EFL, the students' responses to Self-assessment Form 1, Question 2 was used. The researcher's linguistic analysis of the students' classroom writing assignments were also taken into account. To be

able to do this, all the student essays from the writing assignment fall term 2002, were photocopied by the researcher.

Linguistic accuracy is of interest in the assessment of writing and therefore also to the study of self-assessment of writing. In the so-called writing process approach, the editing of the text is usually postponed until the final draft but is not seen as unimportant (Polio, 1997, p. 102). A variety of techniques have been used in linguistic research to study the construct of linguistic accuracy (op.cit., p. 103), for example holistic, error-free units, and error counts with or without classification. The methods used in this study fall into the holistic and error count categories. Error free units were omitted as they typically abound. Error free units are also problematic as they may contain extremely simple language and their definition is not always clear. According to a review by Polio (1997, p. 130) holistic measures are not as suitable for homogenous populations while error counts are seen as more reliable.

When the students handed in the writing assignment to the teacher for the first time, they assessed their different specific English writing language skills with the help of Self-assessment Form 1, Question 2. The students marked a box if they were *satisfied with* Spelling, Grammar, Vocabulary, and so forth, and also marked another box if they felt that they *could improve* the stated skill or if they *could have made mistakes on* it (see Figure 6.2). Self-assessment Form 1 was, as described above, collected by the researcher.

2a Language : In the assignment I was satisfied with my	
<input type="checkbox"/> grammar	<input type="checkbox"/> spelling
<input type="checkbox"/> vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/> sentence structure
<input type="checkbox"/> paragraphing	<input type="checkbox"/> punctuation
other: .....	
2b But, I think that I could improve, or can have made mistakes on	
<input type="checkbox"/> grammar	<input type="checkbox"/> spelling
<input type="checkbox"/> vocabulary	<input type="checkbox"/> sentence structure
<input type="checkbox"/> paragraphing	<input type="checkbox"/> punctuation
other: .....	

Figure 6.2 Question 2 (two items) in Self-assessment Form 1<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> My translation

The first part of the question was based on the assumption that students would not be satisfied if they felt they had used incorrect or unacceptable language. In the second part of the question the students had the opportunity to declare that they knew of mistakes, which they were unable to put right or were in fact uncertain of the correct language use or level demanded. Moser and Kalton (1971/2004, pp. 76-77) emphasize the importance of questions being directed to the specific issues investigated, as well as the importance of using language appropriate for the specific population. Informal and simple vocabulary and phrasing has been used in all the questionnaires.

A linguistic analysis of the students' language in the classroom writing assignment was then performed in two steps by the researcher, taking on the role as an external assessor. The student texts were individually analyzed, and each skill (cf. Figure 6.2) was globally graded using the guidelines described below by the researcher in her capacity as an experienced upper secondary English teacher and professional test writer. This was done twice by the researcher, with a time interval of a couple of months in between, and gave the same results. The reliability of the assessment and analysis of language skills was then checked. First by having two practicing language teachers each grade the skills in 10 randomly chosen assignments independently of the researcher. The three sets of ratings for each skill in each of the assignments were then compared. The agreement between ratings was found highly satisfactory. The assessments the six skills graded showed an inter-rater agreement of 96%. Secondly another, independent grading of 10 random texts was made in the same manner as previously, also by an experienced English teacher who was also a language education research student. These results were then compared with the rating of the researcher. Also this set of ratings was found to correlate with the other teachers' ratings.

In the first analysis the researcher made a manual count of the number of words in 52 of the writing assignments, randomly chosen from each course group. Following this, the number of errors or mistakes made by each student for each skill was counted manually, as many of the texts were handwritten when handed in, contrary to instructions given in the assignment by the teacher. The count was simply done to be able to see the actual number of mistakes a student could make and still consider him- or herself satisfied with the product.

No distinction is made here between the notion of "error" as opposed to "mistake" (i.e. in relation to the belief that errors are due to weaknesses in linguistic competence while mistakes are performance inaccuracies or non-

systematic errors). Error or mistake is used for a form that is regarded as incorrect in relation to standard American or British English.

A student may have been aware of, or uncertain about, language mistakes and yet handed in his or her work proclaiming it satisfactory, in the sense that it is the best he or she could manage at the time. The first analysis was very strict and summative, not taking into consideration the quality (i.e. the seriousness) of the language mistakes. The range of mistakes could in other words be from 0 to as many words as an assignment consisted of (the mean being 464 words in the total group). It is important to remember that the number of mistakes as such should be seen in relation to the total number of possible occurrences if one wants to give a complete picture of the students' performance, but an investigation into these issues is beyond the scope of this study. The study is not an analysis of student performance as such, but rather how the students' assessment of their own performance compares to an external assessment of the same.

The second analysis concerned the type of holistic language assessment made in accordance with the syllabuses instructions and the guidelines given in the National Tests of English for the English courses concerned. There are no syllabus instructions for different specific language skills but the same principles were applied. The marking thus adhered to the following grading guidelines.

A "1" (Fail) was given to:

- *Grammatical mistakes* that interfered with understanding the written text in such a manner that the meaning was deemed to be incomprehensible, at least to a non-Swedish reader, for example: "Do you eat at most, going at the sentior" (Student 305); "I'm going the first year at, it's on of the criteria, reach in the end" (Student 302); "A rumor is sat on loose" (Student 426); "Get reborned into boundary of your own unknowledge" (Student 114).
- *Vocabulary* used in the wrong manner or the use of Swedish words, that made understanding very difficult or in effect incomprehensible in the context, for example: "saintly yours" (Student 308); "full-sized book" (used for adult book) (Student 203); "Gymnasium" (used for upper secondary school) (Student 316).
- *Sentence structure*, for example word order that made the writer's meaning extremely or completely incomprehensible and/or ambiguous,

for example: “Don’t always tells the truth, the newspapers don’t” (Student 119).

- *Spelling* that made meaning incomprehensible, as well as extremely basic spelling mistakes that were used continuously and in a consistent manner, for example: “an bake” (used for a break); “infrared” (infiltrated?); “cutie” (used for quite) (Student 108); “guars” (curious?).
- *Punctuation* that was inappropriate, used incorrectly or left out so that it most probably would cause misunderstanding. For example a text without any punctuation whatsoever, including periods for full stops.
- *Paragraphing* if non-existent.

A “2” (Pass) was given to generally comprehensible language use that was understandable even if not formally correct as well as sentence structure that was understandable in a given context, even if not correct, such as run-on sentences, phrases and so forth. For example, “The television people has a big power of what ordinary people shall beleve” (Student 109).

A “3” (Pass with Distinction) was given to conscious and expressive language use, such as paragraphing with appropriate sub-headings, advanced vocabulary in relation to the two different syllabuses for English course A and B, and so forth. For example, “target group” (Student 110); “the first word that comes to mind”, “enlighten or mislead” “plays on people’s prejudices” (Student 112); “surname” (Student 312).

A “4” (Pass with Special Distinction) was given to consistently fluent, correct and appropriate use of the specific language skills, with only minor language errors.

The external assessment made by the researcher was compared to the students’ self-assessments of being “satisfied with”, being equal to the grade of Pass and above, and/or “could improve/can have made mistakes”, being equal to a grade of Fail up to a grade of Pass with Distinction.

These two analyses, the first specifically linguistic, and the second more general and holistic in accordance with the syllabus grading criteria, give a picture of students’ ability which complemented their self-assessments. The assessment by the researcher can also be said to be generally more objective, in the sense that the researcher had no preconceived idea, nor prior knowledge about the students’ previous performance.

The outcome of the students’ self-assessments and the researcher’s assessment was analyzed statistically in the same manner and with the same

rationale as the analyses regarding the students' self-assessments of general off- and on-task writing performance (6.4.3). SPSS (v 17) and Excel (v 11.5) were used to illustrate the results with figures and diagrams.

#### **6.4.5 Collection of the Students' and Teachers' Voices on Self-assessment**

The students and teachers were interviewed so that the researcher would be able to answer the two questions: a) to what extent self-assessment practices of EFL writing in the classroom may lead to the development of more realistic views of the learners' own level of EFL writing and, b) how the students and teachers express and understand the attempt made in the study to incorporate the curriculum and syllabus goals of lifelong and independent learning through self-assessment of writing in EFL.

Language teaching didactics and the students choice of language learning methods can be said to be both guided and governed by how the teachers and students conceive what successful language acquisition means. The teachers' and students' statements reflect their different opinions and reflections in the wider area of grading and assessment and this can elucidate our understanding of how self-assessment of EFL writing is perceived. The interviews focused student and teacher views on self-assessment but also related areas such as autonomy, student responsibility and so forth, and were a means of gaining knowledge of how the participating two teachers and the students represented by the focus groups understood and reasoned around the relevant concepts and the classroom practice. The report of the interview study is descriptive in character, presenting different student and teacher understandings of their experience. The results of the interviews are presented separately.

A standardized open-ended interview approach, also referred to as a semi-structured interview schedule, was used (Appendix 5) where the researcher started with reviewing both the aim of the project and the focus of the main study and then asked open-ended questions based on the students' and teachers' experiences and behaviour. Questions asked in order to capture the students' and teachers' opinions and value judgements were also included. The interview questions were conducted in the same sequence and essentially using the same words, in accordance with Patton (2002, pp. 342-347). The researcher transcribed the tape-recorded/MD recorded interviews verbatim herself in accordance with Maykut and Morehouse (1996, p.101) to become

familiar with the data. Preliminary themes and categories were noted while the transcribing progressed. The interviews were read and re-read numerous times and categories pertaining to the research purpose were coded. This is an inductive procedure (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989). To eliminate preconceived opinions on the part of the researcher, and ensure further reliability, another language research student read the transcribed interviews using the same criteria as the researcher and arrived at similar results. The correlation between these two were as high as in the previous analysis of the students' written texts.

The major advantage of the interview form chosen was that the exact instrument is available to others and analysis was facilitated (Patton 2002, p. 346) at the same time as the respondents can express themselves in their own words and indicate their own perspectives (Seliger & Shohamy, 1989; Patton, 2002 p. 348).

### The Student Group Interviews

The students were interviewed in eight "sub-sample groups", in this context referred to as focus groups, with 3 to 6 students in each group (41 students in all). They were randomly selected and thus broadly representative of the total group. The students were interviewed retrospectively, that is after they had worked with the classroom writing assignment and also self-assessed their work (cf. 6.4.2). This was done to procure the informants' immediate understanding of the self-assessment of writing experience. The Course A students ( $n= 19$ ) were interviewed in groups of 3 to 6 students. The Course B students ( $n= 22$ ) were interviewed in groups of 5 to 6 students. The interviews, which took place in a small conference room beside the ordinary classroom, took approximately 20 to 30 minutes each and centered around four open-ended questions. The students knew each other beforehand as they were in the same group in EFL. They also knew the interviewer/researcher who had been present in the class several times during the year.

The advantage of focus groups interviews rather than individual interviews was that the participants were given an opportunity to listen to each other's contributions, to help develop their own ideas more clearly. The information that may not be thought of individually or be left underdeveloped in an interview, may emerge in this way, "to obtain greater depth and breadth in responses than occurs in individual interviews" (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989/1995, p. 161), and "highlights the respondents' attitudes [...] and framework of understanding" (Kitzinger, 1994, p 271). Focus groups tend to

let participants make more critical comments than in one-to-one interviews as the format, talking together with peers, seems to be more permissive and non-threatening. The extent to which views are shared or divergent may also be quickly assessed (Patton, 2002, p 386). As reflected in the sociocultural perspective (Dysthe, 1996, 2000; Gipps, 1999; Säljö, 2000) students become aware of their own knowledge and opinions while expressing them to others and may come to new understandings of own experience. A group interview, using the dynamics of group interaction to gain information and insights may also bring several different perspectives into contact and provide insight into group norms (Patton, 2002, pp. 385 - 386). Due to the nature of the study, it is not the number of students per se that have different understandings of the self-assessment that is in focus, but the variation and different dimensions of understanding that are present in the classroom as exemplified by these particular students. In spite of this, the opinions of the two English course groups have been distinguished when relevant. This was done to investigate whether longer experience of self-assessment showed any differences in student attitudes towards self-assessment of EFL.

### **The Individual Teacher Interviews**

The two teachers involved were both interviewed individually after the end of the SALL project in February 2004. After reviewing the aims, the researcher asked nine open-ended questions based on the teacher's experiences with self-assessment in the classroom. The interviews took place in a small conference room at the school and took approximately 45 minutes each.

The first four questions asked concerned teacher attitudes to language met outside of school, their own teaching focus as well as student responsibility and influence. They were based on similar questions from the Swedish National Evaluation from 1998 (Oscarson et al., 1999), so that it would be possible to characterize the teachers in relation to a larger cohort and context. The remaining five other questions related to the project's focus on students' ability to self-assess their own learning in foreign language learning education.

## **6.5 Overview of Events and Data**

For easy reference and clarity, the previously described instruments, materials, and procedures used in the pilot and main study, are presented. This is followed by an overview of the data collected.

Figure 6.3 represents the sequence of research events described in the previous sections are presented.

### **Pilot Study**

#### Spring 2002:

Course B (Classes 1 and 2)  
 Introduction to Self-Assessment  
 Self-Assessment Questionnaire of General Writing Ability (SAQw)  
 Self-assessment of a classroom test  
 Self-assessment of a classroom writing assignment  
 Student interviews  
 National Test of English: Writing Course A  
 Self-assessment of National Test of English Writing (SAWT)

### **Main Study**

#### Autumn 2002

Course B (Classes 1 and 2)  
 Student Work with criteria and benchmark texts  
 Pre-writing activities regarding Media  
 Classroom Writing Assignment: Media Article  
 Self-assessment Form 1 (SA1)  
 Teacher Feedback  
 Self-assessment Form 2 (SA2)  
 Teacher Assessment of Classroom Writing Assignment  
 Student Focus Group Interviews  
 Course A (Classes 3 and 4)  
 Introduction to Self-Assessment  
 Self-Assessment Questionnaire of General Writing Ability (SAQw)  
 Work with criteria and benchmark texts  
 Pre-writing activities regarding a Letter  
 Classroom Writing Assignment: Letter  
 Self-assessment Form 1 (SA1)  
 Teacher Feedback  
 Self-assessment Form 2 (SA2)  
 Teacher Assessment of Classroom Writing Assignment  
 Student Focus Group Interviews

<u>Spring 2003</u>
Course B (Classes 1 and 2)
National Test of English: Writing Course B
Self-assessment of National Test of English Writing: Course B (SAWT)
Course A (Classes 3 and 4)
National Test of English: Writing Course A
Self-assessment of National Test of English Writing: Course A (SAWT)
<u>Spring 2004</u>
Teacher B Interview
Teacher A Interview

Figure 6.3 Overview of sequence of events related to the students' participation in the pilot study and the main study.

The sequence of events presented is a simplification of the procedures in the study, but shows the order of research events during each term and in both course groups.

An overview of the number of responses that were collected is presented in Table 6.8. The slightly different numbers (*N*) are missing data for some of the measurements.

Table 6.8 Overview of data collected and number of responses (*n*).

	Course A	Course B	Total <i>N</i>
Total Group	57	45	102
EFL Grade Compulsory School	57	45	102
SAQw	57	45	102
Writing assignments	57	45	102
SA 1 Q2	57	45	102
SA 1	57	44	101
SA 2	57	40	97
Grade, writing assignment	57	40	97
SAWT	56	44	100
Grade, writing test A	57	n.a.	57
Grade, writing test B	n.a.	45	45
Student Focus Group	19	41	41
Interviews			
Individual Teacher Interviews	1	1	2

As can be seen in Table 6.8, there was some data reduction in the case of the grades and self-assessments of the writing assignment as well as the self-assessment after the writing test. They were caused by absenteeism due to illness, and so forth, and in a few cases due to students not being able to hand in their questionnaires directly to the researcher or the teacher. An investigation into the missing cases showed that these were represented in all three achievement groups, and seemed to be random occurrences. There is nothing that indicates that the missing data is of the kind that would have any bearing on the structure of the results. This notwithstanding, only students with complete data have been included in direct comparisons between sub-groups.

## 6.6 Validity and Reliability

All the instruments used in the study have been tested or piloted for reliability and validity. The Swedish Self-assessment Material, of which SAQw is part, and the National Test of English are well known and have been tested and used on large student samples nationally. The SAQw, for example, has shown a Cronbach's alpha of .91 (Dragemark Oscarson, 2008).

The reliability problem of the specific text analysis of the students' writing assignments has to do with the ambiguity of word meanings and variable language category definitions. Categorizations of what should be defined as grammar or sentence structure errors for example, or grammar or spelling mistakes are not clear-cut. Therefore the issue of reliability has been solved in so far as the assignments have been assessed twice by the researcher with a time period of a couple of months between since, according to Weber (1990/2004), "stability can be determined when the same content is coded more than once by the same coder" (p. 120). The linguistic analyses gave the same results when re-assessed by the researcher. A small number of texts (20), randomly chosen, were nevertheless coded by three independent EFL teachers with experience of EFL at the upper secondary level. One of these was a native speaker of English. The inter-rater reliability was in all cases found to be satisfactory (cf. 6.4.4). The rationale for not using the students' own teachers for the grading of the students' specific writing skills was, apart from not wanting to add to the teachers' already heavy workload, the fact that external assessment was less likely to be influenced by the students' previous written work, something which can always be the case when a teacher assesses his or her own students.

Having two or more independent subject experts grade each student performance on the assignment was impossible for practical reasons and was, in light of the above measures, not deemed necessary. Reliability is the consistency with which the assessment of performance is made, yet consensus among several assessors may simply reflect the fact that they interpret the criteria in the same manner, rather than that the work is objectively meeting the set criteria.

In a review of work in the area of grading, Falchikov and Goldfinch (2000, p. 288) expressed the opinion that validating students' ratings against those of teacher ratings and having these as a standard, is a concern for validity, not reliability. Work in the area is laden with problems, as teacher grading in itself is problematic. It is not necessarily the case that grades are reliable or valid indicators of achievement, and consistent grades are not necessarily fair grades, as several different kinds of bias may operate in grading. If students are able to judge their own performance, measured more or less in accordance with the teachers' grading, there is still the question of what is actually being graded, and how the criteria are understood on both sides. Messick's (1989) concept of consequential validity is also of concern here, as assessment as such must be seen in terms of its consequences. Boud and Falchikov (2006) also talk about the backwash effect of assessment, or the extent to which the uses of different forms of assessment provide positive consequences for learning. Consequential validity is high when assessment provides motivation for further learning. In this way, the study is an investigation of the validity of self-assessment.

For validity purposes, the writing assignments were referenced to the Swedish national syllabus for English as a foreign language for upper secondary education and the concomitant grading criteria.

The student and teacher interview questions were partly modelled on instruments used in previous large national educational evaluations to ensure trustworthiness.

## 6.7 Methodological Considerations

The researcher's considerations regarding the instruments and procedures used, which have a bearing on the ensuing analyses of results, are briefly discussed below.

### 6.7.1 The Written Assignments

Writing tasks used for assessment purposes in school contexts are generally such that elicit real-world writing but whose purpose is to show language proficiency. To be useful assessment should, according to Cushing-Weigle (2002), be concerned with six qualities: reliability (as a consistency measurement), construct validity (if the test or task is measuring what it is intended to measure), practicality, authenticity, impact or washback effect, and inter-activeness (to what extent a student can show linguistic knowledge, affective schemata, strategic competence etc.). These aspects have to be considered in both written assignments used in the present study.

#### The Classroom Writing Assignment

One written assignment used in the study to assess writing, was the classroom writing assignment. In virtue of it being an assignment, rather than a test, it may focus more on the aspects of construct validity, authenticity, inter-activeness and impact.

An important consideration regarding Self-assessment Form 1, Question 2, which was used by the students to self-assess their specific writing skills, was that “being satisfied” with something may mean different things to different students. A student at one achievement level may be satisfied with such language use that a student at the next level considers to be in need of improvement. It is even possible that all of the students had individually different reasons for marking “satisfied” when they did. They may have felt that their results were enough to please the teacher, or to fulfil course criteria, or even a reflection of such short-term goals as getting home on time rather long-term goals pertaining to learning. It may also be argued that to be “satisfied with” is an expression of attitude, rather than an assessment. The counter-argument is that some form of assessment necessarily underpins this attitude, such as the self-assessment of being at least relatively “good at” the skill in question, and that there is therefore reason to be “satisfied with” the writing performance. A statement of the type “I have a good command of”, or “I master this skill” would most probably not have drawn many markings from the students, as such a wording may be considered too self-confident. Questions have to be, according to Moser and Kalton (1971/2004, p. 74), practical and commonsensical. Due to the fact that it was not possible to conduct in-depth interviews in conjunction with the writing assignment, there also had to be leeway for the absolutely satisfied, the ambivalent and the dissatisfied students.

Another aspect in need of consideration with regard to the students' degree of satisfaction is that the linguistic terms used in the questionnaire were not the student's own. The linguistic categories were reviewed at the time of the writing assignment but the students' understanding of these terms was not investigated. The possibility that students marked that they could have made mistakes in a linguistic category, because they were uncertain as to its meaning, presents itself. These categories are not always clear to the students in Swedish, and the difference between, for example, grammar and sentence structure is sometimes difficult to draw.

The decision by the researcher was to regard the student as not satisfied when he or she was fully aware of the fact that errors/mistakes have been made, even minor ones (as the assignment was to be handed in to the teacher for grading). Taking another position, the researcher would have to decide what would, or could, be deemed to be satisfactory to each and every one of the students. Other decisions, as to whether certain errors/mistakes are more serious than others are also impossible to make. Is one glaring grammatical mistake more or less serious than ten minor spelling errors? Is an incorrectly used vocabulary item more or less serious than a foreign sentence structure? The researcher's choice in this case was to assess the errors/mistakes as equally serious when pertaining to the students presumed satisfaction.

It is important to note that there is no value judgement given to the making of errors/mistakes by the students on the part of the researcher. The making of errors/mistakes is an important and inevitable part of learning a language and different types of errors/mistakes are indicators of the learner's progress and level of language proficiency. In this study the researcher has not chosen to study this aspect, but rather wants to see if the students mark that they are "satisfied with" and/or "could improve/have made mistakes on" their language practice when it comes to a number of specific writing skills such as Grammar, Vocabulary, Spelling and so on, corresponds to the general language syllabus goals, and to a general linguistic norm outside the school context.

### **The Writing Test Task**

Most writing tests in school contexts, including the Swedish National Tests of English used in the study fall somewhere between a strong or weak performance assessment model. That is, both the test tasks and the scoring may vary depending on to what extent other factors than language ability, such as prior knowledge, are involved (Cushing Weigle, 2002). The

authenticity of using tests in a study of writing performance must also be considered in terms of content preparation and time limit, and the Swedish tests are comparatively generous in this respect.

The assessment task was a direct type of test where candidates must write a text. Students were given one, or a choice of two topics, a set of instructions and a form of prompt but with a certain leeway in how to handle it. There was a limited time frame and the topic as such was unknown to the students in advance. The use of resource materials, such as notes or dictionaries, was not allowed while writing. If students are to be able to self-assess their results of such a test in a meaningful way, they must be very clear on the expectations of the genre and the language, that is the criteria employed by the teacher grading their work. There is no reason to doubt that the students were not knowledgeable about these factors, as they had all written a similar test at the compulsory level. Therefore the use of the test task in the study seemed a reasonable choice. It was also considered valuable, as the use of self-assessment in summative situations have not been extensively researched.

The Likert scale used to self-assess the writing test task for instance also tends to be reliable due to the greater range of answers permitted to respondents (Oppenheim, 1966/2004, p. 103). When it comes to validity much depends on the respondents' honesty and willingness to cooperate, and the absence of typecast answers or cover-up responses (op.cit., p. 104). The students' attitudes in regard to these factors were of course impossible to know, but there were no indications to the effect that the students' responses were not made in good faith.

### The Assessment of Writing Performance

The use of grades in measuring writing performance is not problem-free as they, at least in a criterion referenced system, are composite, holistic assessments of the students' many different language skills. There are no scores as such to differentiate or point out different strengths or weaknesses in performance, or if high proficiency in one skill compensates for low proficiency in another. According to Klapp Lekholm (2008) grades also encompass several different dimensions related to cognitive and non-cognitive abilities.

Another difficulty is the limited range of the grading scale. It only consists of four steps and students at either end of the scale, can only misjudge their competence in one direction.

### 6.7.2 The Student and Teacher Interviews

The reporting of interviews is what is sometimes called a second-order perspective. In a second-order perspective the researcher describes the experiences of others. It is the students' thoughts about experiences, in this case the students' beliefs and perceptions about their ability to self-assess and grade themselves, which are elicited and reported. Conceptions may be dependent on contextual factors of which the interviewee is a part, and it can never be taken for granted that one gets to know what the student knows or feels about something, even though it is possible to talk about it in general terms. There tends to exist great variation in the meaning behind conceptions of everyday occurrences (Theman, 1978).

Focus group interviews are sometimes regarded as problematic, in that group pressure can lead to consensus in the group and that the "researcher never gains the depth of understanding that comes with one-to-one interviews" (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984, p. 111) or that minority viewpoints may not be inclined to be brought forward (Patton 2002, p. 386). However, the varying voices and different opinions brought forth in the results seem to indicate that this was not a serious problem.

Only two teachers participated in the study. There is always the possibility of bias in the interview responses, as the teachers were also involved in the SALL project and in its success. They may unconsciously have felt that they had to give the kinds of answers and responses they assumed the researcher wanted (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1989/1995, pp. 164-165). Yet, the fact that both teachers report having continued to work in accordance with the study materials and methods gives an indication that their answers were an expression of their considered opinion.

## 6.8 Ethical Considerations

The researcher has in every way tried to conform to the ethical guidelines formulated by the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet, 2008). The students participating in the study were informed at the beginning of the school year, during ordinary class hours, about the project at large as well as

about the self-assessment of writing study, by the researcher and at a later date also by the SALL project leader. A letter was sent home informing all the students and their guardians about the project (Appendix 2) in spite of the fact that many students were of age. In the four classes involved, not one of the students declined to participate in the project at large (i.e. the writing study).

To ensure confidentiality students were given an identification number to use when handing in questionnaires and other assignments, including tests pertaining to the study. The key to these numbers were only available to the researcher. On all work where the students had used their own names instead, these were replaced with the given identification number. The students' teachers were not able to access the self-assessment questionnaires or the follow up interviews.

At each group interview session, the researcher reminded the students that participation in the interview was voluntary. It was accepted unquestionably when individual students chose not to participate because they felt that they needed the time to do schoolwork or anything else. Permission to record interviews, using a MD/tape recorder, was given by all participating students.

In the presentation of the results, both students and teachers have been given letter designations or fictitious names that in most cases are viable in both English and Swedish.

The researcher has taken care that restricted test material used in the study has not been referred to or described in any way so that it may be misused. Where mentioned, any references to content has already been published elsewhere.

Translation of instruments, assessment material, and quotes from the student and teacher interviews have been made by the researcher who has a bilingual English and Swedish language background. All the translations have then been checked by other language experts at the university.

Apart from being a means by which increased metacognitive awareness is achieved, self-assessment is also a means by which knowledge is gained about individuals and groups. Even when the aspiration is to help students become aware and help them improve as language learners, self-assessment may be experienced as having a 'gate-keeping' function. Through self-assessment students may expose themselves to the teacher. Schendel and O'Neill (1999) go so far as to say that "self-assessments may require that

students participate in their own surveillance and domination” (p. 200). A risk with alternative assessment is that it can make the students part of the grading procedure, in a negative manner, as reproducing the assessment the teacher would give them while exempting the teacher from the responsibility. Rather than empowering the students through participation in assessment, the students may then implicate themselves, and the teacher’s power over the students may instead be reaffirmed. Self-assessment can be a way for the self to be “constructed, maintained, normalized and disciplined” (op.cit. p. 207). As in other forms of assessment the effect this has on the individual may be internalized. This may of course be especially true of students with little prior experience of self-assessment (cf. 3.2.3 and 4.2).

To make the process of self-assessment as ethical as possible in relation to the above, the teachers who set the final grades were not privy to the students’ self-assessments. Many different EFL tasks were also self-assessed throughout the term, not only the students’ writing. To ensure that the students understood that it was the improvement of learning that was the ultimate goal of the study, information sessions on self-assessment were given to all the students by the researcher herself prior to the start of the study. Letting the students practice assigning grades to benchmark texts, both by themselves and in peer groups and by using the set course criteria, was also a means of approaching the issue, and safe-guarding from misgivings about student ‘subservience’ to the teachers in their assessments.

## 6.9 Summary

The methodology used in the study is characterized by several approaches. It has features of an intervention study, a descriptive case study and is explorative in nature. As is common in much language education research it utilizes multiple methods.

The participants were 102 EFL students at a small vocational and technical upper secondary school, and their two teachers. The majority of the students were male. Several questionnaires and two written tasks were given. Student and teacher interviews were organised. The pilot study took place in the spring term of 2002, and the main study during the school year 2002-2003. Applying what is usually termed the writing process method, the students completed a classroom writing assignment and self-assessed both their general results in EFL in terms of grades and specific writing skills. These texts were then graded by the students’ teacher and linguistically

analyzed by the researcher. The students also completed the National Test of English writing task and self-assessed their results. The students' self-assessments of their written performance were then compared with the teachers' grades. Students and teachers were interviewed; the students in groups after the classroom writing assignment was completed and both teachers, individually, after the main study was finished.

The study was carried out according to prevalent and accepted research ethics. Students and guardians were informed in advance, and students could at any time decline further participation. As the study had to do with assessment of their own results and grading, special care was taken to ensure that the students would not implicate themselves in any way and the teacher did not have access to the students' self-assessments.

The research instruments used were tested for reliability and validity. Certain reliability concerns, for example in the linguistic analyses, were solved by having a random number of texts analyzed by additional assessors. The written assignments were referenced to the national syllabus grading criteria to ensure validity. To ensure trustworthiness several of the interview questions were similar to questions used in large national evaluations.



## RESULTS

The results of the study are presented and organized along the same lines as the research questions (cf. 1.2.1). First, in section (7.1), the results of the students' self-assessments of *general* off- and on-task writing performance are shown. These include the participants' conception of their ability to write in EFL as well as the students' self-assessments of their results on two pieces of writing: a classroom writing assignment and the National Test of English writing task. The students' off-task and on-task self-assessments of writing are compared. The second section (7.2) describes the students' self-assessments of their *specific* writing skills, that is to what degree they recognize mistakes in Grammar, Vocabulary, Paragraphing, Spelling, Sentence Structure and Punctuation in their own writing. The students' assessments are then compared with the researcher's assessment. In the third section (7.3) the interviewed students' and teachers' voices on self-assessment and related assessment practices are presented. Each section starts with a short recapitulation of the particulars for each analysis and ends with a summary and some reflections on the specific results.

The analyses in the first two sections (7.1 and 7.2) under the heading Total Group are based on data from *all* the 102 students involved in the study. The Total Group is then divided into two subgroups: students doing Course A ( $n=57$ ) and students doing Course B ( $n=45$ ). This division is made in order to explore whether the students' proficiency in English was of any significance to the results of the different analyses. The Total Group is also divided into three achievement groups. The achievement groups are here defined according to the grades in English that the students participating in the present study had attained at the compulsory school level (final year). There were 14 students in the Pass-group (P), 47 students in the Pass with Distinction-group (PwD) and 41 students in the Pass with Special Distinction-group (PwSD). This division is made in order to investigate whether the students' objectively

established performance levels (in the form of grades) made any difference to their EFL self-assessments. Course A and Course B students were not divided into achievement groups given that the groups would be too small to allow for meaningful content analyses. Figure 7.1.1 gives a graphic representation of the groupings of the different analyses.

Analyses by:

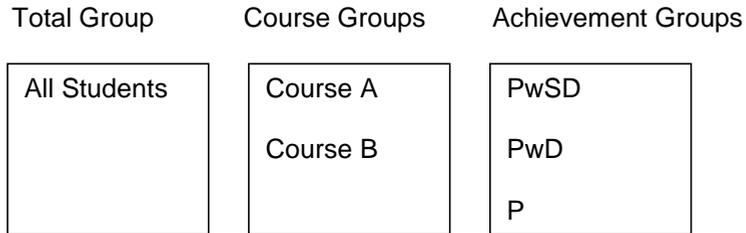


Figure 7.1.1 Groupings in the different analyses

The analyses of the student interviews in the last section (7.3) are based on a random selection of students participating in the present study. These students were divided and interviewed in focus groups. The two teachers’ accounts of their experiences of self-assessment are also presented here (cf. 6.4.5).

Some spurious data reduction occurred and the number of students for each set of data is therefore accounted for in each of the different tables. For a full account of the methodological considerations and a detailed description of the different instruments, see Chapter 6 and the appendices. For a list of abbreviations used see Appendix 1.

## 7.1 The Students’ Self-assessments of *General* Off- and On-Task Writing Performance

Partial answers to the research questions are presented in the following section. The first question is twofold: “What degree of competence in estimating their own general level of writing in EFL do the students in the study possess, individually and as a group? Are there any differences in the students’ competence when it comes to their perceived *general* ability in EFL, which is here termed “off-task” assessment, and their self-assessment in relation to a more *particular* EFL task, also called “on-task” assessment?” Answers to this question are explored when investigating the self-assessments the students made in connection with doing their classroom writing assignment and after the writing task in the National Test of English, as well

as when these results are compared with the students' answers to the more holistic Self-assessment Questionnaire of writing (cf. 6.4).

The accuracy of the students' general off-task and more specific on-task self-assessments of their writing ability can be evaluated when matched against the teachers' grading of the same abilities, that is, in relation to syllabus criteria. In the national grading criteria for English A it is specifically stated that, "Pupils write letters, notes and summaries of material they have obtained in a clear and informative way that is appropriate for different purposes and audiences" (Skolverket, 2001, p. 92). Similarly for English B it says, "Pupils [...] put forward arguments, as well as express their own views and examine the merits of arguments put forward by others" (op.cit., p. 95).

The other research question "To what extent does the practice of self-assessment of EFL writing lead to more realistic learner views of attainment?" was explored by investigating whether repeated self-assessments might have influenced the learner's perceptions of own writing skills.

Issues related to research questions such as these are often discussed in the literature on self-assessment. They pertain to the question of whether the level of the course is a significant variable when it comes to the accuracy of self-assessment and whether more competent language students are more apt to underestimate their performance than less competent students are. An additional intention of the present chapter is thus to explore whether such assumptions can be identified in the results obtained by the different analyses.

The results are presented in the same order as the data were collected, that is, first the students' self-assessment of their general EFL writing ability (7.1.1), then the self-assessment of the classroom writing assignment (7.1.2), followed by the self-assessment of the writing test task (7.1.3). The section ends with a comparison between the results of the three different self-assessments (7.1.4).

### 7.1.1 Students' Self-assessment of their *General* EFL Writing Ability

As previous research has pointed out (cf. 3.2.2), students' beliefs and attitudes are important motivational concepts related to a variety of student variables, including achievement. Learners who believe, for example, that the capacity to learn a new language is within their control will not give up when faced with difficulties. To explore how the students as a group perceived their overall EFL writing ability, the initial step in the analysis of the data was to

calculate mean scores and standard deviations for the students' responses to all the statements concerning EFL writing ability, on the SAQw scale. This was done to give a picture of the global EFL writing level the students assessed themselves to have reached at the beginning of the course. The next step was to calculate mean scores and standard deviations for two of the most relevant statements given in the SAQw scale. These were the can-do statements that referred to the kind of writing the students were later asked to produce in the classroom writing assignment and in the National Test of English writing task.

The first, "I can express my personal feelings and experiences in a letter or a diary" (SAQw Q2) related to the Course A writing assignment. The second, "I can write an essay or a report, giving reasons for and/or against something" (SAQw Q4) related to the reasoned argument nature of the Course B writing assignment. Both statements relate directly to the writing test tasks in the National Test of English (i.e. for Course A and Course B, respectively).

The mean scores for the total student group, as well as its sub-division into two course groups and three achievement groups, are presented under separate headings. The distribution of the students' responses to the statements is also shown. The students marked their agreement with the statements on a scale ranging from 1: "not at all", followed by 2: "a little", 3: "fairly well", 4: "well", 5: "very well" and finally 6: "perfectly".

### Results of the Total Group

All the students involved in the study (the total group) assessed their ability to write in EFL, and specifically how well they could express themselves in a letter and when writing an essay. The results are reported in Table 7.1.1.

*Table 7.1.1 Means and standard deviations for SAQw Total Scale, SAQw Q2 and SAQw Q4. Total group (N=102).*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SAQw Total scale	4.21	0.83
SAQ w Q2. "I can express my personal feelings and experiences in a letter or a diary"	4.11	1.05
SAQw Q4. "I can write an essay or a report, giving reasons for and /or against something"	4.16	1.03

The means are all slightly to the right of the middle of the 6-point scale, which shows that the group had a tendency to assess their general writing ability in EFL positively. When it came to the distribution of individual responses to the two statements which related directly to the type of writing tasks investigated, 66% of the students stated that they could express themselves “well” or “very well” in a letter, and 68% that they could write an essay or a report arguing their case, “well” or “very well”. On the whole, the results show that the Total Group of students are fairly confident in their own EFL writing ability.

## Results by Sub-groups

### *Course Groups*

Course A is, as mentioned previously, the first and only compulsory course at the upper secondary school level. Course B is the following, non-obligatory option, but the course is required for students who wish to progress to university. Table 7.1.2 shows where the two course groups placed themselves in EFL writing ability on the SAQw scale.

*Table 7.1.2 Means and standard deviations for SAQw Total scale, SAQw Q2 and SAQw Q4. Course A (n=57) and Course B (n=45).*

	Course A		Course B	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SAQw Total scale	4.37	0.82	3.98	0.79
SAQ w Q2. "I can express my personal feelings and experiences in a letter or a diary"	4.28	1.03	3.89	1.05
SAQw Q4. "I can write an essay or a report, giving reasons for and /or against something"	4.40	1.05	3.83	.91

As the table shows, Course A students had a slightly higher mean score on all three self-assessed areas, notwithstanding the fact that Course B is at a higher educational level formally. This obviously has to do with the fact that there was an initial difference in achievement levels between these two course groups. Course A students had a higher grade point average from the final year of compulsory school (year 9) than Course B students (cf. 6.2.2). Regarding the self-assessments reported here, students doing Course A tended to choose the option “well” both with respect to the ways they thought they could express their feelings and experiences in a letter or diary, and write an

essay or report, which involved giving reason for and/or against something. Course B students self-assessed these competences slightly lower.

The distribution of responses to the “can do” statements on the scale, that is with regard to how well students assessed that they could write a letter (SAQw Q2), is illustrated in Figure 7.1.2.

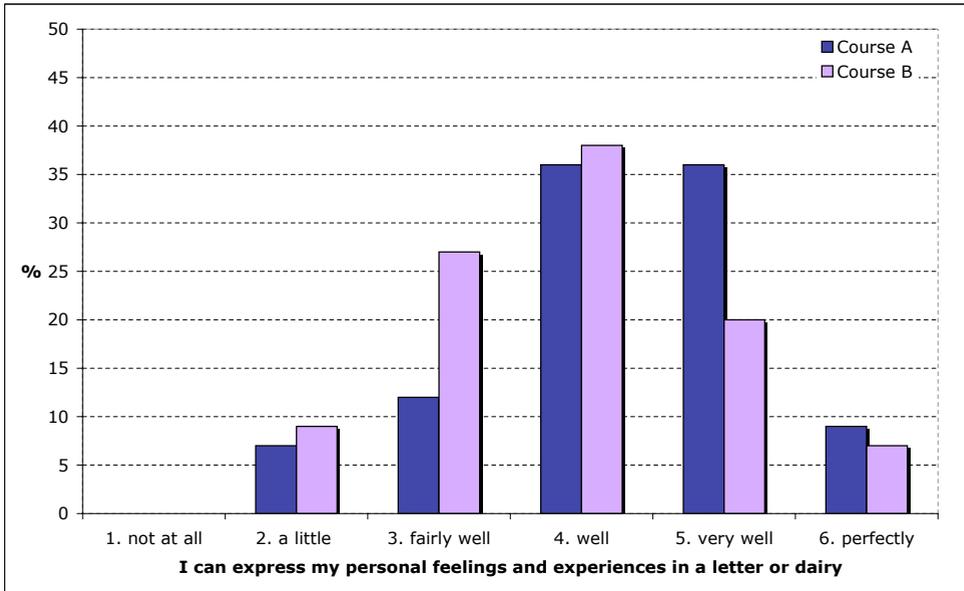
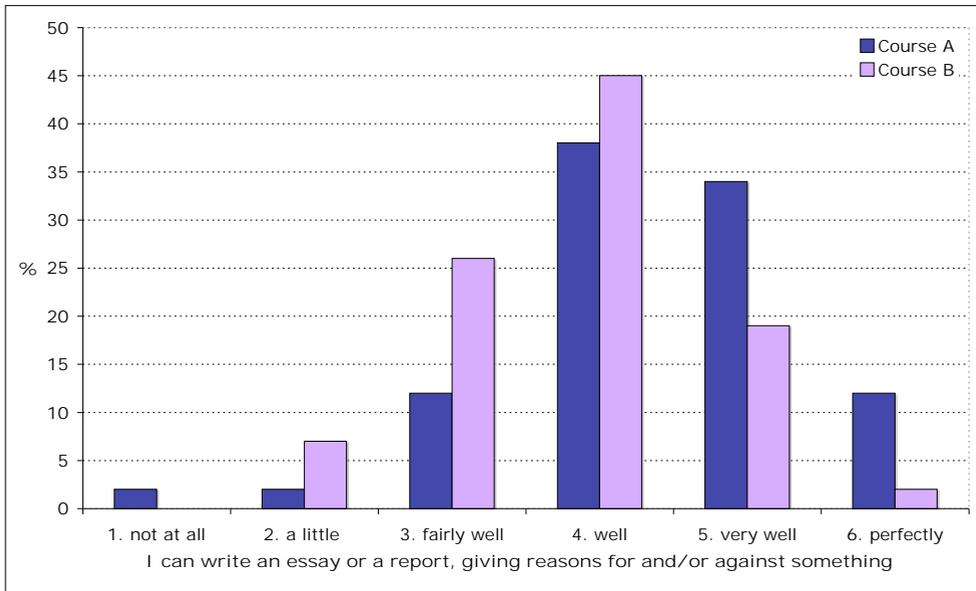


Figure 7.1.2 Students’ answers, expressed as percentages, on SAQw Q2, for Course A and Course B.

In all, 72% of the Course A students answered that they could write a letter “well” or “very well”, evenly distributed, while the corresponding figure in the Course B group of students is 58%. In all 45% of the Course A students also marked the alternatives “very well” and “perfectly”, while only 27% of the Course B students did so.

Figure 7.1.3 shows the distribution of answers to the question of how well students assessed their ability to write an essay (SAQw Q4).



*Figure 7.1.3 Students' answers, expressed as percentages, on SAQw Q4, for Course A and Course B.*

The tendency was the same between the groups when it came to the perceived ability to write an essay or report. To sum up, 72% of the Course A students stated that they would be able to do this “well” or “very well”, while the corresponding figure for Course B was 64%.

In other words, Course B students did not assess their competence as positively as Course A students did. Course A students thus believed themselves more able to write in EFL than the higher level Course B students, much in line with the discrepancy in grades between the two groups.

#### *Achievement Groups*

The results of the students' self-assessments of their writing ability, analyzed by the three achievement groups, are presented below in Table 7.1.3.

Table 7.1.3 Means and standard deviations of SAQw Total Scale, SAQw Q2 and SAQw Q4, for three achievement groups P (n=14), PwD (n=47) and PwSD (n=41).

	P		PwD		PwSD	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
SAQw (Total Scale)	3.25	.23	4.10	.66	4.60	.81
SAQw Q2. "I can express my personal feelings and experiences in a letter or a diary"	3.15	.80	3.94	.94	4.63	.98
SAQw Q4. "I can write an essay or a report, giving reasons for and /or against something"	3.36	.67	4.00	.92	4.55	1.04

Figure 7.1.4 represents the students’ self-assessed levels of proficiency in graphical form. It illustrates the progressive increase in mean scores on the SAQw scale.

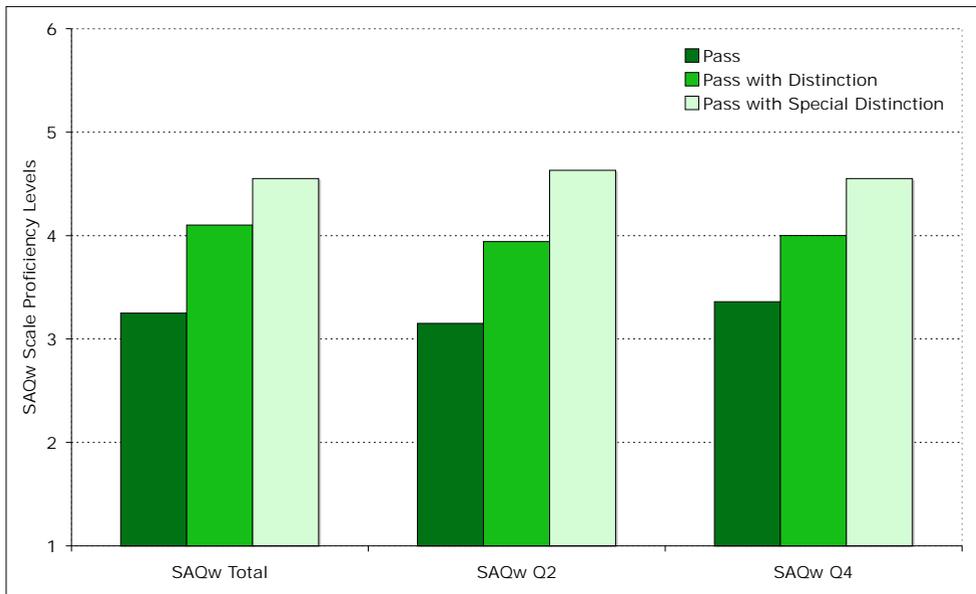


Figure 7.1.4 Means from Table 7.1.3 presented graphically (Scale: 1=not at all to 6 perfectly).

The Pass-group students marked on an average that they were able to do the things listed “fairly well”, while students in the Pass with Special Distinction-group marked that they would be able to do this from “well” to “very well”. The mean of Pass with Distinction-group students’ answers on the scale fell in between the other two groups’ mean scores. In other words, there was a

regular increase in mean scores consonant with the grade levels the three groups of students belong to.

An analysis of variance showed that the differences in means between the groups are statistically significant (SAQw Total Scale:  $F(2, 96)=17.69$ ,  $p=.001$ ; SAQw Q2:  $F(2, 99)=14.83$ ,  $p=.001$ ; SAQw Q4:  $F(2, 96)=9.31$ ,  $p=.001$ ).

Exploration of the distribution of responses showed that 23% of the Pass-group students marked that their ability to write a letter matched their level of English “a little”. Only 5% of Pass with Special Distinction-group students did so. This may be considered a relatively easy task the way it is described in SAQw Q2. When it came to their ability to write an essay, which is a somewhat more advanced task in comparison, 9% of Pass-group students also marked “a little”, while only 2% in of the students in the Pass with Special Distinction-group did so. Pass-group students did not mark the option “perfectly” on any one of the two statements, while students in both of the other groups did so.

The results indicate that the Pass-group students do not have the same confidence in their ability to write EFL as the students in the Pass with Distinction-group of students, who in turn, have less confidence in their ability than the Pass with Special Distinction-students. The pattern of results is very regular, both across achievement groups and skill areas. The pattern is also logical in that there is a steady and gradual increase in the confidence expressed by students when one moves from the lower grade level (P), through the middle level (PwD) to the highest level (PwSD).

To summarize, the total student group assessed their practical writing ability in EFL quite positively. Course A students assessed their ability somewhat higher than Course B students did, a difference which is in accordance with an objective background measure of ability (previous grades). Analysis of the achievement groups, showed that students with the lower grades assessed their ability less favourably than the students with the higher grades.

### 7.1.2 Students' Self-assessment of a Classroom Writing Assignment

As described previously (cf. 6.4.2), the students self-assessed their EFL writing (using Self-assessment Form 1 and 2) in direct connection with handing in the classroom writing assignment to their teacher. This was thus an

on-task self-assessment. The first step in the analyses of the data was to calculate means and standard deviations of the students’ first (SA1) and second (SA2) self-assessed grades of the classroom writing assignment. The second step in the analyses of the data was to do the same for the grades given on the assignment by the teachers (Grade). In further analyses of the data correlations between the different variables were calculated. These analyses were done to investigate whether the students may have benefited from the type of teacher feedback they had received and whether experience of self-assessment practice and self-assessment training may have led to more realistic learner views of attainment.

### Results of the Total Group

The students assessed their own level of performance on the written assignment twice, using grades (i.e. a 4-point scale), before handing in their assignment to the teacher. In other words, they assessed both the first and the final version of their texts. The students indicated the grade they thought they had achieved in relation to the set criteria each time. To give a picture of the results in the total group, the mean scores of the students’ two self-assessments of their classroom writing assignment (i.e. their first and their second prediction), as well as the final grade given by the teacher, are shown in Table 7.1.4.

*Table 7.1.4 Means and standard deviations of SA1 and SA2, and Grade, writing assignment. Total Group (n=97).*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SA 1	2.63	.68
SA 2	3.05	.60
Grade, writing assignment	2.70	.78

As can be seen, students in the total group assessed their writing to a strong Pass the first time, and to a Pass with Distinction the second time. Thus, students in the total group changed their assessments upward from the draft to the final version of their work. The correlation between these two self-assessments was  $r_s=.49^{**}$ .

The mean grade in the total student group, as set by their teachers on the final version of the writing assignment, was a strong Pass. This was lower than students’ self-assessments of the same version. Using teachers’ grades as

a criterion, the tendency was thus for the students as a group, to slightly overestimate their achievement.

An investigation of the distribution of individual student answers shows that out of the 35 students who assessed their first draft of the classroom writing assignment to a Pass, there were 11 students who received a final grade of Pass with Distinction, and 4 students who attained a Pass with Special Distinction. Only 1 out of the 15 students who received a grade of Pass with Special Distinction estimated his or her grade to this level. On the other hand, on the second and final self-assessment of the classroom writing assignment, there were 28 students with the grade of a Pass who estimated that their assignment would give them a Pass with Distinction, and 3 students who estimated their work to a Pass with Special Distinction. Eleven of the students who received a Pass with Distinction assessed their own work to a Pass with Special Distinction.

In order to investigate possible relationships between the individual students' self-assessments on the one hand and the received grade on the classroom writing assignment on the other, correlation coefficients were calculated. The analysis showed that the association between the students' self-assessments of the final version of their classroom writing assignment (SA2) and the teacher's grades was  $r_s=.37^{**}$ .

## Results by Sub-groups

### *Course Groups*

As previously mentioned, Course B follows on Course A, and the students in Course B have studied EFL somewhat longer. Table 7.1.5 reports the means and standard deviations to illustrate differences between the two course groups' self-assessment of their writing assignments and the final grades given by the teachers.

*Table 7.1.5 Means and standard deviations of SA1 and SA2, and Grade, writing assignment. Course A (n=57) and Course B (n=40).*

	Course A		Course B	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SA1	2.72	.75	2.50	.55
SA2	3.19	.55	2.85	.62
Grade, writing assignment	2.77	.76	2.60	.81

Figure 7.1.5 illustrates the main results graphically.

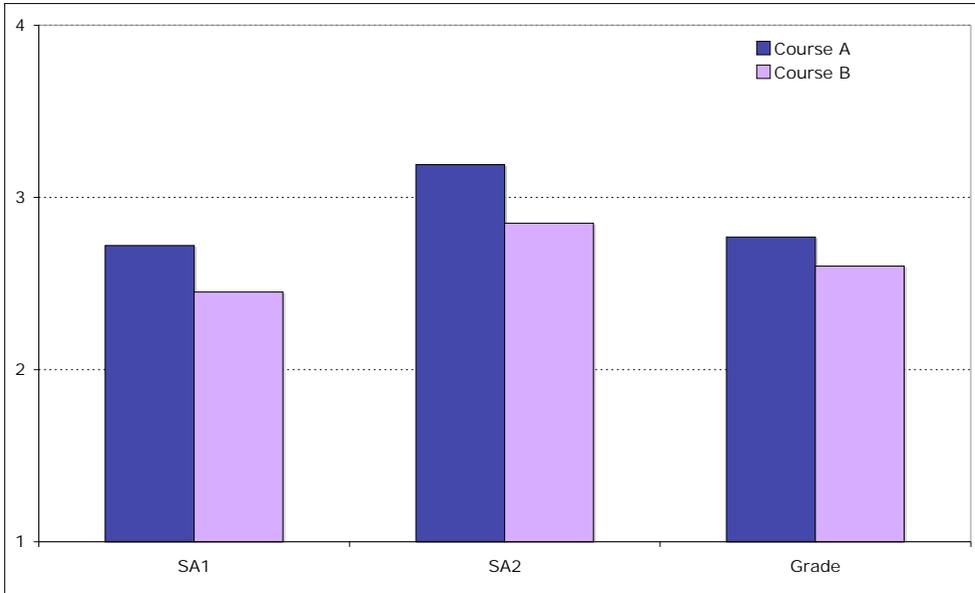


Figure 7.1.5 Means from Table 7.1.5 presented graphically (Grade scale: 1=F, 2=P, 3=PwD, 4=PwSD).

The analysis shows that Course A students assessed their writing at a level equalling a very strong Pass on the first version of the text (SA1), and at a Pass with Distinction on the final version (SA2). When comparing the groups one may conclude that Course B students assessed their writing results slightly lower than Course A students did. Course B students assessed their draft version (SA1) to a strong Pass and the final version (SA2) to a very strong Pass. The average grade, as set by the two teachers of the groups, was a strong Pass in both cases. Correlations between the two variables showed that for Course A the relationship was  $r_s=.60^{**}$  (i.e. statistically significant at the .01 level) in contrast to Course B where no significant relationship could be established ( $r_s=.29$ ).

A breakdown of the results by individual grades showed the manner in which students in the two course groups differed. In Course A, where students assessed themselves highly, it was found that 7 students assessed themselves to a Pass with Special Distinction on the SA1 and 15 on the SA2, while only 11 students attained the grade of Pass with Special Distinction. Course A students were also the ones who received the higher grades from the teacher, and they anticipated even higher grades (e.g. 30 students assessed themselves

to a Pass with Distinction on SA1, and 38 on SA2 but only 22 students actually received this grade).

Course B students also over-estimated their performance in relation to teacher grades, but were more conservative in their estimates. For example there were no students that assessed their performance to a Pass with Special Distinction on SA1, and only 4 students who did so on SA2. Only 4 students received this grade from their teacher.

The differences between the course groups were investigated further by calculating correlations between the students' individual self-assessment of their classroom writing assignment and teacher assessment. No significant correlation was found between Course A students' self-assessment of the classroom writing assignment (SA2) and the teacher's grades ( $r_s=.25$ ). Course B students' self-assessment on the other hand showed significant correlation with their teacher's grades ( $r_s=.52^{**}$ ). In this sense Course B students, who had had more self-assessment training (cf. 6.4.1), conformed more closely to the teacher's grading.

This finding points to self-assessment practice resulting in increased agreement between students' and teachers' assessments. The indication is that experience of self-assessment practices is related to the students' ability to judge their performance.

#### *Achievement groups*

To further explore whether the students' level of EFL proficiency is related to ability to self-assess their achievement level, the means and standard deviations were calculated for the three achievement groups' self-assessments of their classroom writing assignment, as were also the resulting grades (Table 7.1.6).

*Table 7.1.6 Means and standard deviations of students' SA1 and SA2, and Grade, writing assignment for three achievement groups P(n=13), PwD (n=45) and PwSD (n=39).*

Variable	P		PwD		PwSD	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SA1	2.08	.49	2.64	.53	2.79	.80
SA 2	2.31	.63	3.00	.48	3.36	.49
Grade, writing assignment	1.77	.60	2.73	.69	2.97	.71

All three achievement groups estimated that they had improved their results when they handed in the assignment the second time. Only Pass-group students assessed themselves higher than the teachers' grade the first time they self-assessed their work, but all three groups tended to assess themselves somewhat higher than their teachers did the second time, that is when they handed in the final version of their work.

An analysis of variance showed that the three achievement groups differed significantly with regard to the total scores (SA1:  $F(2, 94)=5.99, p=.004$ ; SA2:  $F(2, 94)=21.77, p=.001$ ; and Grades, writing assignment:  $F(2, 94)=15.19, p=.001$ ).

The relationship between individual students' first and second self-assessment across the three achievement groups was only significant in the Pass with Special Distinction-group (P:  $r_s = .38$ , PwD:  $r_s = .28$  and PwSD:  $r_s = .55^{**}$ ). The pattern of relationships between the second self-assessment of the classroom writing assignment (SA2) and the teacher's grades was similar (P:  $r_s = .45$ , PwD:  $r_s = .00$  and PwSD:  $r_s = .34^*$ ). In short it was found that students in the Pass-group tended to overestimate their grades somewhat more often in comparison with students in the other two achievement groups. More proficient students (i.e. PwD and PwSD) self-assessed themselves in accordance with the grades given them somewhat more often than less proficient (i.e. P) students did.

### 7.1.3 Students' Self-assessment of a Writing Test Task

The National Tests of English are designed to constitute a concretization of syllabus goals for Course A and Course B. The test results are intended to function as guidelines for teachers in setting students' final grades in English (cf. 2.2). The self-assessments students made directly after having completed the test are in this way different from those made after the classroom writing assignment, even if they may both be described as on-task self-assessments. The most essential differences are that the test situation must be characterized as much more high-stakes than an ordinary classroom assignment and that students are not able to revise or receive any feedback on the writing test task.

The syllabus goal for EFL writing ability which best matches the National Test of English Writing content and the skills that students were expected to demonstrate in the spring term of 2003, in both Course A and Course B, was to write an essay. Both writing tasks required students to take a

stand on a given topic and give reasons for and/or against a set of statements related to the issue (cf. 6.3.2).

The first step in the analysis of the data was to calculate mean scores of grades and standard deviations of students' self-assessments of their writing test task performance, as well as the same for the final grades on the writing test task given by the teachers. Correlations between the variables were also calculated. These analyses were done to determine the degree of agreement between students' self-assessment and the assessments made by their teachers, and to determine whether students who did not assess themselves in the same way as their teacher did tended to over- or underestimate their grades. It was also done to investigate whether previous experience of self-assessments during the term could be identified in terms of stronger associations.

### Results of the Total Group

The results of students' self-assessments of their National Test of English writing test task (SAWT) and the grade given by the teacher on the test are set out in Table 7.1.7.

*Table 7.1.7 Means and standard deviations of students' self-assessed writing test grade (SAWT) and the teachers' grade (Grade, writing test). Total group (n=100).*

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
SAWT	2.81	.72
Grade, writing test	2.95	.87

A t-test of the difference between the means in Table 7.1.7 showed that the obtained difference is not significant ( $t(99)=1.619$ ,  $p=.109$ ). On average, students' judgement of their test results, can thus be said to correspond fairly well with the grades they were awarded.

The results of a closer investigation of how students' self-assessments related to their teachers' grades are shown in Table 7.1.8

Table 7.1.8 Cross-tabulation of students' self-assessed writing test results (SAWT) in relation to teachers' grades (Grade, writing test). Total group (n=100, i.e. the frequencies quoted below can also be read as percentages)

SAWT	Grade, writing test				Total n
	F	P	PwD	PwSD	
F	1	0	0	0	1
P	2	13	18	1	34
PwD	1	9	21	17	48
PwSD	2	0	4	11	17
Total	6	22	43	29	100

As can be seen, students whose self-assessment of the writing test task did not coincide with their writing test results, tended to underrate rather than overrate their grades, with twice as many underestimates as overestimations (36 and 18, respectively). For example, 18 students who had assessed their test result to a Pass, received a Pass with Distinction, and 17 students who assessed their writing test task to a Pass with Distinction actually received a Pass with Special Distinction. To a large degree, it was also the students who attained the higher grades on the test who tended to underestimate their performance.

Calculation of the correlation between students' self-assessments of the test task and teacher grades showed that it was statistically significant ( $r_s=.45^*$ ).

## Results by Sub-groups

### Course Groups

In order to investigate whether any differences between Course A and Course B students could be established due to the level of English students had reached, further analyses were conducted. Means and standard deviations of students' self-assessment after writing part of the National Test of English, as well as the final grades given by their teachers, were calculated. These are shown in Table 7.1.9 and illustrated graphically in Figure 7.1.6.

Table 7.1.9 Means and standard deviations of students' self-assessed writing test grades (SAWT) and the teachers' grades (Grade, writing test). Course A (n=56) and Course B (n=44).

	Course A		Course B	
	M	SD	M	SD
SAWT	2.84	.71	2.77	.74
Grade, writing test	3.21	.71	2.61	.94

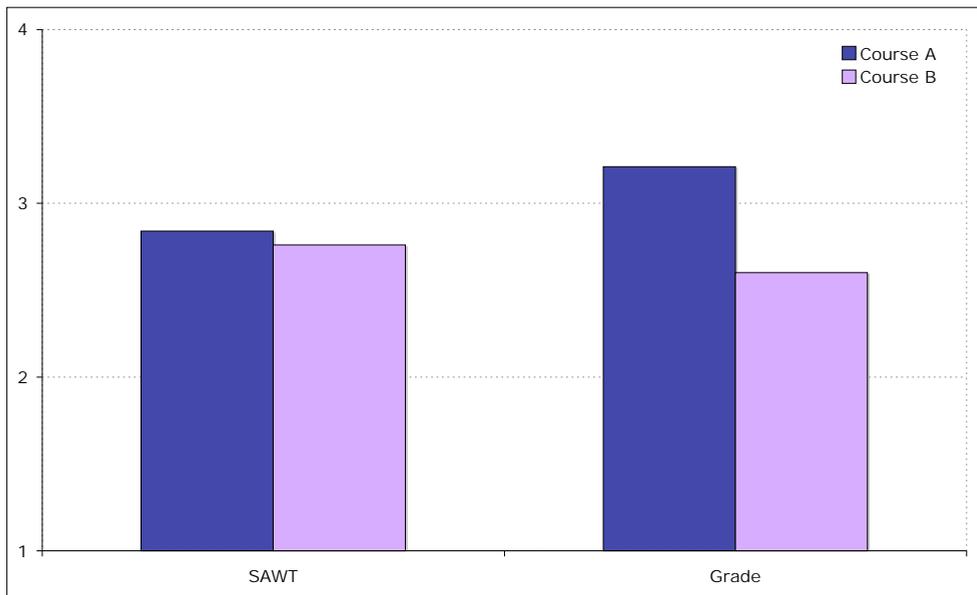


Figure 7.1.6 Means from Table 7.1.9 presented graphically (Grade scale: 1=F, 2=P, 3=PwD, 4=PwSD).

As can be seen, Course A students have a marginally higher self-assessment mean score after the writing test than Course B students. Course A students also attained higher grades on the writing test task compared to Course B students.

A t-test of the difference between the means obtained showed that the difference was significant for Course A ( $t(55) = 4.328, p = .001$ ), but not for Course B ( $t(43) = 1.05, p = .302$ ).

The relationship between students' self-assessments and their teacher's grades was further investigated by cross tabulating the two categories of scores (Tables 7.1.10 and 7.1.11).

Table 7.1.10 Cross-tabulation of students' self-assessed writing test grades (SAWT) and teachers' grades (Grade, writing test). Course A (n=56).

SAWT	Grade, writing test				Total n	
	F	P	PwD	PwSD		
F	0	0	0	0	0	
P	0	7	11	1	19	(34%)
PwD	0	2	13	12	27	(48%)
PwSD	0	0	2	8	10	(18%)
Total	0	9 (16%)	26 (46%)	21 (38%)	56	(100%)

Table 7.1.11 Cross-tabulation of students' self-assessed writing test grades (SAWT) and teachers' grades (Grade, writing test). Course B (n=44).

SAWT	Grade, writing test				Total n	
	F	P	PwD	PwSD		
F	1	0	0	0	1	(2%)
P	2	6	7	0	15	(34%)
PwD	1	7	8	5	21	(48%)
PwSD	2	0	2	3	7	(16%)
Total	6 (14%)	13 (29%)	17 (39%)	8 (18%)	44	(100%)

From the results set out in Table 7.1.10 it may be concluded that the majority of students in Course A made fairly conservative estimates of their possible achievement directly after having taken the test. For example, the highest grade (PwSD) went to twice as many students when the teacher decided.

The relationship between the Course A students' individual self-assessments of their writing results directly after having done the test and the awarded grade was  $r_s = .59^{**}$ , that is, statistically significant ( $p < .01$ ). The Course B students showed a lower correlation between self-assessments and test results,  $r_s = .30^*$ .

#### Achievement Groups

The analyses performed for Course A and Course B regarding the relation between the teachers' grades and the students' self-assessed grades of the

writing test are here repeated, this time by dividing the total student group into three achievement groups (Table 7.1.12).

*Table 7.1.12 Means and standard deviations of students' self-assessed grade (SAWT) and the teachers' (Grade, writing test) for three achievement groups P (n=14), PwD (n=46) and PwSD (n=40).*

	P		PwD		PwSD	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
SAWT	2.36	.74	2.65	.60	3.15	.70
Grade, writing test	1.71	.61	2.85	.67	3.50	.64

The results in Table 7.1.12 show that the mean scores in the different achievement groups follow a steady progression. Students in the Pass-group obtain lower mean scores than students in the Pass with Distinction-group, who in turn obtain lower mean scores than students in the Pass with Special Distinction-group.

Analyses of variance revealed significant differences between the means obtained both for SAWT:  $F(2, 97)=9.803, p=.001$ ; and for Grades, writing test:  $F(2, 97)=40.375, p=.001$ .

The self-assessments made directly after the test and the test results showed no significant intercorrelation for the Pass- and Pass with Distinction-group ( $r_s = -.05$  and  $r_s = .24$  respectively), whereas there was a significant correlation for the Pass with Special Distinction-group ( $r_s = .47^{**}$ ). These results indicate that the more proficient students are more apt at self-assessing their EFL grades than the less proficient students.

When students did not self-assess their test task in accordance with their received grades, there was a tendency for less proficient students to overestimate their test task results compared to more proficient students who instead tended to underestimate their ability and results. On the writing test task for example, there were two students in the Pass-group who assessed themselves to a Pass with Distinction and a Pass with Special Distinction, and who received a Fail. In the Pass with Special Distinction-group, on the other hand, there were 11 of the 23 students who attained a Pass with Special Distinction, but who assessed their results to the lower grade of Pass with Distinction. These results are similar to the results obtained for the classroom writing assignment (cf. 7.1.2).

#### 7.1.4 Relationships between Students' Off- and On-task Self-assessments

After having made separate analyses of the students' self-assessments of both *general* and *particular* written EFL work (as presented in 7.1.1 – 7.1.3) the relationship between them was investigated.

To explore the relation between the students' off- and on-task self-assessments two more analyses were performed. First the students' mean scores on the off-task self-assessments (i.e. SAQw, SAQw Q2 and SAQw Q4) were compared with the students' mean scores on the on-task self-assessments (i.e. SA1, SA2 and SAWT), as well as their grades on the classroom writing assignment and the writing test task. Then, in order to investigate possible relationships between all the students' different off- and on-task self-assessments on the one hand, and the grades they were awarded by the teacher on the other, correlation coefficients were calculated. As before, the full complement of students was investigated, as were also the sub-groups.

The off-task assessments "I can express my personal feelings and experiences in a letter or a diary" (SAQw 2) and "I can write an essay or a report, giving reasons for and/or against something" (SAQw 4) are directly related to both of the on-task assessments made by the students on their classroom writing assignments and the writing test task. To briefly recapitulate these, Course A students were to write a letter exchanging experiences of their own and a fictive Commonwealth character's culture, and their writing test task was to write a letter to the editor taking a stand on some conceptions about Sweden and the Swedes. Course B students' writing assignment was to write an essay discussing the influence of the Media on everyday life, and the writing test task was to write a letter of complaint after having listened to a recorded conversation.

#### Results of the Total Group

Before the comparison, the previous results are first summarized very briefly:

Students assessed their overall ability to write quite positively. Their judgement was that they were "well" being able to perform the writing tasks specified (cf. Table 7.1.1). On the students' first on-task self-assessment, the classroom writing assignment, students assessed their writing to a strong Pass the first time (SA1) and to a Pass with Distinction the second time (SA2). The teachers' grades on the classroom writing assignment for the total student

group averaged a strong Pass, that is a level inbetween the two student self-assessments (cf. Table 7.1.2). On the second on-task self-assessment (the writing test, SAWT), the students also assessed themselves to have reached a strong Pass. They also received a grade score, which was likewise strong Pass (cf. Table 7.1.3).

It may be concluded, on the basis of the above, that the students in general have a reasonably good perception of their ability to write in EFL, both off- and on-task.

Further correlation coefficients were then calculated in order to investigate possible relationships between students' off-task and on-task self-assessments and the received grades. Students' own perceived ability to write EFL as measured by the off-task self-assessment of writing ability scale SAQw, in terms of "not at all" to "perfectly", had a correlation with the grades received on the classroom writing assignment of  $r_s=.36^{**}$ . Students' own predicted ability to fulfil the requirements of the genre of writing expected of them (SAQw Q2 and SAQw Q4) and the teachers' grades on the assignment, also showed correlations that were similar or lower ( $r_s=.40^{**}$  and  $r_s=.23^*$  for the two statements respectively).

The distribution of the estimates showed that the tendency was for students in general to overestimate their writing ability when self-assessing off-task. This was in particular the case for students who received the lower grades on the classroom writing assignment. For example, 5 students who self-assessed themselves as "very well" and "perfectly" able to write EFL (as described in SAQw) received a Pass on the writing assignment, and 12 students who did so received a Pass with Distinction. Only 2 of the 15 students who received a Pass with Special Distinction had assessed themselves able to fulfil the can-do statements "very well" or "perfectly".

The correlation between students' individual predictive self-assessments of their *overall* ability to write in EFL and the grade they received on the written part of the National Test of English was  $r_s= .60^{**}$ . When it came to students' self-assessments of how well they would be able to write a letter, and a reasoned argument essay, and their grades on the test where they were asked to produce these types of writing, the association was slightly weaker ( $r_s= .56^{**}$  and  $r_s= .44^{**}$  respectively). Students whose off-task self-assessment of their EFL writing ability was not in accordance with the grade the teachers gave them on the writing test task, tended to underestimate rather than overestimate their results. To a large degree, it was

also students who attained the higher grades on the test who tended to underestimate their performance.

To sum up, there was a clear association between students' off-task self-assessments and the corresponding grades they received from their teachers on the classroom writing assignment and the writing test task. Students tended to overestimate their EFL writing ability when self-assessing off-task, in relation to the classroom assignment results, but underestimate their EFL writing ability in relation to the writing test task.

## Results by Sub-groups

### *Course Groups*

The previous results for the course groups are, as above, first summarized:

As reported Course A students indicated by means of the SAQw that they were “well” able to fulfil the criteria expected of them (cf. Table 7.1.1). To begin with they self-assessed their classroom writing assignment to a very strong Pass (the first self-assessment, SA1), and then to a Pass with Distinction (the second self-assessment, SA2) (cf. Table 7.1.4). On the self-assessment after the writing test task (SAWT) Course A students' mean score equalled a very strong Pass (cf. Table 7.1.9). Course B students also reached a mean score on the SAQw that was close to “well”. They assessed their first version of the classroom writing assignment (SA1) to a strong Pass, and the final version (SA2) as well as the writing test task (SAWT) to a very strong Pass. Course A students consistently self-assessed themselves somewhat higher than Course B students did, and also attained somewhat higher grades on both the classroom writing assignment and the writing test task compared to Course B students. Previous grade statistics would seem to warrant this difference (cf. 6.2.2).

It can be concluded on the basis of the previous analyses that both Course A and Course B students tended to rank their writing ability higher than their teachers' did, when the students general self-assessments were related to their received grades on the classroom writing assignment. In other words, students in both course groups generally believed that they could write a letter or an essay better before actually having done so, that is, compared to the attained grade on the classroom writing assignment. On the writing test task, on the other hand, Course A students self-assessed themselves lower than the grades received from their teachers, while Course B students self-assessed themselves higher, and closer to the actual grades received.

The analyses then performed of the different relationships gave the additional result that Course A students' off-task self-assessment of their writing ability (SAQw, SAQw Q2 and SAQw Q4) showed no significant correlations with the grades they received from their teachers on the classroom writing assignment ( $r_s=.15$ ,  $r_s=.24$  and  $r_s=.06$ ). The relationship between Course A students' predictive and off-task self-assessment of their ability to write EFL and the grades attained on the test, was on the other hand significant at  $r_s=.42^{**}$ . Further, the relationship between the self-assessments of their own ability to write a letter (SAQw Q2) and the test results was  $r_s=.39^{**}$ , but there was no significant relationship between their assessment of being able to write an essay (SAQw Q4) and test results ( $r_s=.25$ ). The results thus indicate that Course A students' off-task self-assessments only correlate with their estimates of being able to write a letter, but not with their estimates of their ability to write an essay.

The same analyses were performed in the other group (i.e. Course B). These students' off-task self-assessments showed significant relationships with their teacher's grades on the classroom writing assignment ( $r_s=.63^{**}$ ,  $r_s=.58^{**}$ , and  $r_s=.55^{**}$ ). There was an even higher correlation ( $r_s=.78^{**}$ ) between their predictive off-task self-assessment, and their teacher's grade. Their off-task self-assessment of being able to write a letter and being able to write an essay correlated at about the same level ( $r_s=.70^{**}$  and  $r_s=.61^{**}$  respectively). Moreover Course B students' off-task assessments had a significant relationship with their test task results. The analyses showed that the Course B students' off-task self-assessments were clearly related to the grades they received on both of the two written assignments.

#### *Achievement Groups*

To briefly summarize the results described previously (cf. 7.1.1. to 7.1.3) the students' mean scores on the self-assessments made by the students, that is SAQw, SA1 and SA2 and SAWT, proved to reflect the students' progression as described by their in-coming grades. The obtained results indicate that Pass-group students did not have as high confidence in their ability to write EFL as other students did. This progression of EFL proficiency was also reflected in the teachers' judgements as expressed in their grades.

The results of the additional investigation then performed showed that students' individual predictive off-task assessment and the results of the classroom writing assignment showed no significant relationship ( $r_s=.34$ ,  $r_s=.08$ , and  $r_s=.24$  for respective achievement group). The results of the

writing test task and the SAQw showed no significant correlation ( $r_s = -.01$ ) for the Pass-group, while there was an association for the Pass with Distinction- and Pass with Special Distinction-group ( $r_s = .40^{**}$  and  $r_s = .43^{**}$  respectively).

The results showed a consistent tendency for less proficient students to overestimate both their EFL writing ability (off-task) and their assignment or task results (on-task) compared to more proficient students who instead tended to underestimate their ability and results (cf. 7.1.2 and 7.1.3).

To summarize the overall relationships between the students' off- and on-task self-assessments and received teacher grades, an overview of the correlation coefficients is given in Tables 7.1.13 and 7.1.14.

Table 7.1.13 Summary of the relation between students' self-assessments (off-task and on-task), and teachers' grades. SAQw Total Scale and SA2

Relation between Students' Self-assessments and Teachers' Grades		
	Off-task SAQw	On-task Classroom Writing Assignment SA2
Total Group	$r_s = .36^{**}$	$r_s = .37^{**}$
Course A	$(r_s = .15)$	$(r_s = .25)$
Course B	$r_s = .63^{**}$	$r_s = .52^{**}$

Table 7.1.14 Summary of the relation between students' self-assessments (off-task and on-task), and teachers' grades. SAQw Total Scale and SAWT

Relation between Students' Self-assessments and Teachers' Grades		
	Off-task SAQw	On-task National Test of English, Writing test task SAWT
Total Group	$r_s = .60^{**}$	$r_s = .45^*$
Course A	$r_s = .42^{**}$	$r_s = .59^{**}$
Course B	$r_s = .78^{**}$	$r_s = .30^*$

### 7.1.5 Summary and Reflections

The student estimates of performance levels are explored in two dimensions, that is, both from a group and an individual perspective. There is, on the one hand, the question of how accurate different groups' assessments of their EFL writing ability are, how they understand and judge their activities and

capacities at the *group* level, and on the other hand how they understand and judge their activities and capacities at the *individual* level. A student groups' self-assessment can be broadly in agreement with a teacher's, but within every group there can be a range of differences between individuals. Looking only at the mean values of the results, these differences are not apparent. Correlation coefficients, on the other hand, capture the degree of variability at the individual level.

Not only the individual perspective is important, as groups or classes too are working units, whose attitudes and beliefs about their performance influence the learning environment for the group in question. In a communicative language classroom, the students are expected to interact in the learning process. The individual students on the other hand also have their own thoughts about their own level of proficiency, which also influences their learning.

### Off-Task Assessments

In the present chapter, students' perceptions of their *general* EFL writing ability, termed off-task self-assessment as it was not related to any particular writing task, was explored first. The total group (i.e. the entire sample of students in the study) seemed confident and assessed their competence favourably, as indicated by the SAQw mean scores. As the group had a relatively high standard of EFL skills compared with the national cohort (cf. 6.2.2), this seems to be a reasonable outcome.

The supplementary analyses involved the division of the total group into course groups (A and B) and achievement (grade) groups (cf. Figure 7.1.1). Mean scores showed that Course A students were somewhat more confident about their ability than were the Course B students as the self-assessment data revealed (7.1.2). This is an indication that Course A students were better at EFL as indeed their in-coming grades (i.e. from compulsory school) also show. The results provide support for a certain degree of validity in the self-assessments made.

The achievement groups, based on these in-coming grades in English from grade 9, followed the expected pattern with regard to general EFL writing ability. Pass-group students self-assessed themselves lower than Pass with Distinction-group students who, in turn, self-assessed themselves lower than Pass with Special Distinction-group students.

## On-task Assessments

Students' on-task self-assessments, that is their self-assessments of their ability to write EFL in connection with a *particular* task, in this case both the classroom writing assignment and the National Test of English Writing task, were also investigated. This was done using student self-assessments in the form of grades and teacher awarded grades.

### *Classroom Writing Assignment*

The total group of students' self-assessments of the classroom writing assignment results were fairly accurate, with a slight underestimation on the first occasion and a slight overestimation on the second occasion. The latter was after teacher feedback and revision of the work initially done, and may thus indicate positive influence of the type of feedback given, as well as of the self-assessment training (Taras, 2001; 2002; 2003; Sadler, 1989). Previous research by for example Black et al. (2003), Gottlieb (2000), Janssen-van Dieten (1989; 1992), MacDonald and Boud (2003), Oscarson (1980), Ross et al. (1999), Sullivan and Hall, (1997), among others, have emphasized the need for self-assessment training.

The tendency to under- or overestimate on the part of some students could be an indication of a lack of deeper understanding of the grading criteria, and what the criteria actually stand for, as research by for example Falchikov and Boud (1989), Kirby and Downs (2007), Orsmond et al. (2000) indicate. This tendency may also point to the need for more long-term self-assessment training. Another plausible explanation is that these students miscalculated how much they could actually improve in terms of grades through revising their work. Students may have had an overly optimistic belief in the extent to which their EFL writing and their grades could improve over a couple of weeks. There seems to be a need to work more in-depth with grading criteria, and in also in accordance with the writing process, to help students become aware of how much time the language learning process may take. This is especially important when it comes to learners in the lower achievement groups and at lower proficiency levels, who may not have come in contact with the level of language they are expected to function at, and which is required for the higher grades.

Some of the correlations between the students' self-assessments of the writing assignment and the teachers' grades were non-significant. The writing assignment was the first time within the present study (as well as within the SALL project) that the participants self-assessed their writing, which may be

part of the explanation why a certain number of individual student and teacher assessments did not match.

To investigate on-task self-assessments further, the sets of data pertaining to the two course groups (A and B) were analyzed separately. There were two noticeable differences between the groups. One was that the relationship between students' self-assessments (SA1 and SA2) was stronger for Course A than for Course B (cf. 7.1.2). The other difference was that Course A students' self-assessments of the writing assignment and the teacher's grades on the same showed little correspondence. Course B students' self-assessments and the teacher's grades on the other hand, showed a higher correspondence, indicating that they judged their classroom writing assignment results more accurately. Whether this is due to the fact that they had a more realistic view of their work, had had more self-assessment training through their participation in the pilot project of the present study, or simply had learned to read their teacher's principles for grading and could match their own assessment with hers, is of course impossible to know with certainty. The most likely explanation would seem to be the longer experience Course B students had had with self-assessment activities.

#### *Writing Test Task*

The total student group's self-assessment of the National Test of English writing test task was also fairly accurate, but the students had a tendency to slightly underestimate their results. As this was a high-stakes test situation, which often results in a great deal of apprehension among students, the result is understandable. The strength of the relationship between the students' self-assessments of their EFL writing ability and the grades they received on the writing task was closer than the above relationship between their self-assessment of the classroom writing assignment and grades received on the same. On the basis of these results it may be concluded that students had a reasonably accurate perception of their ability to write EFL in on-task situations.

Course A students in particular underestimated their grades (Table 7.1.9). Given that previous research has found that more proficient students have a tendency to underestimate their performance while less proficient students tend to overestimate (cf. review of related research 5.3) one may speculate whether the fact that Course A students were at a relatively high proficiency level, might not be a plausible explanation of their tendency to underestimate their ability.

## Comparison between Off- and On-Task Assessments

The comparison between students' off- and on-task self-assessments with the teacher grades was done to investigate how competent the students were at estimating their own EFL writing level, as well as to see whether the self-assessment training provided in the study helped students become more accurate in their estimations.

In the total student group there was significant correspondence between the students' off-task self-assessments and the teacher grades on the classroom writing assignment. This is supported by earlier research by Peirce, Swain and Hart (1993) and Janssen-van Dieten (1989, 1992). It does not on the other hand coincide with the results on off- and on-task self-assessment of Butler and Lee (2006), but as their research was based on a younger sample of students this may be one explanation to the difference in outcome. Students tended to overestimate their ability to write a letter or an essay, in comparison with their actual performance on such tasks. The learners' general beliefs about what they may be able to achieve, especially at the beginning of a course and the appreciation of the specific demands and requirements of a task set later on in the course, may of course differ substantially. Earlier research also suggests that learners with more elementary skills have the tendency to overestimate their abilities (cf. review of related research 5.3).

The relationship between students' self-assessments of their general EFL writing ability and the grades they received on the National Test of English writing test task was stronger than the relationship between their self-assessment of, and grades received on, the classroom writing assignment. A reasonable explanation for the different self-assessments made between the writing test task and the writing assignment is the high-stakes situation the tests represent. These results tend to concur with outcomes of other early studies on test scores by Oscarson (1980). The students had also practiced self-assessment during the course, and it is possible that they had become better at assessing their ability as a result of that.

Further analyses of sub-groups and the relation between the off- and on-task self-assessments of EFL writing ability showed some differences.

Course A students' general EFL assessments showed no significant correlations with the teachers' grades on the classroom writing assignment. Apart from the simple fact that students may have been no good at judging their ability, the students' assessments may be a result of their inexperience with the criteria and demands of Course A, as well as of the fact that the

classroom writing assignment was one of the first more extensive written assignments that the students were faced with in EFL. This, together with their lack of experience of self-assessment as such may have led them to misjudge their performance to a large degree. One result seems surprising. The students' self-assessments of their general EFL ability and their ability to write a letter showed significant correlation, while there was no significant correlation in relation to their ability to write an essay. This may have to do with the students' interpretation of the very word 'essay'. Their understanding may have been that writing an essay is a more demanding task than just producing a piece of text at their own level.

Course B students' self-assessments of their general ability to write EFL (SAQw) and their self-assessments of their draft of the classroom writing assignment (SA1) showed no significant relationship, implying that students did not assess these two in the same manner. Their second assessment (SA2), however, is significantly correlated with the results of the writing assignment. A possible explanation to this could be that some students (but not all) believed that because their draft was not finished, they could not assess it as highly as they did when they handed in their final version, in spite of instructions to the contrary. Some students may then have assessed their draft to a Fail, because they believed that it had not yet reached the criteria for a Pass or higher grade. The correspondence between teacher grades and students' general self-assessments when predicting their test task results were higher.

The slightly different nature of the two writing test tasks, where Course B students had to first listen to recorded information to be able to start writing whereas the Course A task was a traditional paper-and-pencil one, may have made an important difference in how the two groups experienced their performance and consequently how they assessed their pending results.

Exploration into the achievement groups showed an expected progression of mean score results, implying that a lower achievement group assessed their EFL ability lower than a higher achievement group did. This trend was consistent in the self-assessments of their classroom writing assignment as well as in the writing test task. The results of the correlation analyses also indicate that more proficient students are able to self-assess their EFL grades more accurately, in relation to their teachers' grades, than less proficient students. This result is supported by results from other studies which indicate that high achievement students are more successful in their assessment of their own work and abilities (cf. review of the related research

5.3). There was also a clear inclination for students with lower grades to overestimate and students with higher grades to underestimate their results.

The results form a variable picture, where the nature of assessments seems to depend on the type of written text referred to. The students' ability to self-assess off- and on-tasks in relation to grades given them by their teacher was overall fairly accurate judging by the calculated mean scores and cross-tabulated results. The correlation coefficients were not all significant however. There is, of course, a difference between analyses at the group level, using means and standard deviations, and the analyses on the individual level, using correlations. There is also the issue of the relevance of using grades (both students' and teachers' grades) to determine the accuracy of students' self-assessments. These issues will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

## 7.2 Students' Self-assessments of *Specific* Writing Skills

To delve further into the question of how competent students are at estimating their EFL writing skills, analyses of the students' self-assessments of *specific* skills were also performed. The results answer the double research question "What specific language skills do the students focus on when assessing their writing in EFL, and are the students able to realistically identify them as satisfactory or in need of improvement?"

The research questions are related to the aims specified in the syllabus for EFL at the upper secondary school level. They state that school should ensure that pupils "develop their ability to analyse, work with and improve their language in the direction of greater clarity, variation and formal accuracy" (Skolverket, 2001, p. 89). The syllabus goes on to say that school should aim to ensure that students "take increasing responsibility for developing their language ability" (op.cit). The extent to which the student group in the study is able to fulfil these syllabus goals was probed by examining the students' answers to Self-assessment Form 1, Question 2 (cf. 6.4.4). Here the students were asked to indicate on a list of EFL writing skills comprising Spelling, Grammar, Sentence Structure, Paragraphing, Vocabulary and Punctuation, which of these skills they were "satisfied with" and/or "could improve/could have made mistakes on" when assessing their writing assignment before handing it in to their teacher. This meant that the students could mark any number of the skills listed, and also that their being "satisfied with" one skill did not exclude the possibility that they also checked

the option that they “could improve” or “could have made mistakes on” the specific skill in question. Students could mark both, only one of them, or none. All the writing skill categories were marked by at least 30% of the students.

The results of the students’ focus when identifying different writing skills is presented first (7.2.1) and then the mean as well as the range of the number of EFL mistakes per skill the students made in their written work, as analyzed by the researcher. Then follows an account of a calculation of the students’ degree of competence in estimating their specific writing skills, that is, with focus on how reliable and valid these results are when matched to the researcher’s assessment in the form of grading (7.2.2). This is done, as in 7.1, to see how accurately (i.e. in relation to the external assessment by the researcher) students assess their writing skills when considering the results of a particular assignment they have completed. As in the previous section the analyses consider the differences that can be observed in the entire sample (the total group) but also between the two course groups as well as between the three achievement groups.

### 7.2.1 Students’ Focus Areas

The first step in the analysis of the data was to calculate which of the listed skills the students identified or focused on when selecting the option satisfactory or in need of improvement, in other words what specific problems or merits the students saw in their own writing. This was done to give a picture of how the students assessed themselves in a specific context and what they saw as important language skills to develop in their own writing.

#### Results of the Total Group

To illustrate the self-assessments of the language skills that were focused on in the total student group, Figure 7.2.1 shows the percentages of students who marked each of the different language skills that were listed in Self-assessment Form 1, Question 2, as satisfactory or in need of improvement.

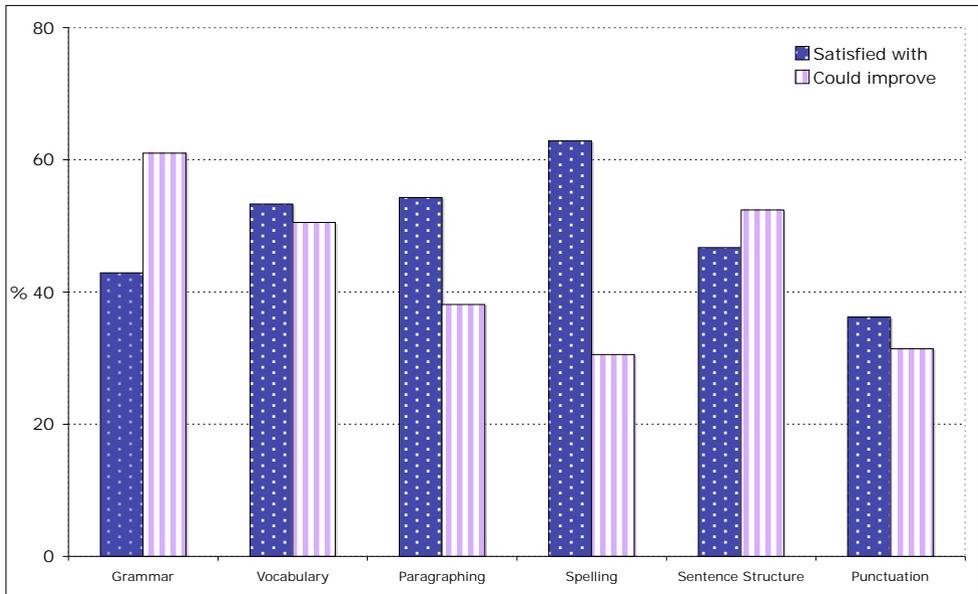


Figure 7.2.1 Percentages of students expressing satisfaction with and possible improvement of their specific writing skills. Total group.

The results show that the three writing skills that ranked first as satisfactory were Spelling (63%), Paragraphing (54%) and Vocabulary (53%). The three skills that students most often marked as in need of improvement were Grammar (61%), Sentence Structure (52%) and Vocabulary (50%). Grammar and Spelling thus seem to be the language skills the students pay special attention to, being most satisfied with Spelling and expressing greatest need of improvement in Grammar.

Regarding the alternatives that were chosen less often, Punctuation was the skill that was indicated “satisfied with” by only 36% of the students. Punctuation (31%) and Spelling (30%) were the skills that the students less often assessed as in need of improvement.

The differences between the students’ expressed degree of satisfaction with, and the students’ assessment of possible improvement, were most distinct when it came to Spelling, and least distinct when it came to Vocabulary skills, as can be seen in Figure 7.2.1. There was a tendency for a generally higher rate of choices for “satisfied with” than for “could improve” (on an average 49% and 43% respectively).

## Results by Sub-groups

### Course Groups

As Course B students had studied EFL one year longer than Course A students, and the course is somewhat more advanced, differences in students' self-assessment of specific writing skills could be expected. Figures 7.2.2 and 7.2.3 show, in percent, how the students in each course group marked the different language skills listed in Question 2, again as satisfactory and/or in need of improvement.

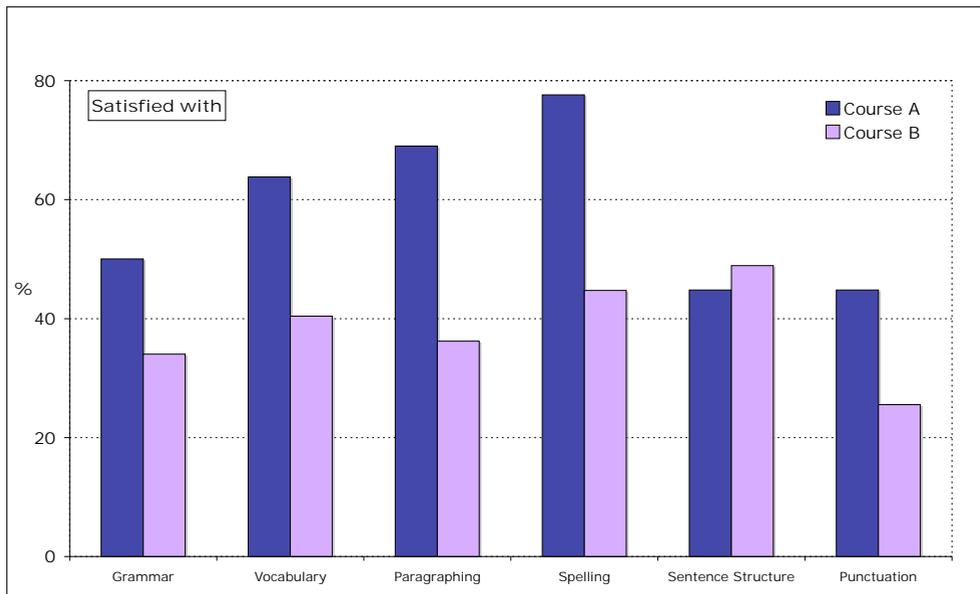


Figure 7.2.2 Percentages of students expressing degree of satisfaction with their specific writing skills, Course A and Course B.

Figure 7.2.2 shows that 78% of the students in Course A marked Spelling as the skill that they were first and foremost “satisfied with”, while in Course B only 45% of the students did so. Course B students on the other hand were more satisfied with their Sentence Structure (48.9%) than the other skills. This skill, together with Punctuation, were the ones that Course A students marked least often (44.8%). Course A students expressed, on the whole, more satisfaction with their writing skills than Course B students did. This is in accordance with the fact that Course A students were at a somewhat higher proficiency level judging from their grades from compulsory school. It is also in line with the answers they gave to the SAQw, where their mean score was somewhat higher than that for Course B students (i.e. 4.37 and 3.98 respectively).

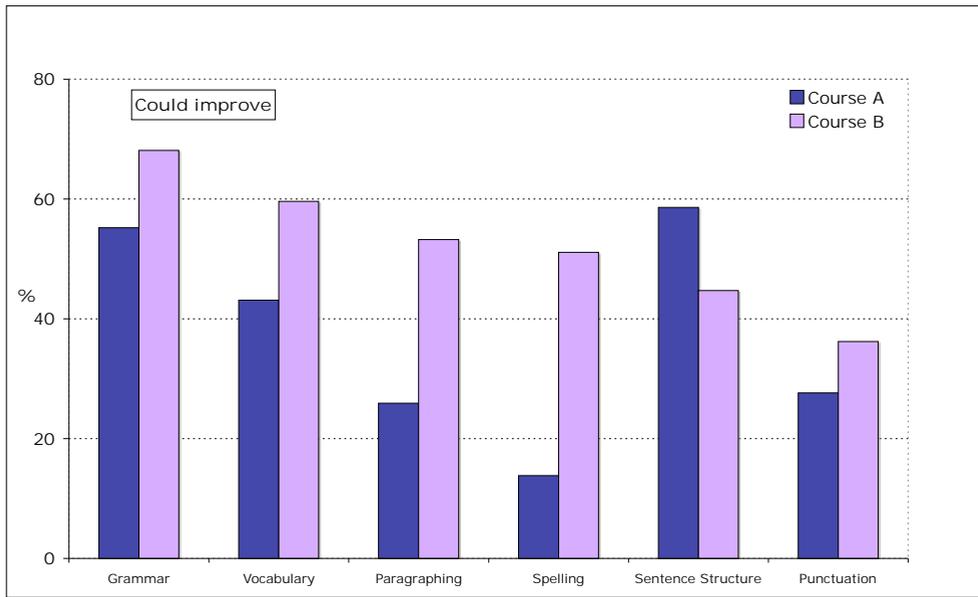


Figure 7.2.3 Percentages of students' indicating possible improvement of their specific writing skills. Course A and Course B.

Course A students marked room for improvement first of all in Sentence Structure (59%) and Grammar (55%). Of the Course B participants, 68% indicated Grammar as the skill they could improve in the first place, followed by Vocabulary (60%). With the exception of Sentence Structure, the Course B students expressed more need of improvement with their writing skills than Course A students did. Considering the difference in proficiency between the two courses (cf. comment above) this outcome cannot be said to be unforeseen.

The results indicate that the two course groups partly focus on different linguistic skills, and are satisfied with their writing skills to different degrees. Overall, students in Course A expressed a generally more positive view of their specific language skills levels than Course B students did. The differences in the course groups' self-assessments are considerable.

*Achievement Groups*

An analysis of responses to Question 2 by achievement group (defined on the basis of incoming grades) shows that regardless of achievement group, students most often marked Spelling as the skill they were "satisfied with" (P students = 40%, PwD students = 58.3% and PwSD students = 76.2%). The perceived degree of satisfaction was thus higher the higher the achievement level.

With regard to the skills that the students most often marked “could improve/could have made mistakes on”, all of the students (100%) in the Pass-group and 64.6% of the students in the Pass with Distinction-group marked Grammar. In the Pass with Special Distinction-group on the other hand Sentence Structure was the skill marked by 52.4% of the students.

To summarize, the results indicate that independently of achievement level, the students tend to be more satisfied with their Spelling than with other skills. The Pass and Pass with Distinction groups assessed Grammar more often as the skill in need of improvement, while the Pass with Special Distinction-group more often marked Sentence Structure. Sentence Structure involves Grammar and is conventionally regarded as a more complex skill.

### 7.2.2 Students’ Assessment of their Specific Skills in Relation to the Researcher’s Grading

The second step in analyzing the present data was to calculate the students’ degree of satisfaction and need for improvement and then relate these to the actual performance levels as evaluated by the researcher. For this purpose a holistic ‘grading’ of each student’s specific skills (cf. 6.4.4) was performed. The results were related to the sub-group of students who were satisfied, in order to see whether any tendencies with respect to the variable of self-assessment accuracy could be discerned.

#### Results of the Total Group

The average number of words per written assignment in the entire sample (the total group) was 464. Figure 7.2.4 shows the mean number of mistakes per error category.

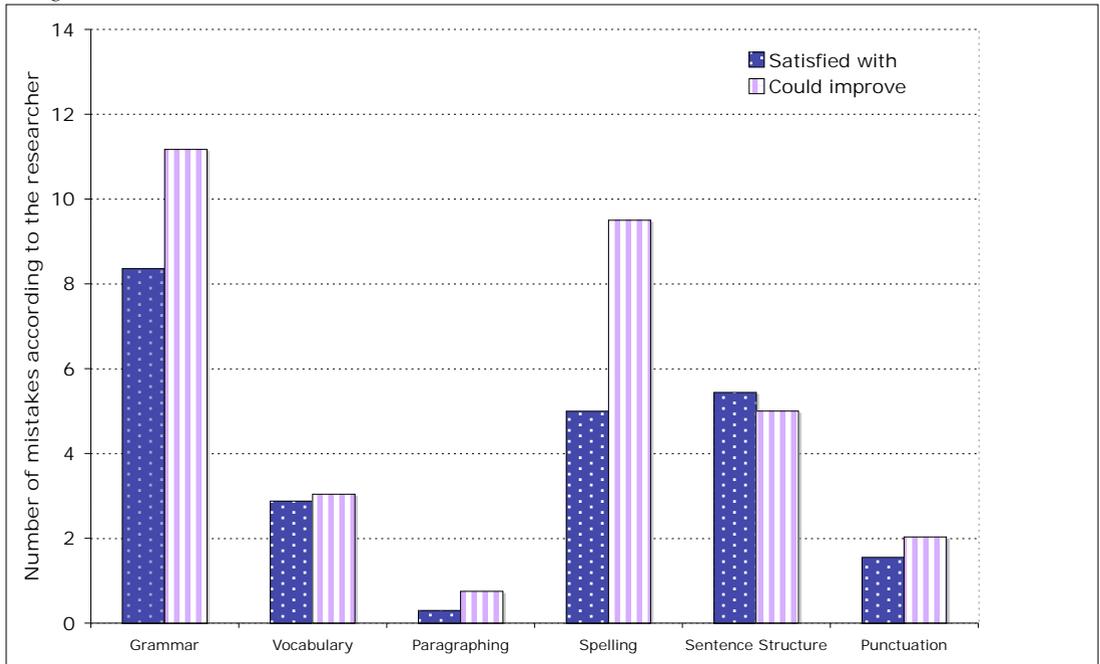


Figure 7.2.4 Mean number of mistakes made by “satisfied with” and “could improve/could have made mistakes” students by error category. Total group.

The skill where the “satisfied” students made the most mistakes on average, according to the researcher’s analysis, was Grammar ( $M=8.36$ ). The number of grammar mistakes made by individual students varied between 0 and 19, followed by Sentence Structure ( $M=5.44$ , range 0-12) and Spelling ( $M=5.00$ , range 0-36). In other words, students could, for example, make up to 36 spelling mistakes, and still be “satisfied” with their written work.

Grammar was also the skill in which the “could improve” students made the most mistakes ( $M=11.17$ ). The number of mistakes made per participant varying between 2 and 40. Spelling ( $M=9.50$ , range 0-45) and Sentence Structure ( $M=5.00$ , range 0-10) followed. It follows, as in the above example, that a student could make zero spelling mistakes, and still feel a need to improve spelling skills.

Grammar is thus the skill where most mistakes are made. This is the case in both the “satisfied” and “could improve” groups but more markedly so in the latter, which reflects a certain degree of awareness among students on this point. The same goes for Spelling where the tendency is even more pronounced. In the remaining categories there is little difference in the estimates of mistakes between the “satisfied with” and “could improve” groups. Overall these results indicate moderate competence among students to

assess their specific language skills. The highest number of mistakes made by individual students, are made in Spelling.

The results of the researcher's assessment in the form of percentages of Pass or higher, in comparison with the group's "satisfied with" statements, are presented in Figure 7.2.5.

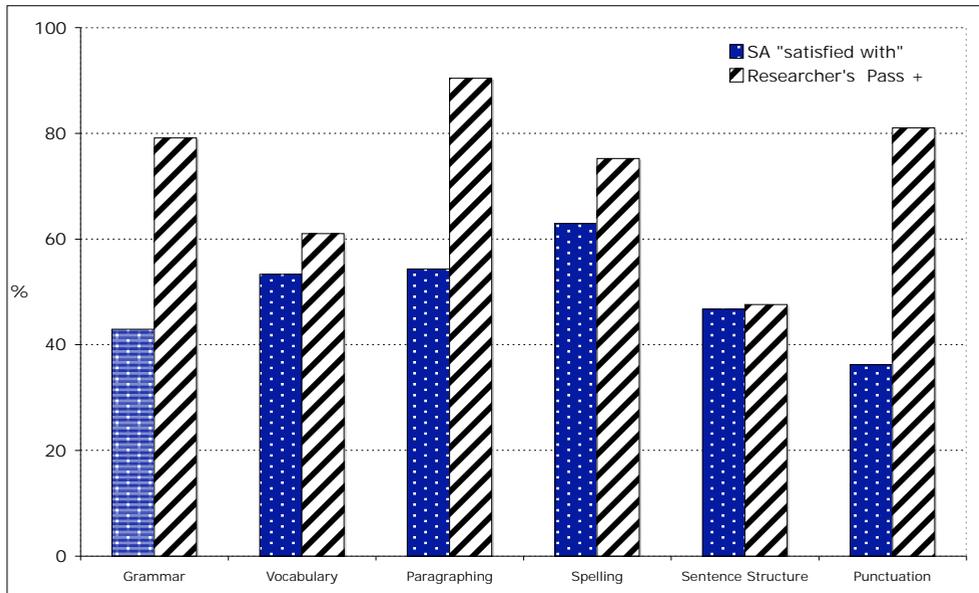


Figure 7.2.5 Percentage of students' "satisfied with" statements per skill in comparison with the researcher's Pass (or higher) grading. Total Group.

The assumption made by the researcher was that the students' indications that they were "satisfied with" a specific skill could be seen as an expression of a specific competence level, on a par with a grade of at least a Pass (cf. 6.7). Given this hypothesis, the group tended to underestimate their skills as illustrated in Figure 7.2.5. The percentage of students to whom the researcher gave a Pass and above was larger than the percentage of students who marked that they were "satisfied with" a particular skill. The largest discrepancy between the researcher and the students' own self-assessments of written language appeared in Punctuation skills, and the smallest in Sentence Structure skills.

## Results by Sub-groups

### Course Groups

The average number of words per written assignment was 460 words per text in Course A and 469 words in Course B.

The mean numbers of mistakes made per course group and error category, as analyzed by the researcher, are presented in Figure 7.2.6.

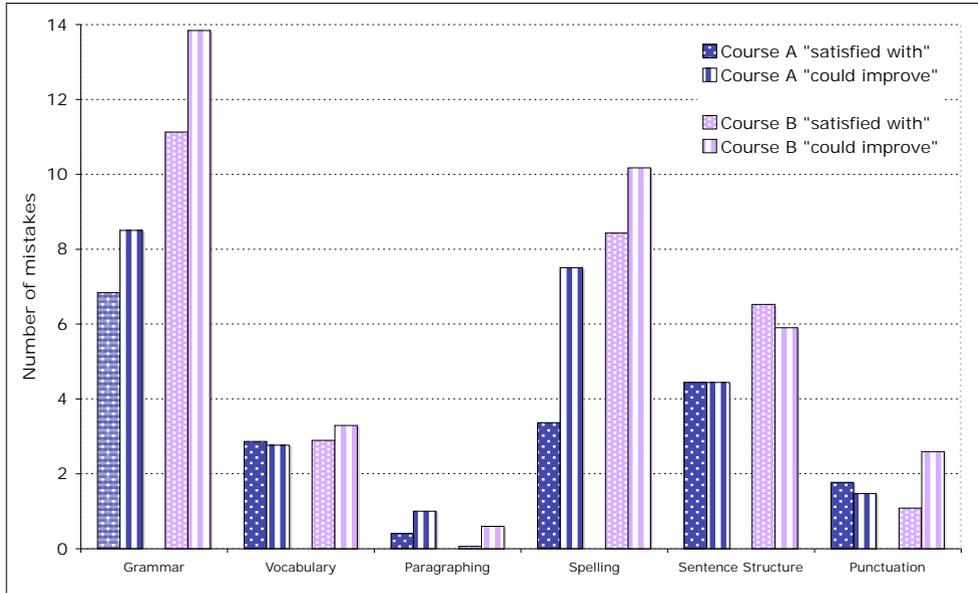


Figure 7.2.6 Mean number of mistakes made by “satisfied with” and “could improve/could have made mistakes” students across course groups and error categories.

Grammar was the skill in which Course A “satisfied” students made the highest number of errors ( $M=6.83$ ). Individual results ranged from 0 to 17 mistakes. This was followed by Sentence Structure ( $M=4.40$ , range 0-9) and Spelling ( $M=3.36$ , range 0-12). In Course B the corresponding order was Grammar ( $M=11.13$ , range 2-19), Spelling ( $M=8.43$ , range 0-36) and Sentence Structure ( $M=6.52$ , range 0-12). As can be seen, both the mean number of mistakes made in the group, and the range of mistakes per individual student was higher in Course B than in Course A.

Course A “could improve” students made most mistakes on Grammar ( $M=8.50$ ) and individual students made between 2 and 21 mistakes. Then followed Spelling ( $M=7.50$ , range 2-22), and Sentence Structure ( $M=4.40$ , range 0-9). In Course B the order of skills was the same (Grammar:  $M=13.84$ , range 4-40); Spelling:  $M=10.17$ , range 0-45 and Sentence Structure:  $M=4.44$ ,

range 2-10) as Figure 7.2.6 shows. The same pattern prevailed, that is, the Course A students' mean number of mistakes, and range of mistakes made by individual students, was lower than for the Course B students.

To sum up, the "satisfied" students made fewer mistakes than those who indicated that they needed to improve a specific skill, with the exception of Sentence Structure. Of the skills assessed, the highest number of mistakes made by individual students in Course A were in Grammar and Spelling. In Course B, Spelling was the skill that dominated. Regardless of the fact that Course B was at a higher course level, these students made, on average, more mistakes than the students in Course A did.

The results of the researcher's grading of the students' writing skills, expressed in terms of percentages of the grade Pass or above, compared to the percentages of students "satisfied with" statements in the two course groups, are set out in Figure 7.2.7. Note that the bar next to each bar representing students' self-assessment represents the researcher's grading (diagonal stripes).

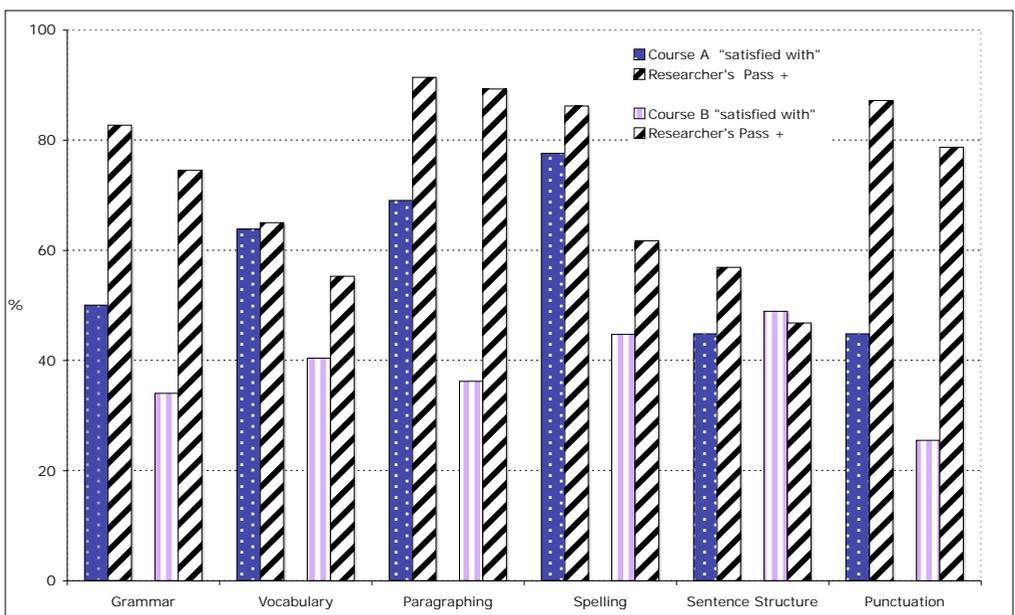


Figure 7.2.7. Percentages of students' "satisfied with" statements per skill in comparison with the researcher's Pass (or higher) grading. Course A and Course B.

As can be seen, the pattern of results in the two course groups differ substantially in that the degree of satisfaction expressed by students is generally a great deal lower in Course B (except for the skill of Sentence

Structure). The researcher's grading is more equal between groups, but is in all cases but one (Sentence Structure) higher than the students' assessments.

To summarize, the course groups follow a similar pattern, in spite of the fact that Course B was at a higher level. Course B students also made, on average, more mistakes than the students in Course A. In all instances, with the exception of Sentence Structure, students in both course groups underestimate their skills in relation to the researcher's assessment.

### *Achievement Groups*

As explained previously (cf. 6.2.2), the students were grouped according to achievement on the basis of their latest EFL grades (final grades from compulsory school). The average number of words per written assignment was for the Pass-group 266 words, the Pass with Distinction-group 418 words, and the Pass with Special Distinction-group 523 words.

The "satisfied" students in the Pass-group made the most mistakes in Grammar ( $M=11.0$ , range 11-11), followed by Spelling ( $M=7.5$ , range 2-23) and Sentence Structure ( $M=7.33$ , range 4-10). For the Pass with Distinction-group the order was similar (Grammar:  $M=9.47$ , range 2-19; Sentence structure:  $M=5.65$ , range 1-10; and Spelling:  $M=6.5$ , range 0-36). The Pass with Special Distinction group followed the same pattern (Grammar:  $M=7.40$ , range 0-17, Sentence Structure: 4.95, range 0-12; and Spelling:  $M=3.13$ , range 0-12). The average number of mistakes decreased the higher the achievement group. This is not always the case when it comes to the range of mistakes made by individual students, but broadly viewed, the pattern is similar.

The students marking "could improve" in the Pass-group made the most mistakes in Spelling ( $M=17.14$ , range 7-45), Grammar ( $M=12.60$ , range 4-23) and Sentence Structure ( $M=6.14$ , range 2-10). The order of skills where most mistakes were made in the Pass with Distinction-group was Grammar ( $M=11.77$ , range 2-40), Spelling ( $M=8.94$ , range 0-27) and Sentence Structure ( $M=5.15$ , range 0-9). The same order was apparent in the Pass with Special Distinction-group (Grammar:  $M=8.94$ , range 2-24; Spelling:  $M=4.56$ , range 2-7; and Sentence Structure:  $M=4.45$ , range 0-10). The average number of mistakes decreased as the level of the achievement group increased. The range of mistakes made by individual students followed the same pattern with few exceptions.

Generally, the highest mean number of mistakes was made by students in the Pass-group, and the lowest by students in the Pass with Special

Distinction-group. In most of the specific skills, students in the Pass-group also made more individual mistakes in relation to the average number of words written per assignment, than students in the higher achievement group did. This pattern prevailed regardless of whether they had marked that they were “satisfied with” or “could improve/could have made mistakes on” the specific skills.

In order to determine whether the students’ performance (achievement) level was an important variable, a comparison was made between the proportion of “satisfied” students per writing skills (grammar etc.) and level, and the researcher’s estimated grade level (Pass or higher) per the same skill areas. Figure 7.2.8 shows the results. The bar next to the students’ self-assessment represents the researcher’s grading.

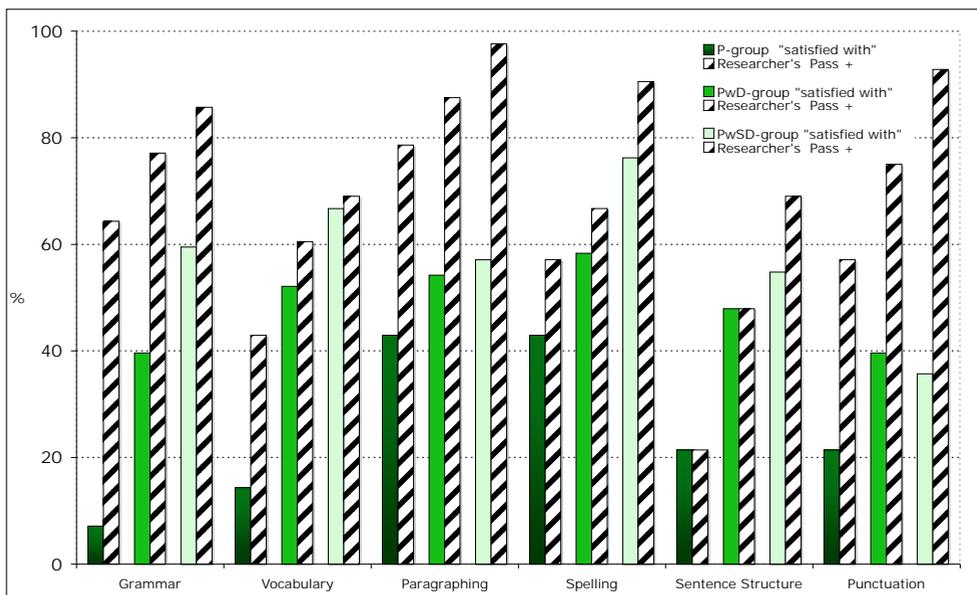


Figure 7.2.8 Percentage of students’ “satisfied with” statements per skill in comparison with the researcher’s Pass (or higher) grading. Achievement groups.

It is apparent that students underestimate their language writing skills in comparison with the researcher’s grading. The proportion of “satisfied” students, in all three achievement groups, are noticeably fewer than the researcher’s grade of Pass or higher. The one exception is in Sentence Structure where the proportion of students in the Pass and the Pass with Distinction groups make the same assessment as the researcher. There is also an increase in the proportion of satisfied students, depending on achievement group. Fewer students in the Pass-group are “satisfied” with any one skill than

are students in the Pass with Special Distinction-group. Overall the pattern is regular, and logical. Broadly speaking, this difference is motivated in that it is in congruence with the researcher's assessment. The largest noticeable discrepancy between the students' and the researchers' assessment is Grammar for the Pass-group and Punctuation for the Pass with Special Distinction group.

In summary, the researcher's estimated proportion of Pass and higher students per achievement level and writing skill area (grammar etc.) follow a likely progression. Students in the Pass-group who noted that they were satisfied with specific writing skills, did so less often than the Pass with Distinction- and Pass with Special Distinction-groups. Pass students also made, on an average, more mistakes.

### 7.2.3 Summary and Reflections

The specific skills that students focus on when assessing their own written work as satisfactory or in need of improvement are to a large degree Grammar and Spelling. These are skills that are also often focused on in EFL writing in school (on the subject of Grammar in language education cf. 5.4.4 as well as Ferris, 1999 and Truscott, 1996). Grammatical forms are traditionally taught in EFL and grammatical errors are often commented on in different types of classroom writing situations. Spelling, even if not a major issue for EFL teaching at this level, is a skill often corrected in written school work, as well as being more easily accessed and understood by students than the more complicated issues of sentence structure and appropriate vocabulary. In a communicative "real-life" situation one may otherwise have expected for example Vocabulary to be one of the more salient skills that the participants could have focused on. Spelling and grammar skills can generally be said to be among the more tangible of the listed skills, and thus easier to self-assess for the students.

Regarding skills that were chosen less often, such as Punctuation and Paragraphing, these are skills that generally receive little attention in the EFL classroom in Sweden, and students often have a very vague idea of the value of them. These skills are the mark of more advanced command of the language, a point seldom reached at the pre-university level.

Generally students expressed "satisfaction" with their specific writing skills more often than they expressed a "need for improvement", with the exception, however, of Grammar and Sentence Structure. This tendency to

select the option “satisfied with” when required to take a stand may partly be a reflection of the successful impact of the larger curriculum goals which emphasize giving the students self-confidence to ‘dare and desire’ to use the foreign language in question. It may also be quite logical for a student with a great number of mistakes in a certain skill to mark that he or she is “satisfied with” it. For a student with dyslexia for example, making 36 spelling mistakes may in fact not be very many mistakes in relation to previous performance.

The two course groups differed in as much as Course A students were generally more “satisfied with” with their writing skills than Course B students, who were at a higher course level. It is not unthinkable that the different course level expectations, Course B being at a more advanced level with higher demands more difficult to satisfy, are reflected in the results. Course B students may have been trying to use more complex and advanced language in accordance with the syllabus goals and thereby, in effect attempting more challenging writing. When attempting to express themselves in a more advanced manner, these students also opened themselves up to the risk of making more mistakes. Doing this, they may have been uncertain as to whether they had succeeded. It is not impossible that it is also a correct judgement on the part of the students. Course B students were more conservative in their self-assessments and did in fact not reach the set course goals to the same degree as other students did. In the same manner, Course A students’ higher degree of satisfaction with their results could be a reflection of having had previous experience of reaching satisfactory results, due to their somewhat higher performance levels in their preceding course (in compulsory school). It may also simply be a correct assessment of their knowledge, and be a sign of awareness of their achieved level.

The degree of satisfaction among the participants was also higher, the higher the achievement level. Students in the Pass-group were somewhat less satisfied with their specific writing skills than students in the Pass with Distinction and Pass with Special Distinction groups. These results seem to be logical and an expression of realistic assessments.

Students made the highest mean number of mistakes in the areas of Grammar, Spelling and Sentence Structure according to the researcher’s analysis of their writing assignments. The more spelling and grammar mistakes students made, the more often they also indicated that they “could improve/could have made mistakes on” these skills, with the exception of sentence structure. These results are important, as they touch on

metacognitive issues, such as the question of the importance of students becoming aware of the consequences of inaccuracy and the value of correctness in EFL, as well as the ability to develop self-editing skills (Ferris, 1999, Köhlmyr, 2003). On the other hand, there were individual “satisfied” students who made up to 36 spelling mistakes, or 19 grammar mistakes. The theory that foreign language learners may have extra difficulties assessing their own specific language skills, for one thing because they frequently do not have the opportunity to compare themselves with “perfect models” such as native speakers (Blanche & Merino, 1989), may be relevant here. Also the notion that it may be easier to assess areas that one “cannot do” rather than “can do” (Bachman & Palmer, 1989) probably carries some weight.

The language analysis showed that participants from Course B made more mistakes than those from Course A. Course B students assessed their skills somewhat lower and thought that they could improve or could have made mistakes on these skills, to a higher degree than Course A students did.

Students in the Pass-group also tended to make more mistakes on average than students in the two higher achievement groups, and were also less satisfied. These are not unexpected results.

Students’ estimates of their specific writing skills when matched to the researcher’s assessment in the form of grades showed that the participants tended to underestimate their own competence on the different specific writing skills assessed. In general the students seem to have a self-critical attitude towards their specific writing skill performance.

The pattern was the same in both course groups, but Course B students underestimated their proficiency to a greater degree than Course A students did. The researcher’s grading of the participants’ competence is similar between the two groups but does show differences, particularly with regard to Spelling. These differences may be due to the difference that existed between the course groups’ initial achievement levels determined on the basis of incoming grades (i.e. that Course A students were better in EFL). It may on the other hand also be a reflection, as discussed above, of the greater expectations and demands of the more advanced Course B syllabus which lays down that the students should try to use more advanced vocabulary for example, and express themselves in a more complex manner — the problem being that they may not have been able to do so successfully.

As before, the results were similar in the three achievement groups considered and followed an expected, regular pattern. The apparent

discrepancies between the researcher's and the Pass-groups' assessment of grammar skills, as well as the Pass with Special Distinction-groups' assessment of punctuation skills, is most probably a sign of the participants' uncertainty regarding these skills. When it comes to grammar, there is a prevalent student attitude that this is a difficult skill to master. It does not seem very remarkable that many students at the Pass level would reason that it might be best not to mark this as "satisfactory". In the same way, the more advanced Pass with Special Distinction students might have understood that Punctuation entails more than using periods or exclamation marks to mark the end of sentences. At the same time, they may have reasoned that they were not sure what more advanced or correct usage involved.

There is, as A. Brown (2005) ascertains, little research in the area of how written EFL performance, including specific language skills, can be self-assessed. It is important to keep in mind, as Sadler (1989) points out, that writing is a complex and multidimensional skill. Coherent and appropriate writing is difficult for many students to achieve in their first language and even more so in a foreign language (Nunan, 1991/1998).

The results tend to support research findings that suggest students assess fairly accurately in specific contexts. However, a great deal of further research is needed in this area

### 7.3. Students' and Teachers' Voices on Self-assessment and Self-assessment Practices

The student and teacher interviews seek to answer two research questions. The first is "How do students and teachers experience an attempt to incorporate the curriculum and syllabuses goals, which to a large extent emphasize independent and lifelong learning skills through the application of self-assessment practices in EFL writing?" The second research question is "To what extent does the practice of self-assessment of EFL writing lead to more realistic learner views of attainment?" The analyses are specific for the interviewed student groups and teachers at a specific time, but may signify certain notions and attitudes that are prevalent outside this context and have value to the ongoing development of more comprehensive, and in this sense, fairer assessment practices.

The student interviews are presented in section 7.3.1. Forty-one students were interviewed in focus groups of 3-6 students in each (19 from

Course A and 22 from Course B) directly after they had worked with different self-assessment tasks in conjunction with a writing assignment. The interview questions focused on the students' attitudes, beliefs and experiences of assessment and grading practices in general, and on self-assessment in relation to writing skills in particular. Students' comments are grouped thematically under related headings. The actual numbers of students that hold varying views are not in focus, nor is the factual veracity of what the students say scrutinized. Instead it is the variety of opinions, as well as the issues that the students believe important, that are of interest and brought forward. Only in the cases where Course A and Course B focused on the issues from different angles or mentioned areas that were not touched upon by the other course group, are these accounted for separately. Several of the quotes presented have been chosen because they sum up opinions voiced more widely in the group.

The teacher interviews are accounted for in section 7.3.2. Teacher A who was responsible for the Course A students, and Teacher B who taught the Course B students were interviewed separately after the *Self-assessment of Learning: the Case of Languages* project (within which the present study was carried out, cf. 1.1) had come to an end. The questions focused on teacher attitudes, beliefs and experiences concerning student responsibility and influence, as well as students' ability to self-assess their EFL learning, not only in relation to the writing assignment. These results are also presented thematically, as it is the different views, beliefs and opinions the teachers expressed regarding their English teaching practice, lifelong learning, independence, autonomy, motivation, and external assessment that give a deeper understanding to how they experienced the self-assessment routines used in the study. Only where the teachers express differing positions or present their views from different angles, are they accounted for individually within each heading.

### 7.3.1 The Students' Experiences

The first step in the analysis of the student interviews was to categorize the students' answers under thematic headings after several readings of the transcribed texts, as well as re-listening to the original recordings. The themes were then organized to go from the general to the particular. The students' understanding of learning English as a foreign language, as well as the English syllabuses and grading criteria, plus language assessment and grading in general are background factors which influence the way in which the

students perceived the self-assessment practices in the study. They are therefore briefly accounted for first, as are the students' broad attitudes towards learning and self-assessment, which follow. In the next sub-sections the students' voices on self-assessment and self-assessment of grades in EFL are presented, as are the students' comments and reflections on self-assessment of writing in general and of the self-assessment of the writing assignment in particular. These also touch on the writing process used and teacher feedback. The section ends with the students' own ideas on how to involve students in EFL assessment.

### Students' EFL Learning Experiences

Speaking of EFL learning, students found the subject of language learning difficult in the sense that they could not always see their own progression. They compared EFL for example with Mathematics and Physical Education. In these subjects it was easier to measure and observe when they had learned something new. In EFL their experience was that they practiced the same skills repeatedly. A metaphor they used was that learning English was similar to laying a basement foundation, or building a brick wall while their Mathematics was more like climbing a ladder, one rung after another.

[Gordon:] [English is built]...on a broad base somehow. While, what did you say? (G5:289 E G 4:8)

[Kristin:] It goes so slowly (G5:290 E K 4:10)

[Gordon:] Yeah, it goes slowly and it is so different, you can't see the progression in the same way because...(G5:291 E G 4:9)

[Kristin:] Yeah, yeah, I just got an idea – if you think about it like this: Math has a certain height, English it is built like this [shows with her hands] (G5:298 E K 4:11)

[Filip:] But it is added first like this- and then like this – and then like that [shows with his hands] (G5:299 E F 4:13)

[Kristin:] Like a layer, a foundation, while math just goes straight up like a ladder (G5:300 E K 4:12)

[Filip:] Yeah, like a sandcastle that spreads out like this down there. Like bricks that are stacked onto each other (G5:300 E K 4:12)<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Author's translation of:

[Gordon:] "... på nån bred grund på något sätt. Medans, vad sa du?

[Kristin:] Det går så sakta

Participants commented that it is important to speak English in EFL class, as they had often spoken Swedish instead at the previous compulsory school level and even in other EFL classes at the upper secondary level. The two quotes, the first by Andrew and the second by Karl illustrate this point:

So one should- one should start talking more English during lessons, even earlier. Because at compulsory school it was more that you could get away with speaking Swedish. The teacher just said “right, speak English now”, and then- then you could go on speaking Swedish anyway (G1:63 E A 4:1)<sup>21</sup>

In the other [class] we used Swedish so everyone would understand (G2:159 E K 4:5)<sup>22</sup>

Speaking of the policy documents, in particular of syllabus and grading criteria, students voiced the opinion that due to its lack of transparency and detail, the current grading system made it difficult for them to estimate their own grades. They also said that they had never talked about, or been given, the syllabus and criteria documents prior to the study, and their experience was that the language in the documents was abstract and difficult to comprehend. Consequently they did not really understand what was demanded of them in terms of the goals they were to reach, for example the different grade level descriptions. Some expressed the view that the exercise of grading the benchmark texts in relation to the syllabus was quite difficult, but very illustrative as it helped them to understand the grading criteria and the expected language level of the course they were taking. The criteria made them aware of the type of mistakes they might be making, what they had to consider in relation to their own texts and also how texts at the different grade levels were structured. Several of the participants described how they had pondered each separate grading criterion during the exercise, and become aware that they had not in fact reached the language level that they thought they had.

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[Gordon:] Ja det går sakta och det är så olika, man ser nog inte dom här framstegen på samma sätt för...

[Kristin:] Jojo, men jag fick just för mig att - om man kan tänka så här: Matten är en viss nivå på höjden, engelskan den byggs på så.

[Filip:] Men den byggs på först så- och sen så- och sen så

[Kristin:] Som ett lager, en grund, medans matten bara åker rätt upp som en stege

[Filip:] Ja liksom ett sandslott ungefär som breder ut sig sen så som där nere. Som staplas som klossar”

<sup>21</sup> Author’s translation of: “Så man bör- man bör väl börja prata engelska mer på lektionerna redan i tidigare ålder. För under grundskolan så var det mer att man kom undan med att prata svenska. Lärarn sa kanske bara ‘ja men prata engelska nu’ och så- sen så kunde man ändå prata svenska”

<sup>22</sup> Author’s translation of: “...men i förra [klassen] så körde vi på svenska så att alla förstår”

Students also preferred to see the teacher's role as supportive in developing their EFL. They believed that, in certain cases, they knew more about their language competence than their teachers did, and that the teachers were not always able to see what the students knew. Diana said:

I know what I am good at and bad at. When I am good at something, I do something so I'll become even better. If I am bad at it, then you take quite a bit of help from the teacher to learn more. But then, I try and learn as much as I can. Because I am the one who is learning and improving. The teacher can teach me a lot of things, but then I am the one who has to improve. So, hmmm (G1: 90 E D 4:6).<sup>23</sup>

When it came to language assessment and grading practices in the EFL classroom, students believed that their teachers followed the syllabus and grading criteria, but expressed uncertainty how these were interpreted by other teachers, and also at different schools. They were afraid of being classified as a "P-person", or an "PwD-person" by their teachers, and consequently of not receiving a higher grade when they performed at a higher level than expected.

Participants maintained that they had not previously come into contact with assessment practices designed specifically for learning previously. They expressed frustration at the fact that grades, in their experience, often became more important than learning new subject matter. In this way they never felt that they had the chance to actually improve their English. Instead they experienced that everything they did in EFL classes was graded, directly from the start of the course, without any genuinely new learning opportunities taking place. When the teachers graded each individual assignment throughout the term and aggregated them to a final grade at the end of the course, the students felt as though they were expected to know the course content right from the beginning, as there seemed to be no time set aside for learning and practice. As Fred expressed it:

I think that ... like, everything is graded. It is not as if you are supposed to learn, you are just expected to know all the time. It doesn't feel as, I don't feel as if I learn very much during lessons (G2:107 E F 2:12).<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag vet ju vad jag är bra på o dålig på. När jag är bra på någonting så gör jag så där för så jag blir ännu bättre. Om man är dålig på det så blir det att man tar till hjälp rätt så mycket läraren för att lära sig mer. Men sen, det jag kan försöker jag lära mig själv så mycket som möjligt. För det är jag själv som utvecklas. Läraren kan lära mig en massa saker men sen är det jag själv som utvecklar grejorna. Så, hmmm".

<sup>24</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag tycker sen liksom att allting hamnar på betyget, inte att man skall lära sig utan det är bara att man skall kunna hela tiden. Det känns inte som, jag känner inte så att jag lär mig på speciellt mycket på lektionerna".

Students strongly believed that the goal should be to reach the course criteria for a pass or higher at the *end* of the course, and that they should be able to get a good final grade, no matter what their level of EFL was at the outset. They felt that the practice of constant grading worked in the opposite direction, as they did not get credit for improvement. They concluded that the fact that they could never show their weaknesses in EFL was not conducive to learning more English. Fred put it this way, “I know what I need to learn, but I don’t learn it during class time”<sup>25</sup> (G2:110 E F 2:13-G2:112 E F 2:14). Instead Fred felt that he could only show what he already knew during lessons, to maintain his grade.

According to participants, at least half a course should be devoted to learning because certain skills, such as control of grammar, developed continuously. Overall, students wanted to be able to work on smaller assignments first, to practice, and only after that did they want larger assignments that would be graded. Bob said:

It is what you try to find first, when you self-assess, the mistakes that you make. It is the first thing you check out. And then when you have corrected the mistakes, you check what, what you’ve done well, and what you haven’t made any mistakes on. And that... self-assessment, I think was... it is the largest part of school. Actually, actually I don’t think that there should be any grades at all. Really, you should do exercises, practice self-assessing yourself, and then reach the goal that you want to without grades in between. *That* is the best way to learn (G4:59 E B 3:1).<sup>26</sup>

On the other hand, some students also voiced the opinion that there was a definite advantage in knowing the grade level you had reached, at any time during the course, while yet others pointed out that it should suffice to discuss their progress with the teacher.

Generally students expressed approval of the National Tests of English because they believed the tests ensured the same standard of grading throughout the country. The fact that the writing part of the test was graded according to a given model and with reference to benchmark texts was appreciated. At the same time, apprehension was expressed that different

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<sup>25</sup> Author’s translation of: ”Ja, jag vet vad jag behöver lära mig. Ja, men jag lär mig det inte där [under lektionerna]”.

<sup>26</sup> Author’s translation of: ”Det är det man försöker hitta först när man bedömer sig själv det är misstagen man gör. Det är det första man kollar på. Och sedan när man har rättat till misstagen så kollar man ju på det man gjort bra och det man inte har missat på. Och det- självbedömningen tycker jag var-, det är ju största delen av skolan. Egentligen ska- egentligen, tycker jag att det inte skall finnas betyg. Egentligen skall man göra övningar- öva sig för bedöma sig själv, och sedan nå det målet man vill nå utan betyg emellan- Det är det bästa sättet att lära in”.

teachers interpreted these texts differently and thus graded students differently. Still, most students believed it was possible for their teachers to get a fair picture of the level achieved by students by referring to the benchmark texts, as everyone doing the same course sat the same test. Another positive aspect of the national tests was that they could not study for them so they were more relaxed. “You come, write, do your best, and then you find out. I’m at the PwD-, PwSD-, P-, F- level or whatever” (G7: 85 E T 2:5)<sup>27</sup> as Teodor stated.

In summary, the students’ previous experiences reflected an EFL learning situation where English was not always the dominant language in the classroom and where summative grading was in focus. They found the steering documents difficult to understand and were concerned about subjective teacher grading. Frustration was also expressed at how relatively little time was devoted to language learning and practice in the classroom, in comparison to testing and grading. The National Tests of English were appreciated as they acknowledged the constructive aim of the tests, that is, to make teachers’ grading more objective and aligned with the stipulated criteria.

### Voices on Self-assessment and Learning in General

Participants believed that self-assessment facilitated learning in general, and that self-assessment was one of the most important things they could learn. If there was no time for self-assessment activities, classroom time was misdirected, as Bob said, “Yeah, it is among the most important things to be able yourself- to assess yourself. Because if you yourself can assess yourself in a correct way- [...] then you are open [for] learning too- then you improve faster and better” (G4:12 E B 1:2).<sup>28</sup> It was also seen as an important, transferable skill. Kristin for example, believed that self-assessment might be useful when they became older and needed to learn new things:

[Think about] what do you learn by doing this, that you can, like, learn later *in life*. I mean, you don’t just study English, you are going to study all sorts of different subjects. It can be good to be able to self-assess in them as well. Like, [...] Forget about the grade, it doesn’t matter that much. Maybe it is better to learn something you have more use of. Maybe, even when you are

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<sup>27</sup> Author’s translation of: ”Du kommer, du skriver, du gör ditt bästa. Och sen får du reda på någonting. Jag ligger på VG, MVG,G, IG, vad som helst”

<sup>28</sup> Author’s translation of: ”Jo, det är bland det viktigaste grejerna för att själv, bedöma sig själv. För att om man själv kan bedöma sig själv på ett riktigt sätt- [...] då är man ju öppen [för] inläring också- då utvecklas man snabbare och bättre”.

an adult and have to learn new things. I think it is pretty good to be able to be self-critical, and that has to do with being able to assess yourself too (G5:199 E K 3:7).<sup>29</sup>

After their experience of using self-assessment in the writing assignment, students expressed the belief that self-assessment and student involvement in assessment of their own skills should start sooner, from the start of elementary school at the compulsory school level. Still it was considered “better late than never” at upper secondary school. They also expressed the necessity for continuous self-assessment. Eric put it this way: “It is not enough to do it [self-assess] during the assignment, you have to do it during the whole term or longer” (G1:54 E E 3:7).<sup>30</sup>

To carry out their assignments well, students claimed it was important to be able to self-assess their work. They also expressed that self-assessment exercises were relevant in other subjects as well, not only in EFL. Alex said, “Why is there self-assessment only in English? I mean, it should be in all subjects in the first year. At least in the core subjects” (G4:155 E A 4:9).<sup>31</sup> Students also thought that if there were elements of self-assessment in the lower grades, the ability to self-assess would develop earlier and it would become more natural to self-assess in *all* subjects. According to them, self-assessment could influence future employment and working life, that is, “lifelong learning”.

Students pointed out that the National Agency of Education wanted self-assessment skills to be developed at school, but that it must be difficult to implement, as they had not experienced this in the school system previously. Bob’s comment summarized one discussion in the following manner:

The basic idea that the National Agency of Education has, is that they want a basis for- that is, they want the pupil to develop at his or her own pace and be able to self-assess but- This is what shows that it is difficult, that it has not happened yet- You have to set out to make it work much more now I

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<sup>29</sup> Author’s translation of: “[Tänk på] vad lär du dig på detta som du kan typ lära dig *i livet* liksom. Alltså du studerar ju inte liksom bara engelska, du ska studera massa andra ämnen. Det kan va bra att kunna bedöma sig själv där också. Liksom [...] Skit i betyget, det betyder inte så mycket. Det kanske är bättre att lära sig något som du har mer nytta av. Kanske även när du är vuxen och skall lära dig andra nya saker. Jag tycker det är ganska bra att kunna va självkritisk mot sig själv och det har ju lite med det att göra att kunna bedöma sig själv att göra också”.

<sup>30</sup> Author’s translation of: “Det räcker inte med att man gör det under den uppgiften. Utan man får jobba med det under hela terminen eller längre.

<sup>31</sup> Author’s translation of: “Varför finns den där självbedömningen bara i engelska? Alltså den borde ju finnas i alla ämnen i ettan? I alla fall i kärnämnen”.

think, like you did in the project, so that is a big step forward (G 4:126 E B 4:5).<sup>32</sup>

Further, students expressed a wish that self-assessment practices should be taught to all Swedish teachers, and in all Swedish schools because then teachers could become more of “guides in learning” and the students would be able to take more responsibility for their own learning.

To be able to self-assess, self-observation and self-understanding skills needed to be developed according to many students. These skills could be trained and improved through practice. The impact that self-assessment could have on self-confidence and self-esteem, was also commented on. The accuracy of self-assessment and grading could depend on how self-critical a person was, and if they had high or low self-confidence, as Kristin and Ivan’s exchange shows:

[Kristin:] It also depends on how self-critical you are as a person. I mean, I can be extremely self-critical sometimes, like- And then it really depends on what your self-confidence is like- if you have low self-confidence it’s guaranteed you’ll set a lower grade (G5:104 E K 2:3).

[Ivan:] If you think that you are really good [in English], and then you, maybe you get a lower grade than you had expected, then maybe you’ll think, “Damn, I’m not good now” (G5:177 E I 3:2).

[Kristin:] It lowers your self-confidence (G5:178 E K 3:1).<sup>33</sup>

A student with low self-confidence might influence a teacher negatively, and actually receive a lower grade than he or she deserved. Several participants commented that they had not ventured to assess themselves at one of the higher grade levels because they would not like it if the teacher lowered the assessment that they themselves had made. Other students commented that they had estimated their own grade slightly lower than they thought might be possible to get, because they did not want to lose in self-esteem. This attitude is apparent in Vincent, Richard and Thomas’ discussion:

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<sup>32</sup> Author’s translation of: Bob: “Skolverkets grundidé är ju det att dom vill ha grund- alltså att dom vill att eleven skall utvecklas i egen takt och kunna bedöma sig själva men- Det är det som visar att det är svårt att det inte har blivit så nu- Man måste ta tag i det mycket hårdare nu tycker jag så som ni gjorde i projektet såå, det är ett steg framåt.”

<sup>33</sup> Author’s translation of:

[Kristin:] “- det beror ju också på hur självkritisk du är som person. Jag menar jag kan vara grymt självkritisk ibland liksom- Och så beror det precis på vad du har för självförtroende- har du lågt självförtroende garanterat du kommer att sätta lägre betyg”

[Ivan:] “Om man tror att man är jättebra och så får man kanske ett sämre betyg än vad man väntade sig så kanske man känner ”Fan jag är dålig nu”

[Kristin:] “Sänker självförtroendet-“

[Vincent:] I feel anyway, that I don't dare set a grade that is too high, because partly I think it would feel strange if she corrected it to a lower grade. I mean, I don't really dare believe in myself when it comes to self-assessment. (G8:23 E V1:5)

[Richard:] No, I set my grade so that- [if I] set a grade that is too high and she gives me a lower one, then, then like I lose my- what's it called? (G8:56 E R 2:4)

[Thomas:] Credibility? (G8:57 E T 2:4)

[Vincent:] Self-esteem? (G8:59 E V:2:4)

[Richard:] Yes, self-esteem to- if I set a fair grade, the same as she does, I think, "Damn I'm good at this. Yeah, so maybe I go on working in that manner, so that it can be even better?" But if I set a grade that is too high, and she sets a low one, then it will be like, "I can't do this now, blaaah, I give up" (G8:60 E R:2:6).<sup>34</sup>

These students figured that if their teacher gave them a better grade than they had expected, they would feel accomplished and work harder to improve while they might otherwise lose both interest and focus.

There was also a belief among students that their teachers had changed their teaching through working with self-assessment practices in the study. They claimed, for example, that the teachers let them think for themselves more than before.

Summing up, students were generally positive towards self-assessment and felt it was an important skill to develop early on, as it enhanced student responsibility and critical skills, also in other subjects. They indicated awareness of how their varying levels of self-confidence could influence self-assessment and noted that the teaching changed when the teachers let the students self-assess their EFL writing.

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<sup>34</sup>Author's translation of:

[Vincent:] "Jag känner så i alla fall att jag vågar inte sätta ett för högt betyg, för dels tänker jag att det skulle kännas konstigt om hon rättade det och sen blev det lägre. Alltså, jag vågar inte riktigt tro på mig själv när det gäller självbedömning."

[Richard:] "Nej, jag satte lite betyget så för att- sätta ett för högt betyg och hon ger mig ett lägre, då- då liksom jag förlorar min- vad heter det?"

[Thomas:] "Trovärdighet?"

[Vincent:] "Självkänsla?"

[Richard:] "Ja den självkänslan att- sätter jag ett lagom betyg precis där hon sätter det, tänker jag: Fan jag är duktig på det här. Ja, så kanske jobbar jag vidare, så blir det kanske bättre ändå? Men sätter jag för högt betyg och hon sätter lågt, då blir det liksom: Det här kan inte jag nu, blå nu orkar jag inte med det här längre."

## Voices on Self-assessment when Learning EFL

Students had a “gut feeling” that self-assessment was beneficial to learning English. They also expressed the view that the relation between self-assessment and learning EFL was different for different people, but they maintained that it was of general value to become aware of language limitations so as to facilitate improvement. Patricia, for example, said:

I think it does matter a little. I have become a bit more aware of mistakes and other things that I have done. It may be- or the things that I might not know so well, and then I know... that what I... that I might have to practice more. Then I think that I can learn better. Then, I easily learn words if... if I can see myself that I've made mistakes I can correct them. Then I learn them... (G3:76 E P 3:1).<sup>35</sup>

Students became more involved in their EFL learning through self-assessment practices and said that the approach made a difference to their learning.

Further, students commented that they were not very good at self-assessment in EFL at the present time (i.e. at the time of the interview) and that it was difficult to self-assess. By comparing their own assessment with that of, for example, the teacher, they had started to understand what they should focus on. To be really supportive to EFL learning, self-assessment needed to be practiced repeatedly throughout a course.

Few students expressed the view that self-assessment practices were not beneficial to learning EFL. These students argued that it was better to spend class time on learning English than engaging in self-assessment of it. Their major concern was that important learning time was being wasted.

Students who felt that they always did their best made the point that conscious or unconscious self-assessment would not make any difference to their learning process.

Summing up, the students' views of the importance of self-assessment in EFL were diverse, ranging the view that it was beneficial and conducive to EFL learning to the notion that it was a waste of time or made no difference whatsoever.

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<sup>35</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag tycker att det spelar lite roll. Man har blivit lite mer medveten om fel o sånt som man har gjort. Det kanske- eller såna grejor som man kanske inte kan så bra och då vet man... att vad man... att man kanske behöver träna på mer då. Då tycker jag att man kan lära sig bättre. Sen så, jag lär mig väldigt lätt ord om- om jag ser själv att det blir fel då så rättar jag dem. Då lär jag mig dem"

## Voices on Self-assessment of Grades in EFL

One opinion elicited was that it was not possible for students to set their own real or ‘mock’ grades. The reason participants gave was that they were not trained for this. As a consequence they believed that they would probably either over- or underestimate themselves.

Students also claimed that there were always people who would misuse an opportunity to grade themselves, and give themselves higher marks than they deserved. They strongly believed that self-assessment was not possible in high-stakes situations, such as when crucial decisions about final course grades are taken.

Another point made by some students was that they really assessed themselves in accordance with how they believed that their teacher would assess them, not in accordance with set criteria. The discussion between Vincent and Richard illustrates this:

[Vincent:] I think that you assess yourself from TB’s perspective. What you think that she is going to give you for a grade. That’s how I think that you assess yourself. You’re used to hearing TB’s or reading TB’s corrections and then you think about how she usually corrects when you assess yourself, and it is different from teacher to teacher so that when you start from what you have- It- you think unconsciously [in this manner] (G8:15 E V 1:3)

[Richard:] Yeah, you simply adapt [your assessment] to the teacher’s, I think (G8:16 E R 1:4)<sup>36</sup>

Students reasoned in this manner, as they believed that the teacher’s assessment and grade was fair and based on the relevant grading criteria. Others, like Yves, took the opposite standpoint:

I consciously avoided adapting my opinion to TB’s, what she thought- But what I thought myself... (G8:17 E Y 1:3).<sup>37</sup>

Students also supposed that because they were not fluent in English, they were not able to determine the level of English they had reached. Instead they said they learned this through their teachers’ assessments, their previous

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<sup>36</sup> Author’s translation of:

[Vincent:] “Jag tror man bedömer sig själv utifrån L2’s perspektiv. Vad man tror att hon skall sätta. Så tror jag att man bedömer sig själv. Man är van vid att höra L2s eller läsa L2s rättningar och då tänker man på hur hon brukar rätta när man bedömer sig själv, och det är olika från lärare till lärare så att när man utgår från den man har- Det- så tänker man omedvetet.”

[Richard:] “Ja, man anpassar sig efter läraren helt enkelt, tror jag.”

<sup>37</sup> Author’s translation of: “Jag undvek medvetet att inte anpassa mig efter L2, vad hon trodde som- Utan det jag själv tyckte...”

grades as well as by comparing their English with that of classmates and with the grading criteria. Students holding this opinion drew a distinction between *comparing* and *assessing* their skills in EFL.

Other participants believed they could loosely estimate the grade level they had attained, but were not capable of being more precise. For example, there were students who guessed they would attain PwD on their assignment and received a P but with a plus added by their teacher to show that they were very close to a PwD.

Yet others explained that their understanding of the required level for each grade had developed ‘automatically’. They said they knew how well they could perform and what the corresponding grade level was in practice, but that they found it difficult to account for. Don expressed it in this manner:

But it shouldn't be a question of a... an actual grade, like: I am worth this. Whamoo! You have a Fail. You, you have an intuitive feeling of the grade level you've reached right now. The assessment, and then what you've done well, as well as badly after that. Then you need to think about that stuff, and improve until the next grade, or-... (G4:122 E D 4:9).<sup>38</sup>

When (and if) they were honest in their assessment of their achievement level students believed it to be accurate.

Students thought that their grades could be affected by self-assessment practices, because it helped them develop their language skills, and thus made it possible for them to attain the higher grades. In other words, self-assessment made an impact on grades indirectly. When students discussed their English with their teacher after having made their own assessment of their work for example, misunderstandings on both sides could be explained. The students could justify why they had written something in a certain way and through this dialogue the teacher could more easily see where the students were in their language development.

There were two risks that participants brought up pertaining to self-assessment and grades. One was that grades could become too much of an issue, with limiting effect on their progress if they constantly focused on their EFL skills in relation to the grading criteria. Students feared that this would accentuate the present focus on grades, rather than the process of *learning English*. Additionally, when they knew exactly what was needed for a certain

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<sup>38</sup> Author's translation of: "Men det skall inte handla om ett- ett direkt betyg, alltså så här, jag är värd det här. Pang! Här har du ettan. Du- Du känner vad du har för betyg just nu, omdömet då och sen vad du gjort för bra och dåligt sen skall du kunna tänka på dom grejerna och utveckla dig själv till nästa betyg eller-".

grade, they could no longer claim that they were unaware of what was demanded of them. The second risk factor was that the teacher could be influenced negatively by an individual student's self-assessment, so that even if a student was at the PwD level, the teacher might not give him or her credit for the work done if he or she self-assessed it to a P.

Participants also claimed that there were areas of their English skills that teachers were not really able to assess, such as reading comprehension and oral skills. In both cases they found the school assessment situation inadequate, as reading was often assessed through writing in the form of book reviews for example, and speaking was typically not performed in authentic situations with native speakers.

To summarize, students' opinions varied on the question of whether they were able to set their own grades and could see the grade level they had attained. There were areas of students' knowledge that the teachers could not assess, but students found their own ability to self-assess to be very individual, and foresaw that summative self-assessment could involve certain problems.

### Voices on Self-assessment of Writing EFL

The self-assessment of writing skills in general was, according to students, facilitated by having reached a certain level of English. Only at a certain level did they think that they could recognize whether they were using, for example, adequate vocabulary or not. Once fairly proficient in the subject, students supposed that they could learn more deliberately through self-assessment. In relation to this, they said it was important to understand the grading criteria for writing. An exposure to authentic English was also seen as necessary to really comprehend what a certain grade or proficiency level could entail.

Participants thought that it was easier to assess their general level of written English than their competence in different specific language skills. Charles, for example, said that "It is difficult to assess yourself because you write in a manner that you think is correct and then you can't see when you've made spelling or grammar mistakes" (G1:31 E C 2.1).<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Author's translation of: "Det är svårt att bedöma sig själv för man skriver ju som man tror det är rätt o då ser man ju inte när man gjort stavfel eller grammatiska fel".

The opinions on self-assessment of writing in general differed in some respects between the two course groups. Course A participants were convinced that their own assessments of their writing skills, regarding both strong and weak points, were *more* exact than their teachers' assessments. These students were convinced that they had assessed themselves correctly and that they knew what level of English they had attained. Their certainty resulted from having compared themselves with each other, as well as from checking the grading criteria. Bob for example explained that:

Yeah, you know yourself better than the teacher does and then-, when you grade yourself, then- there are several aspects combined. How you have approached writing a composition or some other text. You might have used a dictionary or other things, and you think "I used dictionaries, I don't really know these words", and then you get- then you give yourself a lower grade. But if I check a- in a dictionary all the time and hand it in to the teacher, then the teacher doesn't know that. And I get a higher grade, even if I don't really know the words (G4:40 E B 2:1).<sup>40</sup>

Students in Course A also said that they had a very clear picture of the level of writing skills they had reached at the previous compulsory school level, but that they were now somewhat uncertain of expectations at the upper secondary level. These students expressed uncertainty about course demands and expectations, as well as about their new teacher's degree of strictness when grading. Still, they believed that they themselves could and would assess themselves correctly, one reason being that they wanted to be seen as credible in the eyes of the teacher. As Kristin said:

Then when we grade ourselves. You give yourself a rather... the grade that you think you deserve pretty well. Then, well you probably lean in some direction. But of course because you want a rather good grade, you don't want to say a grade that is too low, but you can't say a grade that is higher than what you really deserve because you want to, you know, be credible in the future, and be found trustworthy (G5:103 E K 2:3).<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Author's translation of: "Ja, man känner sig själv mera än vad en lärare känner en och då- när man sätter betyg på sig själv då- då är det flera aspekter som blandas in. Hur man nu har gått tillväga för att skriva en uppsats eller något liknande. Så kanske man använder ordböcker eller andra saker så kanske man tänker på "jag använder ordböcker, jag kan egentligen inte dom här orden" och då får- då sätter man ju ett lägre betyg på sig själv. Men om jag nu kollar på- i en ordlistan hela tiden och lämnar in den till läraren då vet ju läraren inte det. Och då får jag ju högre betyg fast jag egentligen inte kan orden".

<sup>41</sup> Author's translation of: "Sen när vi sätter betyg på sig själv. Man sätter ju ett ganska- det betyget som man tycker man förtjänar ganska bra. För- sen drar man väl det antagligen åt något håll. Men det är mycket för man vill ju inte säga för lågt betyg så klart, för man vill ju ha ganska högt betyg, men man säger ju inte högre betyg än vad man egentligen förtjänar eftersom man vill ha det liksom ganska trovärdigt då i fortsättningen kunna ha det trovärdigt också".

In contrast, there were students in Course B who were uncertain of their own self-assessment ability. These students expressed the belief that they consciously or unconsciously adjusted and adapted their self-assessments to the current teacher's grading. They also expressed confidence in their teacher whom they regarded as a competent and proficient grader. The participants agreed that their self-assessment of their writing, and thus their self-assessment ability, was influenced by previous experiences of teacher assessment.

The majority of the interviewed students had positive comments on how they experienced the method used, that is, self-assessment coupled to a writing assignment using a slightly adapted writing process approach (cf. Chapter 7). They said they liked the method because they became more aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, as well as overall difficulties in EFL, not only in writing. They could also give details, and develop their thoughts better when allowed to write in this manner. Just as they had never self-assessed their EFL writing before, they had not done any writing using the writing process approach previously. What students appreciated most, was the fact that after having thought about what needed to be improved in their writing they had an opportunity to revise their work. Participants had been more inspired and written more in-depth when they were able to go back to their text a second time. They also liked the fact that they were not graded on the draft version.

While speaking about pre-writing and draft writing it became apparent that among the interviewed students many had worked very differently in the pre-writing phase, and that this had made a difference to their experience and the results. Students, who had chosen a subject that they were intrinsically interested in had read more and gone deeper into the subject matter. They had found the writing assignment enjoyable, and had prepared to write about the other culture, or media not only in class but also outside class. Filip said for example, "But, I read a lot when I wrote the letter. I read a lot at home" (G5:62 EF:1:11)<sup>42</sup>. Students who had, on the other hand, overestimated their knowledge of the content area before they started writing, realized afterwards that it would have helped their writing if they had been better prepared. Kristin's answer to a comment by Ivan illustrates this:

But Ivan, I don't think everyone in class worked all that well with our countries. I thought that you were supposed to know quite a lot about the

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<sup>42</sup> Author's translation of: "Men jag läste mycket när jag gjorde brevet. Eller, jag läste mycket hemma."

culture before we sat down [to write]. Everyone discovered once they had handed in their draft that, whoops, by next time, by then I'm going to have to read a bit more about the Irish culture for example" (G5:64 E K 1:16).<sup>43</sup>

Only students within Course A commented that the writing content felt most important. These first year students also voiced surprise on being assessed on *both* language and content.

Many participants explicitly expressed that they felt they had learned more by assessing their own EFL writing (i.e. checking everything themselves including spelling, grammar, genre and content) before handing in their written assignment, and before receiving the teacher's feedback than through just relying on teacher corrections. Don especially appreciated the *Self-Assessment Questionnaire*, and said:

It was very good, the assessment part in the Self-assessment Questionnaire where it said, you know "What are you satisfied with?", "What can you – improve?", because it opened my eyes. And what should I think about. So it was very good (G4:24 E D 1:5).<sup>44</sup>

The major problem in self-assessing the writing assignment was the difficulty of assessing the specific language skills. As they did not make mistakes on purpose, students found it nearly impossible to self-assess their own language. It was difficult for them to observe their own mistakes as they were so involved in their own text, and they were often convinced that they had expressed themselves correctly. Not knowing what to look for, they expressed the need for an impartial reader to give adequate responses.

Previously, according to all the participants, their written work had always been handed back already corrected. Many had therefore reacted with bewilderment at first, unused as they were to interpreting the underlined sentences, questions and comments the teachers had used in their feedback. Students found that this 'new' form of feedback led them to develop both content and language. Many preferred the open type of questions such as "Are you sure about this?" for example, and "Is this really what you mean to express?" compared to previous corrections. Through neutral teacher comments (i.e. not value-laden in either positive or negative terms) students

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<sup>43</sup> Author's translation of: "Fast, Ivan, jag tror att det är så att alla i klassen har inte jobbat så jätteflitigt med våra länder. Jag trodde nog att man skulle kunna ganska mycket om kulturen innan vi satte oss ner. Det upptäckte alla efter första inlämningen också att oj, till nästa gång, tills då skall jag nog ha läste lite om den typ irländska kulturen"

<sup>44</sup> Author's translation of: "Det var väldigt bra, just den bedömn- delen i frågeformuläret där det var liksom "vad är du nöjd med?", "vad kan du –" få utveckla sig- för det öppnade mina ögon tyckte jag. Att vad jag skall tänka på. Så det var väldigt bra".

said they could develop more and better ideas on their own. They had also deliberated their language use (e.g. choice of vocabulary) more carefully by themselves. For example, the underlinings could draw attention to how a sentence had been constructed but the students had to work out for themselves whether what they had written was what they had really meant, and if this was correctly expressed or not. When they were expected to correct the language themselves, it gave them an opportunity to reformulate whole sentences, and their entire writing concept. They had a chance to self-assess their overall input, improve the language and develop their ideas more thoroughly as a consequence.

In this case, students experienced self-assessment as less a matter of giving themselves grades, but of assessing their own performance in relation to what they wanted to communicate in writing and thus how they could improve. Diana said “I thought it was really good because I got to think for myself about the mistakes that I had made – I didn’t just get the corrections – this is the way it should be. I had to think, eh, why? [...]” (G1:10 E D 1:2).<sup>45</sup>

Students also said this type of feedback helped them to see and learn from their mistakes so that they would not repeat them again. This was because they carefully continued to check the specific types of mistakes they had made the first time around, on the written assignment, as they continued to write. They attributed this to the fact that they had had to figure out how to solve the relevant language problem themselves. Even participants, who knew they had to work on their language in general, said they needed to become more aware of the specific types of mistakes made. The self-assessment of specific language skills forced them to focus on the different language skills involved in writing. And, as the teacher response did not give them any ready answers, such as the correct form of a verb for example, they then had to think for themselves how to improve. They felt that they could use the knowledge acquired in this way at the next writing opportunity.

Another related comment was that participants had continued to check *all* other written work more thoroughly (e.g. up to three or four times) after having worked in this manner on the assignment, and every time they seemed to find errors to they had not seen before. Students experienced that the result of these revisions was an even better end product. They also believed that the next writing assignment in EFL would be much easier, because they had

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<sup>45</sup> Author’s translation of: ”Jag tyckte det var jättebra för att jag fick själv tänka på vad jag gjort för fel - inte bara fick det framför mig – så här skall du göra utan att jag fick tänka, eh, varför [...]”.

learned to see at least some of the typical mistakes they were prone to make. Being aware of previous mistakes helped them not to repeat them. Patricia, “You become more aware of the mistakes that you make, and how you can improve by using simple means” (G3:12 E P 1:1)<sup>46</sup>.

There were, on the other hand, students who found the feedback difficult to understand when the teacher had not been explicit in her corrections, and reflected that it would have been better for them if they had received a more pronounced indication of what the teacher meant. Students did not want to feel that they were left entirely to their own resources.

There were also students who felt that it would have been better if the teacher had corrected everything as usual, or if it had been possible for them to receive immediate feedback on their writing. This preferably during lesson time, as a whole week passed between EFL classes. However, students expressing these views also realized that they were expected to work independently and continually revise their written work on their own.

There seemed to be a general understanding among the students that someone else needed to read and respond to their written assignments as they were too involved in their own texts to be able to judge them objectively. In their opinion, the feedback did not necessarily have to come from the teacher. A few comments by Ulf and Filip will serve to illustrate this:

[Ulf:] You need someone uninitiated, who like completely independently reads the text. Because you naturally understand what you have written, yourself. But your wording can be very strange. Sort of- abstract or something and it- then it can be very difficult to understand what you mean. And then you need someone who maybe doesn't think in the same manner, like you do yourself. I think (G8:37 E U 2:1).

[Filip:] No, but I think it is rather good if you- right now we are doing something where we encourage each other to check through each other's work too (G5:86 E F 1:14).

[Ulf:] And therefore you don't need a teacher who corrects it. You can have an outsider, you need- for example a friend, a parent or someone (G8:130 E U 4:8).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Author's translation of: "Man blir mer medveten om vad man gör för fel och hur man kan förbättra det på ganska enkla sätt ändå".

<sup>47</sup> Author's translation of:

[Ulf:] "Man behöver någon utomstående som även helt liksom oberoende läser texten. För att det man har skrivit det förstår man ju självklart själv. Men, sina egna formuleringar kan ju vara väldigt konstiga. Typ abstrakta eller någonting och det- då blir det väldigt svårt att tyda det. Och då behöver man någon som kanske inte tänker på samma sätt som en själv. Tycker jag."

One aspect of the neutral teacher responses to the written texts was especially appreciated: that they made it easier for students to read and comment on each other's work. This also facilitated helping each other understand what needed to be improved. In such a context, both positive and negative responses could be embarrassing. Students found it easier to see another person's mistakes, and believed that peer-response helped them to also develop their own language proficiency.

Self-assessing the writing assignment was experienced as "fun". The participants reported that it was "enjoyable" to assess their own work in this manner as it gave them feelings of independence and of being in control. Lars described it as, "you understand, you get to learn on your own" (G3:11 E L 1:3)<sup>48</sup>.

Few critical views of self-assessment directly related to the writing assignment were expressed. One was that it was difficult, but on the other hand these students believed it could become easier through practice. Another critical view came from students who did not understand the point of self-assessment, and who felt that there was nothing to be learned from merely *grading* their own work.

The reason that students gave for the writing assignment method (i.e. writing process approach coupled with self-assessment questions) having worked so well, was that it both enabled and forced them to take responsibility for their work and to think for themselves. When they had a second chance to decide whether, for example, a sentence was supposed to be in first or third person, if it had the right word order, or if a word was spelled correctly, they felt as if they were involved in 'real learning'.

Students reported a preference for working in this manner, and believed that if they did so continuously, self-assessment would become so automatised that they would routinely revise their work in accordance with the criteria. Bob described how he normally would have taken his graded text, when returned to him by his teacher, and either thrown it in the waste paper basket or left it on his desk at home without another glance,

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[Filip:] "Nej, men det jag tror att det är ganska bra att man- nu håller vi på med något som vi uppmuntrar varandra att kolla igenom varandras grejor också".

[Ulf:] "Och därför behöver det egentligen inte vara en lärare som rättar det. Du kan ha en utomstående, du behöver- till exempel en kompis, föräldrar eller nåt annat."

<sup>48</sup> Author's translation of: "[...] man ser, får lära ju sig själv".

because normally I would have gotten the letter back, which was not rewritten- – gotten the letter back with a grade on it but without having self-assessed it, and I would probably not have assessed it [myself]. The grade would already have been on it. I would have thrown it in the waste paper basket [or] put it on my desk at home, and then done something else. So it is clearly much better if you are able to assess what you have done before, before you hand it in. But, then it is more difficult for the teacher to see what you have, what shortcomings you have. [...] (G4:65 E B 3:2).<sup>49</sup>

When it came to giving themselves a ‘mock’ grade on the assignment there was a peril, according to the students, that the writer would be partial in some respect, and lean either towards a higher grade than he or she should have, or a lower one. They remarked that they could become too lenient if they had the final say as to what their work was worth. They also found it easy to overestimate their achievements when they had put a lot of time and effort into an assignment, and subsequently became more disappointed if the effort did not result in a good grade.

There were also those who confessed that they had not taken the self-assessment part of the assignment as seriously as they could have, because they felt they were pressured by the time allotted in class. These students had wanted extra time to be set aside especially for self-assessment. The self-assessment questionnaire was done at the end of their EFL class, which in some cases ended the school day. Students tended to prioritize continued writing rather than assessing their writing when time was limited.

In summary, many positive as well as a few critical voices of self-assessment coupled to the writing assignment were reported. To be able to assess their own writing skill in EFL, students said that they needed to reach a certain language level first, and have an understanding of the grading criteria. They found it easier to assess their general level of English than their competence in different specific language skills. They appreciated the neutral type of feedback given by the teachers as it enabled revision on the students’ own assumptions, and facilitated peer response. Student groups within Course A were certain that their own writing self-assessment was more valid than their teacher’s, while Course B students were more uncertain and believed that their own assessments were largely influenced by their previous grades.

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<sup>49</sup> Author’s translation of: ”[...] för i normala fall skulle jag fått tillbaka brevet som ju inte renskrivet- få tillbaka brevet med betyg på utan att jag har bedömt det själv och sedan så skulle jag troligtvis inte bedöma det. Betyget står ju redan på det. Jag skulle ha kastat det i papperskorgen, lagt det hemma på skrivbordet och sedan gjort något annat. Så det är helt klart bättre om man får bedöma det man gjort innan- innan man lämnar in det. Men, då blir det ju svårare för läraren att se var man har- vad- vilka brister man har. [...]”.

## Voices on Involving Students in the Assessment of EFL

All the interviewed students mentioned using self-assessment practices coupled to a writing assignment (in the manner done in the study) as one method to involve students in the assessment of their own EFL skills. Several had suggestions for carrying the method one step further.

One idea was that it ought to be possible for students to revise everything they handed in, until it reached the grade level they aimed for. In other words, the students should be able to redo an assignment until it was awarded a PwD for example. Omar proposed:

It should be like this, actually, like... the way it always was before... that you... you do something and then you give it to the teacher and then the teacher said you should improve this, and this and that. And then you practice, until the next time. And then you keep on until the end of the assignment. And if you can't manage, then you, sort of... Well if you manage it, then you should be able to get the highest grade, if that [what you've done] is what the teacher wants (G3:253 E O 4:20).<sup>50</sup>

And Nemo thought:

If you say that on an assignment like that, you improve all the time- then the teacher can quite clearly see: You've learnt that now. I can imagine it should be quite obvious what level you've reached. Then you can improve it yourself- improve it yourself... at the end that is... So you don't just grade the assignment you've had, but the teacher can look at the whole assignment and see the whole grade. That could be something (G3:254 E N 4:23).<sup>51</sup>

Another suggestion was that students could tell the teacher in what skills area and in what way they had improved when they handed in a written text. Edward explained:

Then there is one thing too...well, as you say... I am good at this and if you sit down and talk to the teacher about... this is what I... I think I am good at this and this... I want to show it. Or is it better if you say, "I am not very good at this. Can't I... can't we... plan something so that I can practice this more?" If you know you are, or if you feel that you are good at something, it's about self-understanding. Whether you are or not, you may need the

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<sup>50</sup> Author's translation of: "Det borde vara så här va egentligen, så som- som det alltid har varit innan att man- att man- du gör nåt så lämnar du in det till lärare o så säger läraren du borde förbättra dig på det här och det här och det här. Så tränar man på det där, till nästa gång. Så håller man på så där tills slutet av uppgiften. O klara man inte det då, då kanske man typ. Ja om man klarar det då, då borde man väl få högsta betyg, om det är det läraren vill ha".

<sup>51</sup> Author's translation of: "Om man säger på en sån uppgift att, man hela tiden förbättra på den- Då kan läraren ganska tydligt se på dig: Det har du lärt dig nu. Jag kan tänka mig det kan blir ganska tydligt att se vilken nivå man ligger där. Sen kan man förbättra det själv, förbättra det själv- alltså i slutet av- Så att man inte bara sätter betyget på uppgiften du får, utan lärare får titta på hela uppgiften och se helt betyg i hela den uppgiften. Skulle kunna vara någonting".

teacher's... or a supervisor's opinion, but if there is something that you feel that you are bad at which may more often be the case... isn't it better that you work on that instead? (G4:134 E E 4:11).<sup>52</sup>

This idea presupposed that the students were both honest and secure enough to reveal both successes and failures, and many foresaw that in high-stakes assignments they would be tempted to cheat.

Students also commented that discussing the grading criteria in class was not enough, as every student needed to understand it on a personal level to really grasp its significance. Teachers and students needed to interpret criteria together. Participants wanted to be given the relevant learning objectives in the form of excerpts from syllabus texts and or grading criteria for each assignment or exercise to be done.

Also, a specific period should be set aside for self-assessment during class period. During longer projects, for example, students suggested normal deadlines, but two days before the assignment was to be handed in they wanted the opportunity to both self-assess their work and revise it with the help of their teacher. They also recommended checklists as a help to remembering what was important. Both teachers and students could use these, not only for particular assignments, but to cover the whole course content. It was also suggested that the teacher could assess the student's self-assessment skills, because if students seemed to self-assess themselves incorrectly, they needed to learn this too.

Yet another idea to involve students more was the portfolio concept in languages. Participants had heard that when working with the European Language Portfolio (cf. 3.1.3), for example, they could revise their written work, add it to their dossiers, and use ready-made self-assessment checklists. Kristin said:

I think that processing or revising things is good. So that you can see the different steps, and then you can go back and realize "I was much better... I was much better now than in the first version." I think that gives a certain

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<sup>52</sup> Author's translation of: "Sen så är det en sak också om man- ja som du säger- detta är jag bra på och om du sätter dig att prata med läraren om- detta är jag- tycker jag att jag är bra på, och detta- jag vill visa det. Eller är det bättre att man tar det eller är det bättre att man tar upp "detta är jag mindre bra på. Kan jag inte få- kan vi inte- kan vi lägga upp någonting så jag får träna mer på detta". Om du vet eller om du känner på dig att du är bra på något, det är också det med självinsikt. Om man är det eller inte då kanske man behöver i och för sig en lärares- eller en handledares åsikt om detta men om du är något som du känner att du är dålig på vilket det kanske oftare är- är det inte bättre då att man tar tag i det då istället".

self-assessment feeling or so. It is as Filip says – portfolio (G5:230 E K 4:6).<sup>53</sup>

Several participants believed that if the teacher and student together went through the whole term's work, or even one individual assignment, at least once a term they would become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses in EFL. Existing discrepancies between their own view and that of the teacher needed to be understood. Previous experiences of such teacher-student dialogues from compulsory school, varied in quality. They could be experienced as meaningless or negative if the teacher merely imparted the grade to the student. The opportunity to explain their own learning situation to the teacher, for mutual learning and understanding was considered important. Students wanted the teacher to discuss individual needs and areas of improvement in EFL with each individual. They also wanted opportunities to work on particularly weak areas in their language over a period of a few weeks. In this manner they would not only improve, for example, vocabulary skills, but would also attain a better course grade at the end of the term. Don said:

Then I've always thought about this- grades-, that you have your weak points and your strong points. And- and shouldn't you have a chance to show your weaker areas?- that they might not be weak sometimes?- I mean, let's say I have a grade that- some months before the final grade- and then you say- these are your weak points; you can't vary your language, and you use rather easy- simple language. Can I have a chance then, during two weeks to write a small text for example, where I use language that I am, according to myself, not very good at? Then you can... And because the teacher thinks just like you do yourself, and you are in agreement that- about being able to show that you could vary and that may influence the grade. So assessment has a lot more positive than negative sides, I think (G4:133 E D 4:11).<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Author's translation of: "Men just det här med att man bearbetar saker tror jag kan va bra. Att du får se de olika stegen så kan du titta tillbaka sen igen och "jag var mycket bättre- jag var mycket bättre nu än vad jag var första versionen". Det tror jag kan ge en viss självbedömnings känsla eller så. Det är som Filip nu säger – portfolio".

<sup>54</sup> Author's translation of: "Sen är det så att jag har alltid tänkt på det här med att- med betyg- att man har sina svaga sidor och sina starka sidor. Och- och skall man inte kunna få chansen att få visa sina svaga sidor- att att dom kanske inte är svaga någon gång- ibland. Alltså, vi säger att vi har ett betyg som- några månader innan betyg skall sättas och så säger man- dom att detta är dina svaga punkter att du kan inte variera ditt språk och du använder ganska lätt- enkelt språk. Kan jag få chansen då på två veckor att skriva ett litet arbete där jag använder det här språket och det som är enligt mig som jag är dålig på. Då kan man- Och eftersom läraren tycker och som en själv och man kommit överens om- kunna visa att man kunde variera och det kanske kan påverka betyget på det sättet. Så bedömning har ju många mer positiva än negativa sidor tycker jag".

That students themselves could correct their own work to a greater degree was suggested. The risk of abuse, as in the case where the key to an exercise was merely copied, was commented on, but students believed this could work if the student first showed the completed assignment to their teacher before being allowed to correct it. Writing assignments did not always need to be handed in and graded by the teacher, instead students could do this themselves. If the student handed in the final version of a text together with the first drafts that he or she had written, so that the teacher could see the development of the text, there would be no risk of cheating. Help in the form of dictionaries and grammar books would be enough. According to Peter:

One idea would be to correct your own work. But it can easily be misused and maybe you just don't bother to do the exercise and look in the key instead. Maybe you can show the teacher that you've done the assignment and then correct it yourself afterwards. And then you can check the mistakes you have made and what you still need to learn. That could be something (G7:130 E P 4:1).<sup>55</sup>

It was also suggested that peer assessment be used more. When the students had the opportunity to assess each other's texts rather than their own, they would not only learn to critically examine a piece of work, but also learn from others' mistakes. Teodor expressed it in this way:

I think that would be a good thing too. If you correct each other's [work]. Because it is exactly as Oscar says, you see someone else's mistakes much more easily than your own. Because you are so certain that you're doing everything right (G7:132 E T 4:1).<sup>56</sup>

All in all, the students had several suggestions for implementing a more formative type of assessment approach in EFL, including the method used in this study. More emphasis on working with criteria, time for relevant feedback and revision, special time set aside for teacher-student dialogue, peer- and self-assessment, work with portfolios and checklists were also suggested as possible ways to involve students more in their own EFL assessment.

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<sup>55</sup> Author's translation of: "En sak skulle ju kunna vara rätta sina egna uppgifter. Men, det kan ju lätt missbrukas och man kanske struntar i att göra uppgiften och kollar i facit direkt. Kanske man kan visa upp att man gjort uppgiften för läraren och så rätta det själv sen då. Och så kan man då kolla igenom vad har jag gjort fel och vad måste jag lära mig. Det skulle ju vara en grej".

<sup>56</sup> Author's translation of: "Det tycker jag också skulle vara en bra grej. Om man rättar varandras. För det är precis som Oscar säger, man ser mer fel som någon annan gör än vad man själv gör. För man är så inställd på att man själv gör rätt".

### 7.3.2 The Teachers' Experiences

In the analysis of the teacher interview data, the first step was, as with for the students data, to categorize the teachers' opinions and beliefs under different headings following several readings of the transcribed texts, as well as re-listening to the original recordings. The results are presented so as to go from an account of the teachers' general previous experiences and beliefs, to their comments and reflections on student influence and responsibility, grading and assessment of their EFL, and finally, self-assessment practices in EFL. Only when the two teachers' views differ in some respect are these accounted for separately.

#### The Teachers' Previous Experiences and Beliefs

The two teachers who were involved in the project know as *Self-assessment of Learning: the Case of Language (SALL)* and in the present research study had similar backgrounds, were about the same age, and had about an equal number of years of teaching experience (cf. Chapter 6.2.3).

A modern communicative language teaching approach characterized both teachers, and they were also satisfied with their work situation. According to them, their students were well motivated as they realized the need for English language skills in future employment, where English could be a corporate language. The teachers reported that the students had a strong belief in their own language learning capabilities in EFL.

#### Voices on Student Influence and Responsibility

Both teachers expressed the need for students to have influence in order to be able to take responsibility in their EFL studies. They believed that students became more motivated when they were involved.

At the beginning of the year both teachers described how they went through the syllabus in class, and how the students to a large degree could influence the content of their respective EFL courses themselves. The students received a draft plan that pivoted around certain set themes. They were invited to make suggestions about materials and methods; what novels to read and textbooks to use, preferred examination forms and dates for different assignment deadlines. The teachers then helped each course group to construct a plan for the year. In this manner the teacher guided the school year's work in EFL, but the students decided on the content and emphasis.

TA declared that student influence on assessment was most important for her. It was imperative that her students understood the criteria they were graded on, and that there was an open dialogue between the teacher and the student in assessment matters. TB on the other hand, observed that the students did not always fully understand what the syllabus demanded. She needed to have the final say, because she was concerned that the students would not, for example, choose a varied enough range of examination forms. To make sure that the choice of literature was at the optimal level of difficulty, she wanted to be involved in this choice too.

It [student influence] is good because you get more motivated pupils, if they are allowed to be involved and decide. But, at the same time they don't always know- even when you have worked with the syllabus, quite what it entails. Because it can be difficult, even for a very experienced person. And they might not have complete control over everything that should be taken into consideration or how one should- to manage to involve all the skills to- so that everyone can learn as well as possible and so that they are able to work with everything (L2:29 L 4:2).<sup>57</sup>

Both teachers considered the syllabuses goal of students taking responsibility for their own studies in EFL as important. TA saw student responsibility as *the* most important goal in the whole syllabus, but a difficult one to implement. Her experience was that conflicting views among teaching staff and administration on what student responsibility entailed in practice was the greatest difficulty for its implementation. It would have been easier if there had been agreement regarding this matter, and if the students had been really involved. TB also considered student responsibility important and difficult to achieve in practice, but she found the policy documents, that is, the curriculum and syllabus, most problematic. If she were to follow the syllabus consistently, she would not be able to pass students who were not able to plan their own work, hand in their assignments on time or evaluate their own results fairly correctly. The biggest problem for the implementation of student responsibility in the EFL classroom, according to TB, was student immaturity in this area.

Both teachers expressed the opinion that their students' capacity to take responsibility for their EFL learning was varied. TA said, "If there is anything

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<sup>57</sup> Author's translation of: "Det är bra för att man får ju mer motiverade elever om dom själva får vara med och bestämma. Men samtidigt så vet dom kanske inte alltid- även om man går igenom kursplanen, vad- riktigt vad den innebär. För den kan ju vara svår för den mest luttrade person. Och kanske inte heller har full koll över allt som bör vara med eller hur att man- att man skall få med alla färdigheter för att- alla skall lära så bra som möjligt och för att dom skall jobba med allt".

that they can't take responsibility for...? No I don't think there is anything" (L1:33 L 3:10).<sup>58</sup> On the other hand TA added that she felt that she needed to help many to do so, as they were not used to taking responsibility for their learning. She described one of the groups she taught as very "instrumental in their learning approach" (L1:15 L:2 2). They wanted to follow a text- and exercise book, while another group was more independent and worked with various learning projects. TA believed that her students could think independently, but that it was demanding for the teacher to develop this ability. She had discovered this when working with self-assessment exercises in the study. TB mentioned that getting students to take responsibility for getting longer assignments done was difficult but that most of them managed to keep the deadlines they had (e.g. finishing reading a novel by a certain date). They also took responsibility for speaking English with each other in the classroom.

In practice, the concept of student responsibility, often meant that the students followed very simple rules, such as bringing relevant books to class, coming in time to lessons, reading instructions, doing their homework, asking the teacher for clarifications, handing in their assignments on time, and so on. On another level were student reflections on their own learning and learning strategies, such as looking up words or grammar details by themselves, reflecting on learning strategy use, and real-life application of classroom knowledge. TA said that her students often understood responsibility at the elementary level. She also expressed uncertainty as to whether she might not be too dominant in her teaching and thus hinder her students' understanding of what taking their own responsibility really entailed. TB expressed a certain scepticism about first-year students' ability to take on the latter type of responsibility. She was not sure whether her students reflected on the syllabus goals at all, and if they did, she concluded that it was most probably only to the extent that they should be in class and do what she instructed them.

To sum up, the teachers thought that the goals of taking responsibility for one's own learning were important but difficult to achieve. In reality the responsibility the students took was, according to them, was at a very basic level.

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<sup>58</sup> Author's translation of: "Men vad de absolut inte kan ta ansvar för- nej jag tror inte det finns något sånt- Det tror jag inte".

## Voices on Grading and Assessing EFL Skills

Both teachers were convinced that there were EFL skills that the students possessed that they did not take into account when grading their students' EFL proficiency. Examples they gave were "everyday communication skills" and such skills as "being able to write a song text". These could be missed because the formal language aspects were more in focus in the classroom.

TA believed that the students' preconceived notions of classroom English restrained them from showing their proficiency in many areas. On the other hand, she felt that she could probably give the students more opportunities to do so by constructing stimulating situations in the classroom.

An observation made by TA was that teachers in general needed to discuss assessment much more. She wanted curriculum and syllabus texts to be more transparent with regard to grading and assessment in practice. The example she used was the question whether teachers should give each classroom assignment a grade, or whether it was considered more correct, according to policy, to just set a final grade.

To summarize, both teachers were aware that the students possessed language skills that they could not access in the classroom. They regarded the whole issue of assessment as problematic, in spite of the fact that they had teaching degrees and over five years of experience.

## Voices on Self-assessment in EFL

The teachers were asked to define self-assessment, and TA's description follows:

[It is when] the pupil assesses him- or herself and their own level of knowledge in relation to set goals, and that the pupils evaluate their own knowledge and goal fulfilment continually and everything that self-assessment brings with it in thinking independently, reflecting about 'what' and 'how', he or she learns to be able to become, in time, an even better student or pupil. And, to manage on their own as far as it is possible (L1:37 L 5:1).<sup>59</sup>

The definition TB gave was:

they are able to get a sort of picture of themselves, how they are, what is... what they are good at, what they need to practice more for example at the

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<sup>59</sup> Author's translation of: "Att eleven bedömer sig själv och egen kunskap i relation till uppställda mål och att eleven utvärderar sin egen kunskap och måluppfyllnad kontinuerligt o allt det som självbedömning för med sig med att tänka mer självständigt, reflektera över vad och hur, han och hon lär sig för att på sikt kunna bli en ännu bättre, studerande eller elev. Och att klara sig på egen hand, så långt det är möjligt".

beginning of a course- it can be during the course as well, so that they can later can put their effort into those issues that they really need to practice on. But it can also be that they- well, after a task or before an assignment assess their ability, where they end up in terms of grades, or what they need to improve in an assignment, for example (L2:35 L 5:1).<sup>60</sup>

In relation to their own definitions, both teachers declared that most of their students were able to assess their EFL skills quite correctly.

Further, TA explained that she had no real evidence that her students could self-assess their EFL accurately, but she felt that the majority of them had a good sense of their own EFL proficiency. She had heard them discuss National Tests of English results, and thought they had an objective picture of their own results. Her students often showed that they knew the areas where they needed to improvement. She speculated that earlier assessments, earlier grades and/or general self-esteem influenced them in their own evaluation of their present proficiency. A few students seemed unaware of the EFL level they had achieved, but she hypothesized that wishful thinking might be reflected when unrealistically high assessments were reported. She found the value of self-assessment resided in the reflections it initiated among her students, on their learning process. This was an important step in the students' development towards becoming independent learners:

All in all, I think that many of them have a very good knowledge of what they know. And can assess their own ability. I think. The majority is able to- but then if it is because they are influenced by my assessment. [pause] I don't really know . But, then there are a few who you wish had better self-knowledge (L1:39 L 5:2).<sup>61</sup>

TB reported that most of her students assessed themselves the same way she did. There were of course those without any conception of what level they had attained, and who assessed themselves differently:

I have noticed that most of them assess quite similarly- as I would have assessed them, Hmmm, but then you see the extreme cases that don't have a clue- and assess- are really much over or much lower. Girls then, can set

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<sup>60</sup> Author's translation of: "Att dom då skall klara att ge en slags bild av sig själva, hur dom är, vad som- vad dom är duktiga på, vad de behöver träna mer på till exempel i början på en kurs- det kan vara under kursens gång också, så att dom sen då skall kunna lägga tyngdpunkten på dom bitarna som dom verkligen behöver träna på. Men det kan ju också vara att dom- ja, efter uppgifter eller innan uppgifter bedömer sin förmåga vart dom har hamnat betygsmissigt, eller vad dom behöver förbättra i en uppgift till exempel".

<sup>61</sup> Author's translation of: "[...] på det stora hela så, så tycker jag att många har en väldigt bra koll på vad dom kan. Och kan bedöma sin egen förmåga. Tycker jag. Majoriteten klarar- men sen om det beror på att dom låter sig påverkas av min bedömning [...] det vet jag inte riktigt. Men, sen finns det ju ett fåtal som man skulle kunna önska kanske hade en bättre självinsikt".

their grades very low and the guys sometimes have a tendency to give themselves a higher grade than what they have (L2:37 L 5:2).<sup>62</sup>

Many of the students who did not assess themselves in accordance with TB's grading had difficulty in understanding the discrepancy. She experienced improved understanding on their part after she had worked with self-assessment in the form of *Response Guides*<sup>63</sup>, which she developed after the writing assignment study and working with Self-assessment Form 1. TB also experienced less discussion about grades when it became more apparent to her students what they needed to concentrate on. She concluded that the students needed training, "Well, I don't think it's easy for them- they aren't- they aren't trained to do it at all" <sup>64</sup> (L2:45 L:6:2). She did not see any real practical constraints regarding what the student could do with respect to self-assessment. TA saw self-assessment as a teaching challenge, but the positive aspects outweighed any negative features, such as possible student resistance. She believed it was necessary to work with self-assessment over a period of time. It was a lengthy process but there were ample opportunities for the students to practice self-assessment, for example through simple "can-do" statements in conjunction with most content areas.

In an EFL classroom evaluation given at the end of the course, and after the study had come to an end, TA's students had expressed satisfaction with finding out what they were actually graded on. This made it easier for them to reach expected goals. Her students had written that through self-assessment they had learned to reflect upon their own EFL learning, and that this has led them to become more strategic, and more effective in their language learning. The students had especially appreciated working with the written benchmarks, where they could make objective assessments and then relate them to their own written work. TA also reported that a few students had had laboured under the misconception that self-assessment meant that they were to set their own grades (i.e. real grades rather than mock grades).

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<sup>62</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag har märkt att dom flesta bedömer ganska lika- likartat som jag själv skulle ha bedömt dem. Em, Men så ser man ju dom här extremfallen som inte har en aning om- och bedömer- lägger sig jätte- jättehögt eller väldigt, väldigt lågt. Tjejer då, kan lägga sig väldigt lågt och killar ibland har en tendens kanske lägga sig högre än vad dom är".

<sup>63</sup> *Response Guide*: A handout with a set of statements from certain areas pertaining to the assignment, e.g. content or language, regarding what is important re: the relevant grading criteria. The student checks if he or she has reached an acceptable level by underlining either *NEEDS IMPROVEMENT*, *OK*, or *GOOD* as well as giving a comprehensive grade prediction on the assignment. The student fills in the *Response Guide* and hands it in together with the assignment. The student then gets the assignment and the *Response Guide* back, together with another *Response Guide* filled in by the teacher to compare with".

<sup>64</sup> Author's translation of: "Nja, jag tycker nog inte att det är så enkelt för att dom är ju inte- dom är ju inte tränade i att göra det på något vis".

These students saw self-assessment as a means of increasing their workload while the teacher was not doing her job. TA believed that the students' attitudes would have been different if they had worked with self-assessment from elementary school onwards, as it then would have been a natural part of the learning and teaching process. According to her it was the students she had classified as instrumentally oriented, who experienced self-assessment as a waste of time, taking hours away from "real learning" (e.g. learning vocabulary, reading and listening to texts, etc.). TA assumed that these students would rather "learn 20 words by heart" than reflect on how they learned them. She added that these were the same students who did not see the point of such things as teacher evaluations either:

I really believe in the idea of self-assessment, because of the thoughts it awakens in the pupils about their own learning are very helpful to the pupil in developing independent thinking and being able to retrieve knowledge on their own and brood over "is this really a good way for me to study or should I change strategy? and-". So what is constructive is that it awakens reflections around strategies and reflections about learning, and I think that can increase the advancement of their EFL as well as their overall learning. The negative aspects can be that the pupil sometimes believes that self-assessment is something it isn't, and that the pupil in these cases thinks that self-assessment is about giving him- or herself the grade that he or she wants, or that the teacher wants to do less work, or that it will be more work for the pupil (L1:41 L 5:3).<sup>65</sup>

Speaking about the impact that self-assessment in EFL had had on her own teaching and assessment practices, TA believed that she tried to help students think and learn more independently as a consequence. She wanted her students to reflect much more around assessment in relation to the grading criteria and syllabus goals, than before. She also wanted them to verbalize both language skills they had achieved and those in need of improvement:

Yes, I think I want them to think more about assessment- much more concerning assessment than I have done before. That is one of the greatest effects. That they, in relation to the syllabus, get to express themselves

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<sup>65</sup> Author's translation of: "Jag tror ju verkligen på idén med självbedömning, för att just dom tankarna som det väcker hos eleven kring det egna lärandet är väldigt positiva för att eleven skall kunna tänka självständigt och kunna inhämta kunskap på egen hand och fundera kring "är det här verkligen ett bra sätt för mig att studera på eller skall jag ändra strategier o"- Så det positiva är att det väcker reflektioner kring strategier och reflektioner kring lärande, och det tror jag kan öka utvecklingen i engelska och lärande överhuvudtaget. Det negativa, kan vara att eleven ibland tror att självbedömning handlar om någonting annat än vad det faktiskt handlar om, och att eleven i såna fall kanske tror att självbedömning handlar om att sätta det betyget på sig själv som han eller hon vill ha, eller att läraren vill göra mindre jobb, och att eleven för göra ett större jobb".

about what they think they have done well, and what they need to improve (L1:57 L 7:1).<sup>66</sup>

TB on the other hand would have liked to believe that her participation in the study had had some influence on her teaching and assessment practices, but she was not sure that this was the case when it came to final grading. She had changed her teaching to the extent that her students assessed themselves more regularly, but she was uncertain if her summative grading had in fact changed. She assessed their EFL level of attainment carefully herself:

Because even if they assess themselves more now, than what I- I have changed my teaching in *that* way. I didn't work with self-evaluation or self-assessment before, so I don't know if it in the end has changed my way of setting grades. [pause] I don't think so. Because I- I can't say that I- if they evaluate themselves that they- yeah that they are this good in a special area. So I still want to assess it. So that, it isn't as if I trusted their own self-assessments (J L2:55 L 7:2).<sup>67</sup>

The long-term impact that the study had had on TA was that she reconsidered her previous practice of grading every single individual assignment. Instead she was planning on writing comprehensive comments to enable the students to work towards fulfilling the grading criteria more fully, in combination with the implementation of regular self-assessment, throughout the term.

The influence of self-assessment that TB and her students had experienced caused her to continue using the benchmark exercise, the *Response Guide* and writing coupled to self-assessment in several steps, in her EFL teaching. TB continued to attach specific grading criteria to every assignment. This was a means to help focus the students, so that they had an opportunity to reflect on and take responsibility for achieving pass results. They were also given a free choice of examination forms, but they had to defend their choice and use one that showed that they had fulfilled the criteria in focus.

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<sup>66</sup> Author's translation of: "Ja, jag vill nog att dom ska tänka mer kring bedömning- mycket mer kring bedömning än vad jag gjort tidigare. Det är en av de största effekterna. Att dom i förhållande till exempel betygskriterierna får uttrycka sig kring vad de tycker att de har gjort bra o vad dom tycker att dom behöver förbättra".

<sup>67</sup> Author's translation of: "För även om dom bedömer sig själva mer nu, än vad jag- Jag har ju ändrat undervisning på *det* sättet. Jag jobbade ju inte alls med självskattningar eller självbedömning innan, så vet jag inte om det i slutändan faktiskt har ändrat mitt sätt att sätta betyg på dom (...). Det tror jag inte. För jag- jag kan ju inte säga att jag- om dom skattar sig själva att dom- ja att dom är så här duktiga på ett moment. Så vill ju jag ändå fortfarande bedöma det. Så att, det är ju inte så att jag litar på deras bedömning av sig själva".

Questions of the type “*What and how* have you performed and *why* ?” were regularly used by TB after the writing study had come to an end. She also planned on using an EFL Writing Portfolio, where the students could chose the texts that were to be assessed by the teacher.

The one concern that TB had was that if she, through scaffolding, helped her students’ writing process, they would not be able to receive the same end results on their own account. In the perspective of lifelong learning she expressed apprehension that her guidance in commenting on written work would, instead of helping them, give the students an inaccurate view of themselves and their capabilities.

To sum up the teachers’ experiences, both believed that the syllabus goals, such as students taking learning responsibility for their own EFL studies, were important but difficult to achieve. One method to developing student responsibility was through using self-assessment in the EFL classroom. The two teachers had found that the majority of students could assess their EFL skills fairly well, but believed that it took time to develop the ability to do so, and that the students needed practice. They believed the study had had an impact on their teaching and their views on assessment, and both had continued to use self-assessment practices in their own teaching of EFL after the completion of the research study.

### 7.3.3 Summary and Reflections

The students and teachers had had no previous experience of self-assessment practices before the research study. The lack of self-assessment experience can in itself be said to be remarkable considering the emphasis that the syllabus puts on students’ developing autonomous learning skills, and the emphasis that both global, European and national documents place on the importance of both language learning as such and lifelong learning in general. In EFL there is also material made available by the Swedish National Agency of Education, which is meant to help the development of a reflective attitude to language learning from compulsory school up to English Course A.

Considering the subject of EFL first, Oscarson and Apelgren (2005a, pp. 45 – 47) reported in the Swedish National Evaluation of School Achievement 2003 that about half of the students (46%) at compulsory school maintained that English was the working language in the classroom most of the time (while the teachers report a somewhat lower usage, i.e. 40%). More than half of the time another language (most probably Swedish) is the

language of communication during EFL classes. In light of this, students' comments on the importance of speaking English in the EFL classroom, and that this had not always been their experience, is not as surprising as it should be.

The two teachers in the study can be described as more aware of how their subject (i.e. EFL) was related to the policy documents than the majority of Swedish upper secondary teachers in The Swedish National Evaluation of School Achievement, 1998 (US 98) (Oscarson et al., 1999a, p. 114). This notwithstanding, both teachers (as well as students) considered the goals of the syllabus and the EFL grading criteria difficult to access.

The goal of student independence and responsibility was an important aspect of the participating teachers' teaching philosophy. Awareness of these syllabus goals is important in a criteria directed grading system which gives weight to student participation and student awareness (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a, p. 84). In comparison, the Swedish National Evaluation of School Achievement, 2003, (NU-03) (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a, p. 50) found that 60% of the teachers did not think the students had opportunities to influence their EFL studies.

In the present study the students had been informed about syllabus goals at the beginning of the year according to their teachers, but participants expressed unawareness of this a few months into the term. In NU-03 (op.cit., p. 76) 65-70% of the year 9 students answered that they were familiar with both syllabus and grading criteria. A tentative explanation of the lack of awareness students' in the present study expressed as to their being previously informed about the syllabuses previously, was that *after* having worked extensively with the benchmark texts and grading criteria when doing their writing assignment, they understood them in a manner that made them feel that they had encountered them for the first time. After the benchmark exercise, they themselves emphasised the importance of understanding the grading criteria to becoming aware of the language level they were expected to reach, and it may be concluded that these criteria generally need to be discussed more often in the classroom. Orsmond et al. (2000), Sadler (1989), and Stefani (1998) emphasize the importance of students understanding criteria in order to understand and reflect on their own learning and current proficiency level. It is important to introduce the content of the steering documents at the beginning of a course, but the goals to be reached need to be constantly reviewed, and discussed with the students.

In the Swedish National Evaluation of School Achievement, 2003 (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a, p. 65) 79% of the students answered that they agreed with the statement that their teachers gave them fair grades. With regard to language assessment and grading, students in the study believed that their own teachers followed the syllabus and grading criteria, and trusted their judgement. On the other hand they expressed uncertainty how these criteria were interpreted by different teachers and at different schools.

The participants were adamant in their view that they should be able to fulfil the course criteria for a pass or higher at the *end* of the course, and that they should be able to attain a good final grade, no matter what their level of EFL was from the start. The practice of constantly grading assignments throughout the term worked the opposite way, in their opinion. Students felt that they did not get enough credit for improvement when grades were aggregated. As a result students became more focused on grades, and retaining an even grade level throughout the year, than learning new content and developing their language ability. Expressions such as these by the students support the research by Black et al. (2004), Gipps (1994), Sadler (1989) and Taras (2002) who claim that grades as feedback may in fact shift attention away from learning. At least half the course time should be devoted to learning, according to participating students, because certain skills, such as control of grammar, developed continuously. This student view is in accordance with what Truscott (1996) maintained, that acquisition of language structures is a gradual process. Bitchner et al. (2005) also believed that linguistic categories are acquired at different stages.

The teachers expressed a certain apprehension about not setting correct and fair grades. Students voiced their fears of being labelled and categorized. They spoke of grading as being more important than learning throughout their schooling. The power of grades seemed to be an omnipresent force in both students' and teachers' lives. Students who feel that they cannot show what they need to learn, because they fear receiving a lower grade, are not in a positive learning environment. Still, if there can be an open and constructive dialogue between teachers and students about learning goals, as for example Black (1998), Black et al. (2003, 2004), Rea-Dickins (2006) and Taras (2002) endorse, it should be possible to use summative assessments for formative purposes.

Participants had varying views on their ability to self-assess their grades and many asserted that self-assessment was not possible in high-stakes situations, such as final course grades. These views are similar to those held

by students in Smith's (1997) study. Another reason given by students was that they were not trained to grade themselves, which is a view that Taras (2001) also found in her research. On the other hand, similar to the research results reported by Smith (1997) many students believed that, in certain cases, they knew more about their language competence than their teachers did. There is apparently a gap between school knowledge and real life knowledge that needs to be bridged, through a more comprehensive practice of assessment.

The overall opinion that the self-assessment practices used in the present study were important and had been a positive experience could of course derive from the participants' consciousness of being part of a research study, the so-called "Hawthorne effect". On the other hand, participants foresaw difficulties and risks with self-assessment (e.g. over- and underestimation due to high-stake situations and student self-esteem). These fears can also be seen as a reflection of the discussion on grades, where assessment is sometimes seen in terms of, or as a means of, power. If self-assessment were used as a learning tool, over- and underestimations, for example, would not be considered important. Both students and teachers believed that self-assessment skills could be trained and improved through practice, a notion that research by, for example, Black and Wiliam (1998), and Black et al. (2003) corroborates. The opinion that self-assessment training is needed has been reiterated (Andarade & Du, 2007; Gottlieb, 2000; Janssen-van Dieten, 1989; McDonald & Boud, 2003; Oscarson, 1980, 1998, 1999; Taras, 2001).

On the whole, students expressed appreciation of the writing assignment method used, that is, a writing method approach coupled with self-assessment, a procedure similar to the one Taras (2001, 2002, 2003) used in several studies. Participants experienced that it was easier to assess their general skills than their specific writing skills, and as A. Brown (2005) also reported, experienced difficulty in self-correcting specific language skills. Students felt that it was generally of value to them to become aware of their language limitations so that they could improve. This is an aspect, which Köhlmyr (2003) sees as an important EFL learning need, especially when it comes to grammar.

The type of teacher feedback used in the writing assignment (i.e. the neutral questions, comments etc.) was of declared value to the students EFL writing and language development. This type of feedback takes the focus away from the self and focuses on the task. They also appreciated that it made

peer response more comfortable. The real value in the approach may be that it aids students to becoming independent of teachers' assessments and more convinced of their own judgements, as well as fostering a beneficial and critical view of their own work. This seems to be more easily done when it is not a threat to the students' self-image. The students' opinions also support Linnarud's (1986) reflection that the process oriented writing method gives the right order of response, and Taras' (2002) suggestion that students need to be able to internalize feedback.

Similar to the research findings of Black et al. (2003, 2004) both teachers and students found that teaching and learning changed when using self-assessment practices. The teachers became more open to letting students take more responsibility in their own EFL learning, and the students' desire to learn EFL became more focused. Research by Black et al. (2003) has shown that there is an impact on teachers when self-assessment practices make what is often implicit in the classroom explicit. The messages that the teachers communicate about what is essential to learn affects the entire learning environment and learners' beliefs about themselves (Wigfield and Harold, 1992), and are therefore important to consider.

After using self-assessment in the writing assignment, students believed that self-assessment and student involvement in assessment of their own skills should start sooner. This corroborates Taras' (2001) research findings, where she concluded that self-assessment should be introduced during the first year, when students are more receptive, and self-assessment may offer greater cumulative value.

Students and teachers saw several possible ways to develop the use of self-assessment in the EFL classroom, to involve students more in their own assessment and, in the end, in their own lifelong learning. The students' suggestions of how to involve learners in their assessment of learning included being able to revise until criteria goals were reached, portfolio assessment, peer assessment and more dialogue with their teachers around assessment issues. Many also saw self-assessment as a transferable skill, important in a lifelong learning perspective, something which is endorsed by Falchikov and Boud's (1989) assertion that, "Lifelong learning requires that individuals be able not only to work independently, but also assess their own performance and progress" (op. cit., p. 395). If language learning is to be seen in a lifelong perspective, classroom assessment practice needs to be opened up to include a larger variety of non-threatening assessment activities.

## SELF-ASSESSMENT IN EFL WRITING: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In the light of European language policy statements and Swedish national syllabus goals aiming to further independent and lifelong language learning skills, the purpose of the study was to explore and learn more about how a sample of adolescent learners of EFL at the upper secondary school level perceived their own level of EFL writing, both at a *general* and *specific* level. To further the development of more comprehensive and fairer assessment practices it also aimed to explore how the introduction of certain everyday self-assessment practices in the classroom were experienced by teachers and students involved.

The chapter begins by discussing main results in relation to certain background variables and related research in the area (8.1). The discussion broadly follows the research questions and builds on the reflections which follow each sub-section in Chapter 7. Some general considerations regarding the study at large are then taken up (8.2), followed by tentative conclusions and implications for the teaching of EFL writing in a school context (8.3). The chapter ends with some suggestions for further research (8.4).

### 8.1 Discussion

The discussion starts by examining both the students' competence in estimating their writing ability (off- and on-tasks) and their capacity to realistically determine whether their specific writing skills are satisfactory or in need of improvement. Some of the students' and teachers' experiences of using self-assessment in the study are then discussed, followed by an account of the extent to which the practice of self-assessment of EFL writing may lead to more realistic learner views of attainment.

### 8.1.1 Students' Competence in Estimating EFL Writing, Off- and On-task

The results of the present study show that the students' own estimation of their overall ability to write in EFL was relatively high. In light of their previously established achievement levels, and compared to the national cohort, this was also a realistic assessment. The results of the study demonstrate that students' competency in assessing their own *general* competence, both on- and off task using teachers' grades as a criterion, are reasonably accurate. The students, as a group, show a clear capacity to assess their own language level, which in turn means that they are in a position to take responsibility for the planning of what they need to learn and for the evaluation of their work. This interpretation is in line with previous research reviewed by Giota (1995) and is also supported by the research of, for example, Oscarson and Apelgren (2005a), who found that Swedish students were fairly good at assessing their results in EFL at the compulsory school level.

With regard to the students' *individual* ability to assess their EFL skills the different self-assessments the students carried out, both of their achievement on the classroom writing assignment as well as on the high-stakes test task (i.e. the National Test of English), revealed varying degrees of association with their teachers' grades. In many cases student and teacher assessments conformed well, in others there was a clear mismatch. Variation is, on the other hand, as Falchikov and Boud (1989) found in their meta-analytic study, and also Ross (1998) when looking specifically at second language learning, not uncommon. The variation of correlational relationships between students' self-assessments and teacher grades found in the present study was also in line with previous results reported by Blanche and Merino (1989), LeBlanc and Painchaud (1985), Oscarson (1980), Ross (1998), von Elek (1981; 1985) among others. (As A. Brown (2005) notes, there has as yet been little research done on the general assessment of task-based *writing* performance.)

Such divergence of results between students' and teachers' assessments is interesting to discuss. Several lines of reasoning may account for the differences between students' estimates and teachers' grades obtained in the present study (see for instance 7.1.4). One is the different situational context and purpose of the two pieces of written work they assessed. There is, from the students' perspective, a marked difference between working on a written

classroom assignment early on in a course and writing a high-stakes test at the end of a course. The working atmosphere is, of course, much more relaxed in the former, with attendant lower ambition in matters not directly linked to learning. Students' understanding of the expected level of achievement, as described by the grading criteria, is most probably also a factor. The criteria were new to the students, as they were all starting a new course. How well the students interpreted the criteria for success (i.e. the goals) in regard to the two writing situations may also have been different. In the classroom writing assignment, additional specific criteria related to the design of the assignment, such as following instructions, and following the set template, may have been bypassed by the students when assessing their work, but not by the teachers who did the grading. As Sadler (1989) and Stefani (1998) have pointed out, there is a need for teachers and students to share assessment criteria, that is, to be in agreement on how the criteria are to be interpreted. It is also worth considering how high-stakes testing may influence the way in which students perceive their own proficiency.

Another explanation for the different outcomes in correlations is the possibility that the teachers' grading, in both pieces of writing, focused more on the students' formal language skills than is motivated by the relevant grading criteria. These focus more on communicative competence, even if there is common agreement that correctness is part of communicative language ability. Languages (as a subject of study) are in themselves particular as Cushing-Weigle (2002) pointed out; they not only represent linguistic knowledge, but as a means of communication also involve knowledge of, for example, culture and identity, and those are generally reflected in different writing genres. Policy documents on both the European and a national level emphasize this, as can be seen in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001) and the different European Language Portfolio scales and check-lists, as well as in the design of Swedish curriculum and syllabuses.

Following Oscarson (1980) and Blanche and Merino (1989) findings, that the best self-assessments were obtained using "can-do" statements in behavioural terms, these were the type of general off-task self-assessments regarding writing that the students were asked to make in the SAQw. The off-task assessments were, in other words, not merely general appraisals of their writing ability, but set in relation to performance tasks in writing. The differences found between the students' off- and on-task assessments of their EFL skills implied that students assessed their general skills in relation to the

test task more accurately, or at least more in accordance with the teacher grades at the end of the course, than they did in relation to the writing assignment at the beginning of the course. Considering this, one needs to bear in mind that the students' own experiences of being able to perform any EFL writing task referred to, and on which they most probably base their self-assessments (e.g. writing a letter to a friend privately), do not necessarily correspond to what is expected in a school situation. The degree of formality of language in school writing situations is, for example, often much higher. Cumming (1998) talks about the special educational context in which foreign language writing functions with respect to special conventions and discursive practices. The language expected at school and in future academic or working life, is not always the language the students meet outside school and feel that they master. As Blanche and Merino (1989) state, foreign language students may have extra difficulties in comparing themselves to native speakers, in contrast to second language learners who are surrounded by and often immersed in the target language. Linnarud (1986) also points out that Swedish students cannot be expected to have the same control of formal register and genre as native speakers the same age. One can have reason to speculate whether Swedish teachers of EFL who are not native speakers themselves have different models of English, which they emulate in the classroom, and language mistakes with a Scandinavian touch may be deemed more acceptable to them than those characterized by other foreign languages. The development towards a more general form of so-called "EuroEnglish", understood and spoken by both native and non-native English speakers, can also play a role in students' understanding of their own EFL competence in relation to different standards required in the classroom. Students' assessment of their own writing skills can therefore depend on the type of written communication they have in mind when they make their assessments.

Two other reasons why the students and teachers made different assessments of the students' performance may, on the one hand, be that the students had unrealistic views of their own proficiency, such as wished-for results. On the other hand, the differences may be due to real indications of competence these students have received outside school, which are not perceived or apprehended in the classroom. This interpretation would then be supported by the attitudes of the students in the study by Smith (1997) previously referred to. How realistic of outside school demands the writing tasks were *per se* have not been duly investigated. The writing assignments and the test task were both in line with syllabus demands, but the

interpretation of how these transfer to “real-life” expectations and experiences is difficult to make. Therefore the closer relationship between student and teacher grades on the test task results could be an indication that the aims of the writing test to capture a broader writing ability as described in the syllabus, are easier for both students and teachers to comprehend, and relate their assessments to, than in for example the classroom assignment. The test task is constructed to assess students’ general competence as EFL writers, and the teachers also follow guidelines and benchmark examples. The classroom writing assignment is dependent on more particular circumstances and instructions and is related to specific task expectations students may not be aware of. Students’ ability to self-assess their EFL competence therefore seems to be dependent on the type of task and situation at hand. This also reinforces the realisation of how important student understanding of both criteria and the reasons behind self-assessment are, as several researchers have previously pointed out (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; Andrade & Du, 2005; Boud 1995; Mok et al., 2006; Orsmond et al., 2000; Reiling, 2000; Sadler, 1989; Stefani, 1998).

The narrow span of the present grading scale in Sweden gives rise to certain concerns regarding using it for self-assessment purposes. As already mentioned (cf. 2.2), the scale presently only consists of four steps, and students at either end (i.e. Fail and Pass with Special Distinction) can only misjudge their competence in *one* direction. Fail students can only overestimate and Pass with Special Distinction students can only underestimate when in doubt. The other students, those at the Pass and Pass with Distinction levels can, on the other hand, both overestimate or underestimate since they are lie between a higher and a lower grade level. It can further be assumed that such over- and underestimations are, to a certain extent, randomly distributed, which means that they may partly cancel each other out. Over- and underestimations among the Fail and Pass with Special Distinction students are, on the other hand, systematically one-sided and thus result in less dependable measurements, the reason being that they contain a somewhat greater amount of systematic error. This suggested explanation of the observed differences in self-assessments between high level and low level performance students is not necessarily the whole truth, however. There may, of course, also be real differences between these two groups of students that one needs to investigate more closely.

The issue of over- and underestimation of language skills has been the focus of much research on language self-assessment. Examples are Blanche

and Merino (1989), Heilenman (1990) Janssen-van Dieten (1989) and Oscarson (1984). On the one hand, it can be argued to be irrelevant, as the rationale for “mock grading” is not a question of students in fact grading themselves, but rather a question of raising their metacognitive awareness of their achievement levels in relation to the grading criteria, in order to further their language learning. On the other hand, it is important if students’ over- or underestimations of their knowledge lead them to make the wrong assumptions about their learning needs. Students who overestimate their language proficiency may believe that they are in control of things they really do not grasp, and thus do not take in skills that they in reality need to learn. Students who underestimate their competence may possibly apply themselves to work on areas they actually already master and, in doing so, fail to challenge themselves. The making of reliable and realistic self-assessments is therefore an important part of the student being able to focus correctly, and learn efficiently, by not spending too much or too little time on certain language issues, such as formal skills, register or genre. In terms of lifelong language learning, without the aid of a tutor or teacher, it is imperative that this skill be developed.

There is also what can be seen as a positive aspect to student overestimations, which is seldom touched upon in the assessment literature. As for example Giota (2006a) notes, students who overestimate their competence as compared to actual performance have a better chance of achieving good results than those who underestimate their performance. This is because these students do not hesitate to take part in different learning opportunities that challenge their competence and thus learn new things. These findings seem contradictory considering the results, which show that it is the students in the higher achievement groups, that is students with higher language competence, that tend to underestimate their grades. Yet, one must also take into account the fact that apart from the question of the restriction of range which affects students in this group (i.e. only being able to either assess themselves correctly or underestimate), the results of the present study show that the total group of students both have a general belief in their ability to write in EFL and, as was found by Dragemark Oscarson (2008), a high level of general self-efficacy. One could speculate that the achieved grades would not have been so high had the students not believed in their ability to the same degree. There seems to be good reason, in other words, to help our language students to continue to believe in their ability to learn languages, and as the

syllabus says, “want and dare” to use the language. This is an interesting area where more research is needed.

### 8.1.2 Students’ Competence in Identifying their Specific Writing Skills as Satisfactory or in Need of Improvement

Students’ competence in self-assessing their *specific* language skills overall was found to be of moderate strength, that is as seen in relation to the researcher’s assessment. Students in general underestimated their performance in most of the skills they rated.

Students showed an awareness of their own performance in relation to the specific skills of spelling and grammar. These are skills they probably recognized and understood the meaning of. The more mistakes the students made, the more often they noted that they could improve.

The differences between the two course groups’ assessments of what they were “satisfied with” and express that they “can improve” in different linguistic skills are noteworthy. Course A students were generally more “satisfied with” all the specific skills they were asked to comment on than were Course B students. Possible explanations may link with Course A students’ higher achievement background (as indicated by their compulsory school leaving grades), coupled with the fact that the goals for Course A, which precedes Course B, naturally are at a slightly lower level. In line with course expectations, Course A students also had, in comparison, an “easier” writing assignment and lacked experience of the demands required of them at the upper secondary level. Students at the next level, Course B, may have been trying to use more advanced language with regard to sentence structure and vocabulary, for example, than they experienced as language they master. This is in accordance with the increased syllabus demands and expectations for the higher level Course B. In a language *learning* perspective it is of course preferable for students to attempt to use more advanced language, and make mistakes, than it is to be afraid of making mistakes and resort to “playing it safe”. As Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972) both argue, through reaching for the next level of attainment students open themselves up to learning by testing their ability. Thereby they have the opportunity to modify their language.

The fact that the students’ focus tended to be fixed on grammar and spelling is also interesting in view of present educational policy which, in line with recent language learning research, endorses communicative language

teaching. What the students' focus can be seen to reflect is what the students and teachers in practice in the classroom see as essential, and not as Ball (2006) points out, the policy or discourse in the form of curricula or syllabuses surrounding them. Oscarson and Apelgren (2005a) found through the National Evaluation (NU 03) that the students already at the end of compulsory school, in general, had a good command of the basic grammatical structures and spelling needed to produce effective writing, even if errors naturally occurred. Grammar and spelling are not in themselves in conflict with communicative language learning, which does not disregard correctness. It is valuable for language communication to be specific and grammatically correct so as not to cause misunderstandings and obliqueness of expression. Still, grammar and spelling are not the central aspects of a dialogic classroom environment. In relation to this, one may wonder why these upper secondary level students, who also should have developed their language skills further, do not focus on the skills that are more relevant and essential for more advanced *communication* in general. Considering the fact that the students' courses (Course A and Course B) are deemed to be at the CEFR levels of B1–B2 (Oscarson, 1999), this could have been expected. On the other hand one can speculate whether the results are an effect of the fact that the categories used in the present study were not the students' own categories, but linguistic ones taught to them in school and merely reviewed when the writing assignment was introduced. The students' depth of understanding of these terms was not investigated. One may suspect that they (in spite of the teachers' revision of the essentials) did not fully fathom the differences between, for example, grammar and sentence structure. One may also speculate that many skills that were largely left unmarked, such as paragraphing and punctuation, were possibly disregarded because students did not really recognize or understand them. The results may have been different had they done so.

On the subject of the results of students' self-assessments of their specific writing skills, the use of the concepts "satisfied with" and "could improve/could have made mistakes on", could involve different underlying attitudes on the part of the students. To "be satisfied" does not necessarily mean that the students believe that what they have written is correct. Rather, it can imply that they have done as well as they can, or that they simply are not about to put in more effort at the moment. On the other hand, the high number of students "satisfied with" their spelling skills for example, may be a simple reflection of the fact that many could access the computers' spelling

programmes, which may have given them an unrealistically high expectations of their own spelling skills. Learners are not always aware that one needs to be a fairly good speller to be able to use these programmes, as the programme itself does not catch words that are incorrectly spelled in the construction used but correctly spelled in a different context (e.g. words such as “weary” and “very” or “writing” and “writhing”).

The marking of “could improve/could have made mistakes” does not either, in itself, necessarily mean that the students believe that they have made errors or have written something incorrectly. It can of course be an expression used when the learner needs safeguarding of the self, and/or of the self’s self-image. There are few matters, especially when it comes to language production, that cannot be improved even if they are in themselves correct or acceptable. An area such as grammar may have been marked “could be improved/could have made mistakes”, by a student, ‘just in case’. There is, on the other hand, nothing specific to support the belief that any of the students would be satisfied with a grade lower than a Pass. The data from the student interviews, discussed in more detail below, as well as the researchers’ own classroom observations, rather indicated that students were not satisfied with grades at a lower level than a Pass with Distinction.

### 8.1.3 Students’ and Teachers’ Experiences of and Attitudes toward Self-assessment of EFL Writing

The previous assessment experiences of the students and teachers are naturally reflected in their discussion of the self-assessment training they took part in during the study. There is, as Ball (2006) speaks of, a gap between policy and reality, and one should not assume, as Fairclough (1992) points out, that we are aware of our own practice and its ideological dimensions. The students and teachers need to construct individual meaning from new experiences. Individual students and teachers have different understandings and therefore the different views expressed are all valid, in a particular sense, to the individuals who express them. The number of students holding a certain view has not been specified more than in very general terms, and not all students were interviewed, but of the views expressed in the focus groups, the large majority can be said to be positive to the concept of self-assessment in general. They were also sympathetic to the way in which self-assessment was used as a part of the writing assignment given. Some of the recurrent and salient topics will be discussed below.

Student influence and responsibility are two aspects that are held to be necessary if self-assessment practices are to be implemented in the EFL classroom in an optimal way. Students in the present study can be said to have had a high degree of influence on their EFL course content and working procedures, which is not typical if compared to the opinions of students in the Swedish National Evaluation of School Achievement 2003 (NU-03) (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a, pp. 49-50), where 50% of the EFL students seem to express the view that they have little or no influence at all on their instruction in EFL.

As research by Giota (2002, p. 299) suggests, students' interest and involvement in school assignments increase when they can exert influence. Students develop social responsibility goals along with learning goals that they strive to attain simultaneously, as early as in grade 6 in Sweden when students are around 12 years old (Giota, 2001; in press). Both teachers in the present study can also be said to have a more open and positive attitude towards student influence than that generally expressed by the teachers interviewed in The National Evaluation, US 98 (Oscarson et al., 1998). In this evaluation it seemed that the students were expected to take responsibility for what *the teacher* had planned beforehand, mostly on their own without student participation. The teacher's responsibility was generally seen to be that of providing instruction on what and how to learn. Both teachers in the present study also set a limit to what the students could take responsibility for, and where they, as professionals, had to step in, but in US 98 (op.cit) the students were regarded by many of their teachers as too immature to take responsibility, regardless of whether they were in grade 5 at compulsory school or in Course B at the upper secondary non-compulsory level.

Students' opinions were overall positive to self-assessment in language learning, and few students were hesitant or objected to its use in the present study. Instead, many expressed the need for self-governed assessment in other subjects as well. Students were not always able to give a rationale for their "gut" feeling, apart from the fact that it was "fun", but maybe this can be considered to be good enough from the students' perspective. More students than initially expected by the researcher were also aware of the policy goals for lifelong learning, and could see its transferable effects in a lifelong perspective. In light of this, any apprehensions that self-assessment would be experienced as a method of "pastoral power", as described by Foucault (1982), were not substantiated in the views voiced by the present student group. Rather the majority expressed their experience of self-assessment of

EFL writing as a means of taking control of their own learning. There is nonetheless reason to take heed of the ethical implications of using self-assessment in the classroom of which Lemke (2000), Schendell and O'Neill (1999), Tuschling and Engemann (2006), and Pontgratz (2006) speak. Through self-assessment the teacher gains additional knowledge about students, and the power of this knowledge needs to be used to benefit, not subjugate learners.

Furthermore, the method used in the writing assignment was generally considered to be a good way to create awareness of students' own language competence in EFL writing by both students and teachers. One aspect that students especially responded to was the training with benchmark texts for the purpose of understanding the grading criteria and the level of language expected at the end of the course. This included the insight that results attained were not about the self, or about the amount of effort put into a task. These are aspects that Butler (1987) and Boud (2000) have also found salient. Today's educational discourse as expressed in the syllabuses is easily read in such a way that one may believe that the goals in, for example, EFL are inherently understood by the students, rather than something which the educational bodies also have a responsibility to help their students to develop. Students emphasized the importance of working with and discussing the grading criteria with peers and teachers in order to grasp their meaning, and what was expected of them. Unless able to do this, they found it impossible to have a realistic understanding of how well they had achieved these goals. To retain a democratic society, which is a general Swedish curricular aim as well as being an inherent principle expressed in European policy documents, it is important that *all* students are helped to develop the same possibility of both understanding and reaching important educational goals. A strong source of influence for the unskilled writer is spoken language. There are differences in students' spoken language, and even if not as pronounced in Sweden as in for example England, the speech patterns of some student groups are closer to the discourse of writing than they are in others. Improving the students' ability to articulate ideas in writing is part of empowering education. Freire's (1970) notion of 'reading the word and the world' speaks of the symbiotic relationship that Myhill (2005) sees between literacy and power, and of which writing can also be seen as an important part. If learners do not know the level or standards expected of them, it is not unlikely that they become demotivated and alienated, as well as subject to others' judgments of them, as Giota (2002) states.

Another area often mentioned when it came to the writing assignment, was the chance to return to the text “independently”, that is without having access to traditional language teacher marking and corrections. This is possibly one of the more important student views from a language education and EFL writing perspective. The type of feedback, which encouraged independent student thought by only underlining sentences where the meaning was unclear, or by questioning the writer’s meaning, was often commented on and appreciated. These results support the findings of A. Brown (2005), Schendell and O’Neill (1999) and Taras (2001; 2002; 2003) who all endorse a type of feedback which further involves students in their own learning. As the writing assignment method in this way focused on learning, and not only on the grading of a product, the self-assessment questions seemed to help the students towards developing independent reflective practice, awareness of criteria and attainment of higher standards of achievement.

#### **8.1.4 Self-assessment as a Means to Increase Learner Awareness of EFL Writing Results**

In the interviews, students commented on the fact that working with criteria together with the practice of self-assessment had made them more aware of the goals and language levels they were expected to reach in EFL writing. The majority of the students believed that they had become better at understanding what skills they needed to improve through having to pause and reflect on their work in relation to expectations. This is also in accordance with the research findings of Stefani (1998) who found that self-assessment made students think and consequently made them learn more.

The study rests on the assumption that when the students’ self-assessments are in accordance with those of the teachers, then the students’ self-assessments are reliable and valid. It goes without saying that this is not necessarily so, and it may in fact be that it is the students’ own assessments that are closer to the “real-world test” of fulfilling the intentions as expressed in the syllabus criteria. As Orsmond et al. (2000) report, a direct comparison between teacher and student grading can be misleading in respect of the validity and value of self-assessment. Shohamy (2001a, 2001b) further stresses the point that the knowledge of any teacher, or tester is incomplete and additional sources are needed to obtain accurate and valid interpretations of the stakeholder’s knowledge (op.cit., p. 377). Falchikov and Goldfinch

(2000) also point to the validity problems involved in using teachers' grading as a standard.

In light of the above, the correlations between the students' and the teachers' assessments obtained in the study are not necessarily an exact expression of the degree to which the students' self-assessments were accurate, nor to the degree to which the students' assessments became more realistic during the study. The differences between the background characteristics of the two course groups, that is Course A students' having a higher in-coming achievement level, gives adequate reason to speculate around the impact of training in self-assessment to develop more realistic learner views of writing. It was in fact the students with the longest experience of self-assessment practices, through their participation in the pilot project of the study (i.e. Course B), who overall tended to make the more "realistic" self-assessments. This regardless of the fact that most language research in the field points to the fact that the higher achievement profile the students have, the better they tend to be at self-assessment, as was apparent when the students were grouped according to their in-coming grades. Therefore, there seems to be reasonable cause to advocate the practise of self-assessment in a variety of EFL writing situations to help students to develop better awareness of their language proficiency. The need for training has also been expounded forth by Ross, Rolheiser and Hogaboam-Gray (1999), Mok et al. (2006), Ross et al. (1999) among others.

Results of new methods of formative assessment may also be delayed, as Sadler (1998) points out, by previous ingrained patterns of assessment. Students spoke about the vital importance of knowing how teachers go about setting their grades, in order to be able to assess their own work in relation to how the work will be graded by the teachers. Such comments indicate that some students did not always self-assess their results or general EFL ability from their own horizon or inner conviction and knowledge, but through their experiences of former teachers' grading. There are no indications that these prior assessments were incorrect, but given grades may easily reflect questionable factors such as aggregated results of smaller classroom tests, or effort and attendance, and it may be these assessments that are internalized by a student. Instead, continuous *formative* assessment of progress is something that research by, for example, Black (1998), Black and Wiliam (1998), Black et al. (2003), Giota (2002) and Gipps (2004) has proved to be able to further students' development towards more responsible and motivated learners through creating a culture of success.

## 8.2 General Considerations

As the present study has been part of a larger research project, *Self-assessment of Learning: the Case of Languages* (SALL), the design has been both aided and limited by the framework within which it took place.

The general project aims were in many ways similar. This study, however, focused specifically on the students' assessments of their own general on- and off-task written production and specific writing skills. An independent study would of course have made designs other than the one used here possible, but these may not necessarily have been any better, as it is difficult to study the students' own perception of their EFL writing in any other way but through accessing their own views and assessing their writing.

The educational environment of the study was, due to the project within which it was done, already set with regard to the participating student characteristics and educational program. Special attention needed to be paid so as not to expose the students and the two teachers to "research fatigue". (All in all, the SALL project involved several small studies each with their own set of questionnaires.) Nevertheless, the fact that the study was part of a project, which lasted over several terms, served to legitimize the writing study and most probably lessened the effect of the students and teachers being in any way particularly influenced against it.

## 8.3 Conclusions and Implications for Teaching EFL Writing

The first research question posed was: What degree of competence in estimating their own general level of writing in EFL do the students in the study possess? Are there any differences in the students' competence when it comes to their perceived *general* ability in EFL in comparison with their self-assessment in relation to a more *particular* EFL task?

Generally the results can be said to warrant the conclusion that the students in the study demonstrated competence in self-assessing their EFL writing, both at a group level and at an individual level. There was some individual variation, and the students were in general better at assessing their *general* (off-task) ability in EFL writing than their *particular* (on-task) ability. The implications of these results are that the goals set out in the syllabuses, concerning student participation in planning and evaluating their EFL writing,

are not unrealistic ones, and that students in general have a good idea of what their performance levels are.

Teachers need support in making assessment analyses, and having access to students' self-assessments gives a more comprehensive base from which to make these judgements. The students' own assessments are a real and valid complementary source of information. Teachers in the related Swedish Research Project, the *Teacher's Extended Assessment Role* (LUB), who received in-service training aimed at promoting alternative methods of assessment, such as self-assessment, developed a broader knowledge of their students' actual achievement levels, on which they could base their students' progressive and final course level assessments of in EFL (Molander Beyer & Dragemark Oscarson, 2007; Molander Beyer, 2008).

The differences in off- and on-task self-assessments also warrant the conclusion that teachers and students benefit from working together with interpreting the steering documents, that is the national syllabuses and grading criteria. A shared understanding of the implications of different criteria given focus in different tasks needs to be developed in the classroom, in dialogue with the students.

The second research question was: What specific language skills do the students focus on when assessing their writing in EFL, and are the students able to realistically identify them as satisfactory or in need of improvement?

The students' focus on traditional language skills such as grammar and spelling is most likely a reflection of the ways in which assessment is mostly carried out in school situations, but not necessarily what is emphasized by the syllabus. For students to be able to assess specific formal skills, they need to understand the real use and purpose of different language categories, such as punctuation and paragraphing. Students need to become involved in the reasons for developing these skills, if they are to be able to assess whether they have mastered them. For school purposes this means that if students are taught to self-assess their work in the EFL classroom, using grading criteria and teacher as well as peer feedback in non-threatening forms, they can develop a deeper awareness of their achievement levels. The result is likely to be that they are better prepared for continued language learning, also in a lifelong perspective. As Cram (1995, p. 276) points out, the cyclical nature of self-assessment results in a spiral, which underpins learner autonomy.

The third research question investigated was: How do students and teachers experience an attempt to incorporate the curriculum and syllabus goals through the application of self-assessment practices in EFL writing?

The attempt to incorporate independent learning goals, in the form of self-assessment practices in EFL, was generally experienced as a positive and relevant learning experience by both teachers and students. Self-assessment of EFL learning seemed to help the learners in the study re-evaluate their writing content and motivate them to further develop their writing skills. It also gave them an opportunity to reflect, and to grow through reflection, as the self-assessments made visible much of what was otherwise hidden in the learning process. Students' influence on methodology and content should by extension include influence on assessment, and as students clearly stated, this should be from an early age. There is no reason to suppose that such an experience would be unique for the students in the study.

The last research question explored was: To what extent does the practice of self-assessment of EFL-writing lead to more realistic learner views of attainment?

The students seem to have improved their self-assessment skills through training. Self-assessment practice together with teacher feedback strengthened the agreement between the student groups' and teachers' assessments, as well as between individual students' and teachers' assessment. The individual students' proficiency levels, as well as their experience of self-assessment, seemed to be salient aspects of both on- and off-task assessments. In other words, in line with previous research by, for example, Ross, Rolheiser and Hogaboam-Gray (1999), Mok et al. (2006), Ross et al. (1999), continual training seems of importance for the development of the capacity to self-assess "correctly".

The implications of the results of the study for teaching and learning EFL writing in school contexts speak for an early introduction of self-assessment practices and continuing throughout schooling in relation to students' capability. Grades of individual term assignments and summative assessments of course goals can of course also be used for formative purposes, but the aggregation of grades of students' work samples seems to have negative impact on learning and would seem to be best avoided in light of student voices in the study. Several researchers (e.g. Sadler, 1989; Sadler 1998; Black et al., 2004) refer to continuous grading, that is having grades on

different assignments combined throughout a course and summed up at the end, as an inhibiting factor to learning.

Assessment both can and should be discussed with students, and it needs to be a positive, informative and fair experience where their own views are taken into account. Students should be party to decisions on assessment issues that count. To refrain from training such strategic behaviours over a long period of time and refrain from helping students to learn to evaluate their learning is, as Garner (1987, p. 128) says, unacceptable educational practice. This increased pressure to exercise and share responsibility in learning needs to be learned by both students and teachers; it does not develop by itself. In general it is difficult for anyone within the realms of language education to know what exactly is needed for a student to communicate in EFL writing later on in life. The acquisition of lifelong language learning skills therefore seems both a reasonable and a desirable goal to strive for.

The present study also indicates positive results of teacher feedback that is not value-laden (i.e. neither in the form of direct corrections or grades, nor in the form of praise) with the effect that students have to reflect on and identify language errors themselves. This is likely to decrease dependence on the teacher and thus facilitate learner independence. Related to the Truscott-Ferris debate (cf. 5.4.4) the results seem to indicate that it is not a question of the teacher correcting language mistakes or not, but a matter of students' understanding of where their formal language structures break down, of the understanding of the consequences for communication, and of helping the students resolve the issues from their own comprehension.

The larger aim of the study was to see whether the use of self-assessment could help students develop lifelong learning skills and in this way further the development of more comprehensive and thereby fairer assessment practices.

The two teachers in the study both witnessed to the difficulty in setting grades, even though both were experienced language teachers and well versed in the syllabus grading criteria. In the LUB-project a large proportion of Swedish language teachers expressed the view that it is difficult to set grades (Oscarson, 2008). Students also expressed apprehension that teachers in general do not follow the set grading criteria or the benchmark texts when grading writing or when grading in general, even though they expressed trust in their own teachers' competence in this area.

Both students and teachers professed in the interviews that there were areas of students' language proficiency that the teachers could not see, nor access in the ordinary classroom assessment situation. Given the opportunity and power to partake in the assessment process more fully, the students' perspective may be genuinely taken into account and thus add to the validity of the assessment outcome. In the end it comes down to who has the preferential right of interpretation of what constitutes essential knowledge. The narrower the basis for assessment is, the greater the risk that certain skills may be under-represented and that certain students and student groups may become marginalized. The power of assessment on a personal as well as a societal level should not be underestimated, as Heron (1988), Shohamy (2001a, 2001b) and Giota (2006a, 2006b), among others, point out. The importance of letting the students' voices become part of all EFL assessment practice to generate a more comprehensive picture of their results should lead to the development of fairer and more comprehensive assessment of these results.

The use of self-assessment in the study seemed to encourage what Dewey spoke of as a reflective attitude, allied to a whole-heartedness and willingness in wanting to learn, and in this way, developing an intellectual responsibility to the self (Dyke, 2006). Self-assessment in EFL writing can then be *one* way to reach self-regulation and strengthen lifelong language learning attitudes if it becomes part of everyday classroom practice. The chances are that it can be a means to further more comprehensive and fairer assessment, if practised from an early age and trained continuously as a form of formative assessment. This can also be done in conjunction with summative assessment which for example Taras (2001; 2003) advocates.

The results of the answers to the research questions point to the use of self-assessment in writing as *one* way of helping to realize more comprehensive and fairer assessment practices. The results show tendencies which are supported by related research and thus add to our knowledge in the field. The results in the present study also give an alternative picture of vocationally and technically oriented students as successful and confident learners and writers of EFL, a picture that seldom seems to be brought forth.

## 8.4 Further Research

The results of the study may instigate and motivate further research. More work needs to be done on the differences of self-assessment outcomes of

different tasks to see if the results of the study are replicated, or if any recurrent pattern emerges. For example, additional analyses of the achievement groups Pass and Pass with Distinction could add to the question of whether the restriction of range regarding grades used makes any difference when it comes to how students over- and underestimate their results. The students' motivations for their self-assessments of their written assignments, and to what they might have attributed their self-assessed grade in the present study, have not yet been analyzed. Neither were the positive aspects of the students' specific writing skills investigated, that is, whether the students could assess their language strengths as well as their weaknesses. A deeper analysis of these questions, as well as further analyses of data within the SALL project regarding speaking skills could provide further insight into the nature of self-assessments of EFL skills by adolescents. As the researcher followed the students during the whole SALL project, analyses of field note observations of both teachers and students could add valuable information to the present results.

Another aspect of the study, which would have been interesting to investigate further, is the question of whether the results would have been the same if there had been a more even gender distribution in the group, or if it had been dominated by female students. As research on self-assessment skills in language learning is inconclusive in this area, there is much that may be done. In the same manner it would have been interesting if one had had access to student groups from several different upper secondary school programmes. Other research studies point to findings that metacognitive skills may be very differently attended to by teachers in different communities, and therefore investigation into these issues would add valuable knowledge to the field of self-assessment in learning languages.

The present study and the questions it instigates for further research shed some light on some of the issues involved in the self-assessment of writing in EFL. There are further areas of language assessment of writing, as well as other language skills, which need to be looked into to be able to realize the international, European and Swedish national policy aims for lifelong learning, and to further develop the democratic aspects of assessment which are so important for the promotion of fair practices in this sphere of language education.



# SVENSK SAMMANFATTNING

## Inledning

Europeisk och svensk språkutbildningspolicy beskrivs i ett flertal dokument av central betydelse för arbetet i föreliggande studie (cf. Kapitel 2). Gemensamt för dem är att de betonar vikten av elevers självständiga och aktiva lärande, vilket ses som en nödvändighet för utvecklingen av ett livslångt lärande för medborgarna. Målen är i grunden demokratiska och syftar bland annat till att öka förståelsen mellan de olika europeiska kulturerna och förbättra möjligheterna till mobilitet. Ett av målen är att alla europeiska medborgare skall kunna tala minst två språk utöver det egna modersmålet (Europarådet, 2004a). Eftersom språkinläring och språkbedömning är nära sammanflätade har det blivit allt viktigare att utvidga kunskaperna kring bedömning.

Synen på bedömning har alltmer förskjutits från bedömning *av* lärandet till bedömning *för* lärandet vilket bland annat inneburit att uppmärksamheten alltmer kommit att riktas mot s.k. formativ bedömning och alternativa bedömningsformer. Särskilt har man kommit att intressera sig för elevers möjligheter att själva delta i bedömningen av inlärningsresultaten.

Ämnet för studien, elevers bedömningar av den egna skriftliga förmågan i engelska, är angelägen för fördjupad förståelse och kunskap om förutsättningarna för elevers självbedömning. Det finns relativt lite forskning på området. Svenska läro- och kursplaner betonar vikten av att elever arbetar självständigt och tar ansvar för sin egen inläring, vilket inkluderar att bedöma den egna kunskapsnivån. Skriftlig produktion av engelska valdes för studien på grund av att engelska är ett språk som alla elever lär sig i skolan och att skriftlig framställning blivit ett allt viktigare område i undervisningen i främmande språk.

Studien är en del av det svenska Vetenskapsrådets projekt *Självbedömning av inläring: Exemplet språk (SALL)* (Oscarson, 2001). Projektets generella syfte var att undersöka elevers självbedömningar av egna produktiva färdigheter (dvs. tala och skriva) i engelska. I projektet

utvecklades instrument och praktiska metoder som kopplades till olika aktiviteter i klassrummet, bland annat sådana som beskrivs i föreliggande studie.

## Forskningsfrågor

Studien syftar till att öka kännedomen om i vilken mån självbedömning av skriftlig produktion i skolämnet engelska kan förbättra elevernas möjligheter att medverka i en mer heltäckande och därigenom mer rättvisande bedömningspraktik. Det kan antas att sådan självbedömningsförmåga hos eleverna blir till stöd i ett längre ("livslångt") lärande perspektiv. För att uppnå syftet undersöktes hur fyra elevgrupper på en gymnasieskola förstod sin egen generella och specifika förmåga att skriva engelska i relation till läroplanens och kursplanens mål. Enligt den nu rådande kommunikativa funktionella språksynen lär sig elever språk inte bara genom individuellt arbete utan också genom interaktion och samverkan i grupp. Därför undersöktes hur elever självbedömde sig både utifrån ett *grupperspektiv* och ett *individuellt perspektiv*. Fyra forskningsfrågor ställdes:

- Vilken kompetens har elever att bedöma sin egen *generella* skriftliga nivå i engelska, enskilt och som grupp betraktade? Finns det skillnader mellan elevernas bedömningar av *generell* färdighet ("*off-task*" *assessment*) och deras bedömning i samband med *särskilda* uppgifter ("*on-task*" *assessment*) .
- Vilka *specifika* språkliga färdigheter fokuserar elever på när de bedömer sina egna texter och i vilken mån är de nöjda med dessa färdigheter eller anser att de behöver förbättras?
- Hur upplever elever och lärare ett försök att integrera de läroplan- och kursplanemål som betonar självständigt och livslångt lärande genom självbedömning av skriftlig produktion i ämnet engelska?
- I vilken grad leder elevens självbedömning av skriftlig produktion i engelska till mer realistiska uppfattningar av den egna förmågan?

## Bakgrund

Som sagts inledningsvis talar utbildningspolitiska dokument på såväl internationell som svensk nivå om vikten av det livslånga och autonoma lärandet när det gäller språk. Europarådets arbete har varit viktigt på detta

område och de svenska läro- och kursplanerna har tagit intryck av ett flertal arbeten kopplade till sådana policydokument (se t.ex. Council of Europe, 2001, gällande *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: CEFR* och utvecklingen av s.k. språkportfolios), vilket bland annat avspeglar sig i målen att elever skall kunna planera sitt eget arbete samt själva bedöma sina framsteg.

Lärandeteorier som ligger till grund för arbetet är till exempel Deweys tankar om reflexivitet som ett sätt att hjälpa människan att hantera upplevelser av förändringar i samhället. Eleven utvecklar sin självständighet genom att lära sig att tänka och reflektera, vilket är viktigt för medborgare i alla demokratiska samhällen. Deweys tankar ligger också till grund för 'upplevelsepedagogik' och är centrala i utvecklingen av självreglerande arbetsätt, exempelvis problembaserat lärande (PBL), skrivprocessen, mm.

Även kognitiv- och socialkonstruktivistiska perspektiv är betydelsefulla för självreglering. Enligt exempelvis Piaget konstruerade människan mening genom erfarenhet och lärande vilket förutsätter en aktiv elev. Man kan också säga att eftersom människor tolkar erfarenheter på olika sätt är det ofta svårt att tala om absoluta kunskaper. Kunskap är dessutom, enligt Glasersfeldt (1995) meningslös som isolerad företeelse. Mening konstrueras bäst i ett socialt sammanhang. Socialkonstruktivisten Vygotsky betonade inte bara omgivningens betydelse utan också språkets. Kunskap är något som växer och utvecklas i samspel mellan eleven och någon annan, till exempel en lärare. Läraren kan meditera lärandet, men eleven lär själv. Gipps (1994) med flera har påpekat vikten av träning i introspektion och säger att metakognition, dvs. medvetenhet om egna kognitiva funktioner och inlärningsprocesser (Flavell, 1979) utvecklas genom "lotsad" självbedömning (*guided self-assessment*), där eleven blir medveten om de egna inlärningsstrategierna. Metakognition består bland annat av självbedömning och självreglering och exempelvis visar goda språkinlärare goda metakognitiva förmågor (Rivers, 2002; Wenden, 1999).

Ytterligare viktiga faktorer för att medvetandegöras om inlärningsstrategier är elevers och lärares föreställningar om själva lärande och om hur detta går till. Självständiga elever uppfattar sig som mer kapabla, enligt bland andra Zimmerman (1998). Sådana föreställningar om förmågan att lära är prediktiva, dvs. förutsägande, enligt Shunk och Swartz (1993) samt Zimmerman och Risemberg (1997). Elever som tror på sin språkförmåga är mer målmedvetna och klarar sig bättre, även när de möter motstånd, hävdar Hsieh och Schallert (2008). Även lärares föreställningar om hur inläring går till präglar klassrumsundervisningen och påverkar elevens utveckling och syn

på sig själv (Wigfield & Harold, 1992; Gardner & Miller, 1999). Lärare som tror att eleverna kan lära sig får mer framgångsrika och mer motiverade elever än lärare med motsatt syn (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968; Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Martinek & Guillet, 2002).

Språkundervisningsmetoder och språkbedömningsmetoder har följt varandra historiskt och den rådande kommunikativa synen på språkundervisning och språkinläring har lett till förändringar. Det kommunikativa klassrummet är dialogiskt med till exempel parövningar och grupparbeten vanligare förekommande än i det traditionella språkklassrummet. Med ett problembaserat eller 'learner autonomy'-inspirerat arbetssätt stimuleras elever till en mer aktiv språkinläring. I samklang med detta har mer integrativa och holistiska typer av test och prov utvecklats (Oller 1979), där inte bara formella aspekter av språket prövas, utan även diskursiva, kulturella och sociolingvistiska kompetenser vilka fått en allt större betydelse (Bachman, 1990). I och med detta har också alternativa bedömningsformer, som till exempel kamrat- och självbedömning, kommit mer i fokus (Gipps, 1994; Gipps & Murphy, 1994; Hamayan, 1995, Paris & Ayres, 1994; Worthen, 1993). Det är till exempel uppenbart att de senare årens arbete med skrivprocessen, där kamratrespons och återkoppling (feedback) från lärare är i fokus för att utveckla elevers skrivande, ändrat formerna för både skrivuppgifter och bedömningar i skolsammanhang.

Shohamy (2007) har påpekat att mer traditionella språktest, särskilt s.k. *high-stakes test*, har kommit att användas i politiska och sociala sammanhang där de har makt att påverka deltagarna på ett sätt som inte alltid är i deras eget intresse. Att utveckla mer självreflexiva bedömningsmodeller där bland annat självbedömning får större roll är ett sätt att angripa denna problematik. Det kritiska perspektivet på språkundervisning och vad som kallas *Critical Applied Linguistics* (CAL) (Pennycook 1999, 2001; Lynch, 2001) speglar detta. Shohamy (2001a, 2001b) ifrågasätter till och med om den språksyn som de mer traditionella språkproven baseras på gagnar de demokratiska mål som finns i ett pluralistiskt samhälle. Alternativa bedömningsformer ansågs därför av Lynch (2001) som annorlunda i jämförelse med traditionella test, eftersom rättvisa i det kritiska alternativa bedömningsperspektivet betyder att elevens perspektiv tas i beaktande och att bedömning är så strukturerad att den "maximerar etiska handlingar", mellan bedömaren och den bedömda. Detta faller i linje med Messicks (1989) tankar om att validiteten i bedömning också måste relateras till bedömningsresultatens konsekvenser och inte bara till bedömningsens inneboende egenskaper.

## Tidigare forskning

Forskning om självbedömning i allmänhet, dvs. avseende olika ämnesområden, har visat att under vissa förhållanden kan elever göra realistiska självbedömningar men stor variation förekommer (Kirby & Downs, 2007; Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Shrauger & Osberg, 1981; Stefani, 1994). Kunskapsnivå anses allmänt vara en signifikant variabel med bättre överensstämmelse på de högre nivåerna (Falchikov & Boud, 1989). Självbedömning befanns vara mer reliabel när kriterier var explicita (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; Andrade & Du, 2005; Boud, 1995; Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Kirby & Downs, 2007; Mok et al., 2006; Orsmond, et al., 2000; Sadler, 1989; Stefani, 1998). Vidare kan konstateras att överensstämmelsen mellan lärarbedömningar och elevbedömningar stärktes vid övning, speciellt när det gällde lågpresterande elever. Arbete med kriterier ansågs också hjälpa dessa elever att förstå mål och förväntningar bättre och därigenom få en bättre uppfattning om sin egen nivå (Ross, Rolheiser & Hogaboam-Gray, 1999). Forskning har även funnit att elever med elementära kunskaper har tenderat att överskatta sina prestationer, medan elever med högre kunskaper haft en tendens att underskatta sin förmåga (Boud, 1995; Falchikov & Boud, 1989; Prohaska & Maraj, 1995). Det har också spekulerats om huruvida uppgiftstypen påverkar riktigheten i bedömningarna (Falchikov & Boud, 1989).

Forskning angående självbedömning i språk har oftast fokuserat sambandet mellan lärarytelse och elevskattningar och dessa har varierat kraftigt (Pierce, Swain, & Hart, 1993; Janssen-van Diemen, 1989; 1992; Oscarson, 1980). Generellt har sambandet varit starkare i de fall där skattningarna utgått från mer specifika, ”can-do” satser än i de fall där skattningarna utgått från mer allmänna bedömningar av språkfärdigheter (Blanche & Merino, 1989; Butler & Lee, 2006). Elever rapporterar positiva attityder till självbedömning (Smith, 1997) samt ökad motivation (Blanche & Merino, 1989; von Elek, 1981, 1985) och ökat lärande (Andrade & Du, 2007). Det finns studier som visar att elever tror mer på sina egna bedömningar än lärarens (Smith, 1997). Flera studier antyder att träning i självbedömning förbättrar sambandet mellan lärar- och elevskattningar (Gottlieb, 2000; Janssen-van Diemen, 1992; MacDonald & Boud, 2003; Oscarson, 1980; Taras, 2001). Det finns lite forskning på de omgivande förhållanden som gäller självbedömning, till exempel på hur elever uppfattar eller förstår kriterier, relationen mellan bakgrund, process och resultat, samt praktiskt tillvägagångssätt.

Endast ett fåtal studier behandlar självbedömning av skriftlig produktion (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; A. Brown, 2005; Janssen-van Dieten, 1992; Ross, 1998; Taras, 2001). Detta är en anledning till studiens fokus.

## Metod

Studien är såsom redan nämnts en del av Vetenskapsrådets projekt benämnt *Självbedömning av inläring: Exemplet språk (Self-assessment of Learning: the Case of Languages, SALL)* (Oscarson, 2001). SALL projektet och studien har samma övergripande syfte, dvs. att undersöka elevers bedömningar av de egna produktiva färdigheterna i engelska. Den föreliggande studien fokuserar dock på skriftlig produktion. En pilotstudie genomfördes 2002 och själva studien 2002-2003.

Undersökningen gjordes vid en teknisk gymnasieskola i en svensk storstad. Två lärare och fyra elevgrupper ingick i studien. Två grupper läste Engelska A och två grupper läste Engelska B. Majoriteten av eleverna var pojkar. Med utgångspunkt i avgångsbetygen från grundskolan låg eleverna på en relativt hög nivå jämfört med elever i Sverige som helhet. Eleverna i kurs A hade högre avgångsbetyg från grundskolan än B-kurseleverna.

Flera självbedömningsformulär gavs till eleverna (Bilaga 3 och 4) och analyserades statistiskt. Eleverna genomförde även två skriftliga uppgifter. Den ena var en omfattande skrivuppgift som även analyserades lingvistiskt av forskaren. Den andra var det skriftliga delprovet i det nationella provet i engelska. Efter det att skrivuppgiften hade genomförts intervjuades elever i åtta fokusgrupper. De två lärarna intervjuades individuellt vid slutet av studien.

Studien inleddes med att alla elever bedömde sin generella förmåga att skriva engelska genom att ta ställning till fem s.k. ”can-do”-meningar på en skala 1 – 6, från det svenska självbedömningsmaterialet som Skolverket tillhandahåller (Skolverket, 2002). En adapterad modell av skrivprocessen (<http://www.nwp.org>) användes som arbetsmetod för den första skrivuppgiften i början av kursen. Uppgiften bestod i att eleverna i kurs A skrev ett brev, medan eleverna i kurs B skrev en argumenterande artikel (Bilaga 3). Eleverna självbedömde här sin uppnådda nivå på skrivuppgiften genom att själva sätta betyg på båda arbeten. De bedömde också sina mer specifika formella skrivfärdigheter genom att markera om de var ”nöjda med” eller ”kunde förbättra” sin stavning, grammatik, styckeindelning, ordkunskap,

meningsbyggnad och kommatering. Texterna betygsattes vidare av elevernas lärare och analyserades av forskaren. I slutet av kursen skrev sedan eleverna det nationella provet i engelska och självbedömde sina resultat på den skriftliga delen av detta. Dessa elevbedömningar jämfördes slutligen med lärarnas betyg.

För att kontrollera reliabiliteten i forskarens lingvistiska analyser av skrivuppgifterna (ett brev och en artikel) gjordes parallella analyser av andra bedömare med slumpmässigt utvalda elevuppgifter. Flera av intervjufrågorna var modellerade på de frågor som ställts vid större svenska nationella utvärderingar.

## Resultat och Diskussion

### Generell kompetens

Elevernas självbedömningar av den egna skriftliga kompetensen undersöktes utifrån både ett *grupp* perspektiv och ett *individuell* perspektiv vilka båda är viktiga i skolsammanhang. Den första forskningsfrågan var: "Vilken kompetens har elever att bedöma sin egen *generella* skriftliga nivå i engelska, enskilt och som grupp betraktade? Finns det skillnader mellan elevernas bedömningar av *generell* färdighet ("*off-task*" *assessment*) och deras bedömning i samband med *särskilda* uppgifter ("*on-task*" *assessment*)"?

För att besvara frågan analyserades först elevernas *generella* skrivförmåga i engelska efter hur de hade svarat på det svenska självbedömningsmaterialet gällande skriftlig produktion. Elevernas bedömningar av sina prestationer av skriftlig produktion i samband med en särskild uppgift ("*on-task*") undersöktes sedan genom jämförelse mellan elevernas och lärarnas bedömningar. Eleverna gjorde självbedömningar av dels en skrivuppgift (A-kurs eleverna skrev ett brev och B-kurs eleverna skrev en artikel) dels en nationell provuppgift genom att de betygsatte sina prestationer. Dessa jämfördes sedan med de betyg eleverna fick av sina lärare.

Resultaten visade att eleverna på gruppnivå bedömde sin förmåga att skriva engelska som relativt hög allmänt sett, vilket var en realistisk bedömning mot bakgrund av att de låg över genomsnittet i åk 9 betyg nationellt. Dessutom visade det sig att elevernas förmåga att bedöma både sin *generella* kompetens, såväl allmänt som i samband med en särskild uppgift var relativt god om man använder sig av lärarbetygen som standard.

Resultaten antyder att eleverna kollektivt har förutsättningar att ta ansvar för sin planering i engelska och att de kan ta ställning till vad de behöver lära sig.

När det gäller elevernas individuella förmåga att bedöma sina kunskaper att skriva engelska, var det större variation på överensstämmelsen mellan elev- och lärarbedömningar. Variation är enligt vad till exempel Fachikov och Boud (1989) och Ross (1998) framhåller inte ovanlig. Variationen i korrelationerna i studien ligger också i linje med tidigare forskning av Blanche och Merino (1989), LeBlanc och Painchaud (1985), Oscarson (1980), Ross (1998), och von Elek (1981; 1985).

Skillnader i resultat mellan lärares och elevers individuella bedömningar kan diskuteras utifrån olika infallsvinklar. En är utifrån olika situationer och kontext, eftersom det bör vara skillnad för en elev att bedöma en skrivuppgift tidigt i en kurs och att bedöma utfallet av ett prov i slutet av en kurs. Elevernas förståelse av de förväntningar som anges i styrdokumentet är sannolikt också en faktor. En skrivuppgift konstruerad av läraren har också alltid speciella kriterier vilka en elev kanske inte uppmärksammar på samma sätt som en lärare, medan en nationell provuppgift utgår från mer generella kurskriterier. Sadler (1989) och Stefani (1998) betonar just detta, dvs. att lärare och elever behöver en gemensam bas för förståelsen av de kriterier efter vilka prestationer bedöms.

Ytterligare en möjlig förklaring till de konstaterade skillnaderna i bedömning av klassrumsuppgiften kan vara att lärarna fokuserade mer på formella aspekter av språket än vad som egentligen är motiverat av kursplanerna. Dessa ger i första hand uttryck för den kommunikativa, funktionella språksynen.

Blanche och Merino (1989) påpekar att elever som lär sig ett främmande språk kan ha extra svårigheter att jämföra sig med infödda talare. Linnarud (1986) betonar också att svenska elever inte kan förväntas ha samma kontroll över register och genre som engelska elever i samma ålder. Det kan till och med vara så att svenska lärare i engelska, som inte har engelska som modersmål, kan ha olika modeller som de eftersträvar att eleverna skall anpassa sig till men som inte överensstämmer med elevernas i verkligheten acceptabla språkbruk. En elevs förståelse av sin egen skrivförmåga kan bero på vilken typ av skriftlig kommunikation de själva har som förebild när de gör sina bedömningar.

Skäl till att elever och lärare gör olika bedömningar kan även vara att eleverna har orealistiskt höga förväntningar på sin egen förmåga, dvs. rent

önsketänkande. Men olikheterna kan också bero på verkliga indikationer på kompetens som elever fått utanför klassrummet och som de inte får möjlighet att ge uttryck för under lektioner i skolan. Hur autentiska de skriftliga uppgifterna i studien upplevdes av eleverna har inte undersökts. Det är möjligt att provuppgiften prövade en bredare skrivförmåga med utgångspunkt i kursmålen, vilket var lättare för både elever och lärare att relatera bedömningar till och som ledde till bättre överensstämmelse mellan elever och lärare. Elevernas förmåga att bedöma sin skriftliga förmåga i engelska verkar vara beroende på typen av uppgift och den kontextuella situationen för skrivandet. Detta förstärker vikten av att elever förstår både kriterier och syftet med självbedömning, vilket flera forskare har påpekat tidigare (Andrade & Boulay, 2003; Andrade & Du, 2005; Boud 1995; Mok et al., 2006; Orsmond et al., 2000; Reiling, 2000; Sadler, 1989; Stefani, 1998).

Studien utgår från att när elevernas bedömningar överensstämmer med lärarens är de realistiska och meningsfulla. Detta är givetvis inte alltid fallet. Det kan vara så, åtminstone i enskilda fall eller i vissa avseenden, att elevers egna bedömningar kan spegla färdigheter på ett verklighetstrogare sätt än vad lärares bedömningar gör. Man kan med andra ord inte utan vidare utgå ifrån att hög korrelation mellan elever och lärares bedömningar är ett tecken på god självbedömningsförmåga. Som Orsmond et al. (2000) säger kan en jämförelse mellan elev- och lärarbedömningar vara direkt missvisande. Shohamy (2001a, 2001b) poängterar att en lärares kunskap alltid är ofullständig, och att fler källor behövs för att nå en riktig tolkning av elevens kunskap.

Man kan också fundera hur användbar av den nuvarande betygsskalan är för självbedömning. Den innehåller bara fyra steg och elever på det nedersta och översta (IG och MVG) kan bara missbedöma i en riktning, de förra bara uppåt och de senare bara nedåt. Tendensen att elever i de lägre betygsgrupperna tenderar att överskatta sig, och de i de högre betygsgrupperna tenderar att underskatta sig, kan till en del förklaras av detta.

## Specifik kompetens

Den andra forskningsfrågan: Vilka specifika språkliga färdigheter fokuserar elever på när de bedömer sina egna texter och i vilken mån är de nöjda med dessa färdigheter eller anser att de behöver förbättras? undersöktes genom att forskaren analyserade elevernas skrivuppgift (dvs. brevet alternativt artiklen) med avseende på grammatik, stavning, styckeindelning, meningsbyggnad, kommativering och ordkunskap. Resultaten av undersökningen jämfördes med

elevernas bedömning angående huruvida de ansåg sig "nöjda" med färdigheten och/eller i behov av förbättring eller hade gjort fel.

När det gäller elevernas kompetens att bedöma dessa *specifika* färdigheter underskattade elever generellt sin kompetens jämfört med forskarens bedömning. Elever visade framförallt medvetenhet om sina egna färdigheter när det gällde stavning och grammatik, begrepp de troligtvis både kände igen och förstod betydelsen av. Elevernas fokusering på stavning och grammatik är intressant eftersom dessa inte nämns som mål i kursplanen eller betonas i kommunikativ språkinläring. Det elever koncentrerar sig på är troligtvis en spegling av det som faktiskt står i centrum för språkundervisningen i skolan, vilket inte alltid är det som styrdokumentet avser. Diskursen i läroplan och kurskriterier är, som Ball (2006) poängterar, inte alltid realiserad i verkligheten. Elever har redan från grundskolan relativt goda färdigheter i grammatik och stavning (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a). Om detta är fallet, kan man spekulera över varför eleverna i studien inte gått vidare och fokuserat andra områden. Resultaten kan dock även vara en effekt av att förståelsen av de lingvistiska kategorierna inte fanns, trots att lärarna gick igenom dem före skrivuppgiften.

Allmänt var eleverna "nöjda" med sina skriftliga delfärdigheter, med undantag av grammatik och meningsbyggnad, oberoende av hur många fel de gjorde. Detta visar på att läroplans- och kursplanemål som går ut på att elever skall "vilja och våga" använda språket uppnås. Även för elever som bevisligen gör många fel kan det vara logiskt att vara "nöjd", dvs. om de jämför sig med sig själva.

Analysen visar att de områden inom vilka eleverna gjorde flest fel gällde grammatik, stavning och meningsbyggnad. Ju fler fel elever gjorde, ju oftare markerade de att de behövde förbättra sitt språk (eller insåg att de gjort fel). Detta är en viktig typ av insikt för elever, eftersom de därigenom blir medvetna om konsekvenserna av språkliga fel, samtidigt som de utvecklar förmågan att självvrätta. Generellt underskattade eleverna sina färdigheter i jämförelse med forskarens bedömning, vilket tyder på att dessa elever hade en självkritisk attityd till sina skriftliga färdigheter.

Fokus på traditionell, formell språkfärdighet som grammatik och stavning är troligtvis en spegling av hur skriftlig produktion kommenteras ute på skolorna. För att eleverna skall kunna bedöma sina färdigheter behöver de förstå innebörden av de olika språkliga kategorierna som betecknar

färdighetsområden. De behöver även förstå de bakomliggande orsakerna till att man kan behöva utveckla dessa områden.

## Elevers och lärares erfarenheter

Den tredje forskningsfrågan: "Hur upplever elever och lärare ett försök att integrera de läroplan- och kursplanemål som betonar självständigt och livslångt lärande genom självbedömning av skriftlig produktion i ämnet engelska"? undersöktes genom elev- och lärarintervjuer. Svaren grupperades och analyserades tematiskt.

Av intervjuerna framkom att både lärare och elever var positiva till självbedömning och sättet att arbeta med skrivuppgiften, dvs. metoden där en anpassad skrivprocess kopplades till självbedömningsfrågor. Det ansågs som ett bra sätt att skapa medvetenhet om elevernas språkliga kompetens. Övning i att sätta betyg genom att bedöma andra elevtexter var bra, eftersom det ledde till en ökad förståelse av kriterier och den nivå de förväntades prestera själva. Arbetssättet gav dem en insikt i att resultaten inte handlade om dem själva eller om hur mycket arbete som de lagt ner. Även Butler (1987) och Boud (2000) fann att elever blev mer medvetna om sambandet mellan kriterier och resultat när kriterier diskuterades gemensamt. Studien visar också positiva resultat av lärarrespons som inte är värderande och konkret "rättande" utan snarare fokuserande med hjälp av understyrkningar och frågor och där elever själva får reflektera över och arbeta om det de skrivit. Detta bör leda till att elevens beroende av läraren minskar och underlättar ett självständigt arbetssätt. Eleverna själva måste förstå var deras språk brister och konsekvenserna av detta för den skriftliga kommunikationen. De behöver hjälp att lösa de språkliga problemen utifrån sin egen förståelse. Typen av respons tog även bort fokus från dem själva och underlättade på så sätt kamratrespons. Arbetssättet involverade eleverna i inläringen, en följeffekt som också A. Brown (2005), Schendell och O'Neill (1999) och Taras (2001; 2002; 2003) uppmärksammat. Eleverna tyckte att det var lättare att bedöma den egna generella skriftliga språkförmågan, jämfört med de specifika färdigheterna (dvs. grammatik, stavning, etc.)

Erfarenheten av självbedömningen av skrivuppgiften gjorde att eleverna ansåg att man borde börja med självbedömning tidigare i skolan. Såväl elever som lärare såg möjliga tillvägagångssätt att utveckla användandet i klassrummet. De föreslog till exempel att de skulle kunna revidera en text, tills kriterierna var nådda och att man skulle kunna använda

sig av portfoliobedömning och kamratbedömning. Dessutom efterlyste de mer dialog med läraren i bedömningsfrågor. Många såg också att självbedömning är en färdighet som gick att överföra till andra ämnen och andra områden i ett livslångt perspektiv.

Elevinflytande och ansvar är två viktiga aspekter av självbedömning. Lärarna i studien var också mer positiva till elevinflytande än man allmänt kan säga är fallet i svensk skola (jfr t.ex. Oscarson et al., 1998). Kursplanens mål beträffande elevernas självständighet och förmåga att ta ansvar var angelägna att uppnå för dem. I US 98 ansågs elever inte tillräckligt mogna att ta ansvar för sin engelska, vare sig de gick i åk 5 på grundskolan eller läste kurs B i gymnasieskolan. Det är lätt att tro när man betraktar styrdokumentens mål att elever automatiskt är ansvarstagande för sin inläring, när det egentligen handlar om att hjälpa eleverna att utveckla denna förmåga. Eleverna i studien hade stora möjligheter till medbestämmande i sina kurser, både vad gäller innehåll och arbetssätt, i jämförelse med vad som rapporterades från andra undersökningar, till exempel NU03 (Oscarson & Apelgren, 2005a). Som Giota (2002) framhåller, så ökar elevers intresse för skolan, när de får vara med och bestämma.

Såväl lärare som elever uttryckte att kursplaner och betygsriterier var svåra att tolka. Generellt kan sägas att styrdokumentet behöver diskuteras mer med eleverna, inte bara i början av terminen. Fler elever än väntat var dock medvetna om kursplanemålen och om målen med det livslånga lärandet. Elever påpekade även vikten av att tala engelska på lektionerna. Detta var en erfarenhet som de i många fall inte hade från tidigare undervisning.

Det framkom få kritiska röster angående självbedömning i studien. De flesta elever sade sig uppleva övningarna som ett sätt att ta kontroll över det egna lärandet. Trots detta finns det en etisk dimension som är viktig att ta hänsyn till i enlighet med vad Lemke (2000), Schendell och O'Neill (1999), Tuschling och Engemann (2006), och Pontgratz (2006) säger. Genom självbedömning får läraren tillgång till information om eleven, och det finns risker med självutlämnande utsagor inte minst när det gäller betyg och bedömning.

När det gällde traditionell bedömning, uttryckte både elever och lärare osäkerhet. Elever ansåg att deras lärare gav dem rättvisa betyg och följde styrdokumentens intentioner, men de var osäkra hur det var generellt. Elever önskade också att bedömningen skulle grundas på de kunskaper de hade uppnått vid slutet av kursen. Om allt betygsattes under kursens gång blev

fokus på betyget för starkt vilket påverkade lärandet och lusten att lära. Aggregering av betyg på elevers arbete under årets gång verkar ha en negativ inverkan på elevernas förhållande till inläring och bör undvikas, om man lyssnar på vad eleverna har att säga i studien. Flera forskare (t.ex. Sadler, 1989; Sadler 1998; Black et al., 2004) påpekar också att sådan aggregering kan vara negativ för inläringen.

Många elever uttryckte att de i vissa avseenden visste mer om sina kunskaper i engelska än läraren. Dock ansåg de flesta att det fanns en risk att elever kunde under- eller överskatta sig beroende på graden av självförtroende och självkänsla. Om självbedömning används som ett redskap för inläring, så behöver dock inte över- eller underskattning betyda något. Både elever och lärare framförde i detta sammanhang åsikten att om självbedömning tränades uppnåddes sannolikt större samsyn.

Både elever och lärare fann att undervisningen och lärandet förändrades under studiens gång. Lärarna lät eleverna ta mer ansvar och eleverna blev mer fokuserade på att lära sig.

## Effekten av självbedömning

Den fjärde forskningsfrågan: "I vilken grad leder elevers självbedömning av skriftlig produktion i engelska till mer realistiska uppfattningar av den egna förmågan"? finner svar i samtliga de ovanstående resultatanalyserna.

I studien var det de elever med längst erfarenhet av självbedömning - de elever som var med i pilotprojektet - som gav de mest realistiska bedömningarna av sina egna prestationer i skriftlig produktion. Det verkar rimligt att övning i flera olika skrivsituationer hjälper elever att utveckla en större medvetenhet om den egna förmågan. Resultat av övning kan dock fördröjas, som Sadler (1998) antyder, av tidigare mötta bedömningstraditioner. Flera elever talade om hur de bedömde sig själva i relation till vad de trodde läraren skulle sätta för betyg, och inte utifrån sin egen inre övertygelse.

## Slutkommentarer

Det övergripande syftet med studien var att undersöka om användningen av självbedömning kunde underlätta utvecklingen av ett livslångt lärande och bidra till en mer heltäckande och på så sätt rättvisare bedömningspraktik. Lärarna i studien, precis som i det närbesläktade Vetenskapsrådets projekt

*Lärarens Utvidgade Bedömarroll (LUB)* (Oscarson, 2008) uttryckte att det var svårt att sätta betyg. Eleverna var också tveksamma till om alla lärare följde kriterierna, fast de litade på sina egna lärare. Både lärare och elever uttryckte att det fanns områden av elevernas kunskaper i engelska, som inte kom fram under engelsklektionerna. Eleverna i studien uppvisade god självbedömningskompetens på både gruppnivå men med variation på individnivå. Kursplanemål som gäller elevinflytande och ansvarstagande för den egna språkinläringen är realistiska och går att förverkliga. När tillfälle ges för eleverna att ta reell del i bedömningsprocessen, kan detta öka validiteten i bedömningar. I slutändan handlar det om vem som har tolkningsföreträde om vad som är väsentlig kunskap. Elevernas bedömningar av den egna språkliga färdigheten är ett värdefullt komplement när det gäller att utvärdera elevernas språkliga nivå. Ju snävare basen för bedömning är, ju större är risken att vissa områden blir underrepresenterade och att vissa elevgrupper blir marginaliserade. Den inneboende makt som finns i bedömning, både på en personlig och en samhällelig nivå, skall inte förringas, vilket bland andra Heron (1988), Shohamy (2001a, 2001b) och Giota (2006a, 2006b) framhåller. Får elevernas röster komma fram är detta *ett* led i utvecklingen mot en bredare och mer rättvis bedömningsgrund.

Självbedömning i skriftlig produktion kan sålunda med fördel införlivas i det dagliga klassrumsarbetet. Den kan också bli *en* del i en mer övergripande strategi för att öka elevernas grad av självreglering i lärandet av engelska – också i ett längre perspektiv.

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## Appendix 1:

### Abbreviations and Glossary of Terms Used

#### 1.1 Abbreviations

EFL	English as a foreign language
SA1	Self-Assessment Form 1 (used after the first draft of the classroom writing assignment)
SA2	Self-Assessment Form 2 (used after the second and final version of the classroom writing assignment)
SALL	Self-Assessment of Learning: the case of languages (a Swedish research project)
SAQ	Self-Assessment Questionnaire (from the Swedish Self-Assessment Material)
SAQw	Self-Assessment Questionnaire, Writing
SAWT	Self-assessment questionnaire after completion of the National Test of English, writing Course A and Course B

#### 1.2 Terminology

##### Assessment

Assessment is defined by the Encarta World English Dictionary (1999, p.104) as, “evaluation: a judgement about something based on an understanding of the situation” and “educational evaluation: a method of evaluating student performance and attainment”. Assessment includes self- and peer-assessment, teacher observation, and portfolio assessment. Sadler (1989) defines assessment as “any appraisal (or judgment, or evaluation) of a student’s work or performance”. Lynch (2001) sees it as the “systematic gathering of information for the purposes of making decisions or judgements about individuals” (op.cit. p. 358). Bachman (2004) defines assessment as “the process of collecting information about a given object of interest according to procedures that are systematic and substantively grounded. A product, or outcome of this process, such as a test score or a verbal description, is also referred to as an assessment”

(p. 7). Most forms of assessment have both formative and summative functions. A commonly accepted distinction is defined below.

### *Summative assessment*

Summative assessment is also often referred to in the literature as assessment *of* learning. Summative assessment is usually given at the end of a module or course, to sum up end results or summarize achievement status of a student (Black, 1999, p. 118). It is also often used for accountability purposes. According to Taras (2005): “The process of assessment leads to summative assessment, that is, a judgement which encapsulates all evidence up to a given point” (p. 468).

### *Formative assessment*

Formative assessment is sometimes referred to as assessment *for* learning, or “guidance of learning” (Black, 1999, p. 118). It is the assessment of student performances that is used to shape and improve the students’ further competence and learning by giving them information about their progress. Gipps (1994) uses the term when results are used to identify student needs and give feedback and “feed back into the teaching/learning process” (p. 124). Taras (2005) also emphasises the point that formative assessment requires “feedback which indicates the existence of a ‘gap’ between the actual level of the work being assessed and the required standard. It also requires an indication of how the work can be improved to reach the required standard” (p. 468). Given continuously these processes are believed to help students become more self-regulated. Some researchers such as Sadler (1989) believe that attempts to use formative assessment for summative purposes will impair its formative role while others such as Orsmond, Merry and Reiling (2000), and Taras (2000, 2002) hold an opposing view. The major difference between summative and formative assessment, according to Gipps (1994), is the purpose and effect (p. 125).

### **Alternative Assessment**

Alternative assessment is used to describe “something more than just procedures and methods” (Lynch, 2001, p. 360). The use of the term alternative assessment indicates a ‘culture’ that differs from a traditional testing culture (Gipps, 1994). It includes assessment forms such as self-assessment, peer-assessment, portfolio assessment, logbooks, and so forth, characterized in general by qualitative rather than quantitative measurement.

## *Self-assessment*

The term *self-assessment* is the term used in the thesis. It is the term that is most commonly used in the literature even if there is no one term which is commonly agreed on. It may be broadly defined as 'the process whereby someone determines the nature, characteristics, quality, or level of his or her own ability or learning, either individually or in interaction with someone else' (Oscarson, n.d.). It mainly pertains to a person's internal evaluation of abilities and results. Self-assessment is also more neutral than many other terms used in the literature, which are briefly commented on below:

*Self-monitoring* is often used in language learning contexts and similar in meaning to *self-assessment*, but has more to do with the mental processes taking place at the time of speaking or writing for example, than the process afterwards of assessing what has taken place. *Self-monitoring* can be understood as analogous to *self-observation*.

*Self-report* often seen as an act of objectively describing facts, processes, and experiences related to own ability and behaviour, such as describing the reason for answering a test question in a certain manner.

*Self-evaluation* may be understood in the sense of the exercising of some sort of public authority, for example teacher grading and national evaluations.

*Self-efficacy* sometimes used interchangeably with self-assessment in the research literature (e.g. Mills, Pajares & Heron, 2007), and concerned with the students' general beliefs in their ability to learn or handle a situation or task.

*Self-rating* is apt to connote ranking, grading or classification based on comparative quality or standard for example on an educational scale, rather than considering results achieved.

*Self-estimation* is liable to be understood as an un-precise measure, and may also be associated with calculations and mathematical estimations.

*Self-appraisal* is likely to signal self worth, and expert estimation of the value of something in a general way as a consideration. It may refer for example to a formal evaluation of one's effectiveness in a working situation (Oscarson, n.d.).

## **Peer-assessment**

Peer-assessment is assessment of, or by another student, or group of students at the same level or ability, so that in peer assessment students judge the work of their peers.

## English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English as a Second Language (ESL/L2) and English as an Additional Language (EAL)

Even though the term second language learning is often used to cover both second and foreign language learning, I have chosen to make the distinction in this thesis. It is in most cases a language learned in the country where the language is spoken, and a foreign language is acquired through teaching, sometimes without any contact with native speakers outside the classroom. Second language learning means being surrounded by the language that one is learning. It is in this case the majority language or the *lingua franca* without which one cannot function and participate fully in society. It means being confronted by the language at every level, from the text on a road sign to the legal jargon in a court of law. It means that others with which one communicates have it as their mother tongue with the range and nuances that this entails. “The language has communicative functions inside the community where the learner lives” as compared to foreign language learning where the “language has no established functions inside the learner’s community but will be used mainly for communicating with outsiders” (Littlewood, 1984, p. 54). Presently the term additional language is also becoming common, referring to second language learning (Leung, 2001, p. 33).

## Language Mistakes and Errors

An error is defined by Corder (1967) as systematic, incorrect usage reflecting a lack of linguistic competence whereas a mistake is seen as a random error in performance. Corder redefined mistakes as something language learners make in order to learn correct language usage. The learner has an idea of L2 and tests and modifies it, consciously or unconsciously, until the learner understands the correct use of the rules. If a student’s own inner monitor is too strong, it will make the learner afraid of making mistakes something that is believed to obstruct language learning. While learning, the students are using an interim language (Selinker, 1972) and need to be allowed to do so to develop further.

There are a variety of language errors and mistakes that can be analyzed as well as several analytic approaches to these (e.g. Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Performance Analysis, Transfer Analysis, Discourse Analysis). None of these approaches have been used, as it is rather the degree to which the learner is aware of incorrect language use or mistakes caused by other factors that is of interest to the thesis. The difference between errors (i.e. incorrect language caused by not knowing better) and mistakes (caused by e.g. stress, carelessness) is not possible to distinguish and therefore the terms are used

interchangeably. Neither is the focus on the gravity of errors made, with the exception of those that make communication impossible. For example, in the research on error gravity conducted by Johansson (1978) and Olsson (1972) verb errors was found to hinder communication more than word order and congruence.

### Self-regulated Learning, Independent Learning and Learner Autonomy

Self-regulated students are according to Zimmerman (2001) “metacognitively, motivationally and behaviourally active” (p. 5) in the personal learning process, they can monitor the effectiveness of their learning strategies and change behaviour accordingly. It is a somewhat broader term with further theoretical perspectives than independent learning, or learner autonomy. In comparison learner autonomy is defined by Huttunen (1986) as the “learner’s ability and willingness to take charge of his own learning” (op. cit., p. 28). The terms are used interchangeably in the thesis.



Appendix 2:

Information

2.1 Project Information to Students and  
Guardians



Mölnådal 2002-08-20

*Till medverkande elever och berörda vårdnadshavare*

### **Information om deltagande i forskningsprojektet *Självbedömning av inlärnin*: Exemplet språk**

Under 2002 deltar [REDACTED] i ett forskningsprojekt tillsammans med Göteborgs universitet under ledning av professor Mats Oscarson. Projektet finansieras av Vetenskapsrådet. Det har som syfte att öka kunskapen om hur elever kan bedöma sina egna inlärningsresultat, och om det är så att ett aktivt deltagande i den egna bedömningen kan hjälpa elever att nå sina egna och de redan uppställda kursmålen på ett bättre sätt.

**Bakgrund.** För att lära ut och lära in på ett bra sätt måste både lärare och elever veta vad den som skall lära sig redan kan, annars kanske man börjar med för svåra saker eller lägger tid på sådant som faktiskt redan är inlärt. Vi tror att man genom gemensam elev- och lärarreflektion kan fokusera tydligare på vad som är viktigt att betona i undervisningen. Detta är även en viktig del i att utveckla ett demokratiskt tänkande. I läroplanen och kursplanen framhålls att eleven skall ta ett eget ansvar för sina studier. Eleven skall också "kunna utvärdera sitt arbete som ett led i att förändra och förbättra sitt lärande", men det har hittills inte forskats mycket om hur elever kan bedöma och utvärdera det de lär sig. Eftersom detta kan sägas vara en förutsättning för den självständighet och det ansvarstagande som alla behöver för att fortsätta lära i ett föränderligt och modernt samhälle, finns det ett behov av mer kunskap på det här området.

**Projektet.** *Självbedömning av inlärnin*: Exemplet språk går ut på att undersöka förmågan till egen bedömning av inlärnin

ggen. Höstterminen 2002 följs fyra gymnasiegrupper i årskurs 1 och 2 under del av terminen och eleverna ges övning på att reflektera kring sina studier och resultat. De intervjuas/enkätundersöks också om sina uppfattningar om vad de kan i engelska i förhållande till kursmålen mm. Sedan jämförs elevernas uppfattningar med resultat från bl. a. nationella prov. Den tidigare forskning som finns visar att sådana jämförelser inte alltid stämmer överens. Det kan bero på olika saker. Ibland kanske eleven inte har möjlighet att visa upp alla sina färdigheter under

lektionerna. Ibland kan elever ha en orealistisk uppfattning om vad de kan. Det är bl. a. därför som övning behövs. Omständigheter som kön och studievana sägs ofta påverka och undersökningen kan eventuellt visa om det finns grund för sådana antaganden.

Rent praktiskt innebär den här pedagogiska undersökningen att vi i samråd med skolledningen och lärare ber grupperna använda visst självbedömningsmaterial som vi tar fram. Detta ansluter på det hela taget till målet för den planerade, vanliga undervisningen. En person deltar som "observatör" i en del av undervisningen efter överenskommelse med läraren. Vi gör också en del intervjuer med elever för att få en så bra bild som möjligt av hur självbedömningarna fungerar och om hur eleverna själva ser på sina möjligheter att bedöma egna färdigheter och studieresultat.

**Sekretess.** Projektet följer noggrant de forskningsetiska regler som gäller pedagogiska undersökningar i skolan och garanterar bl. a. anonymitet och skydd av personuppgifter för alla deltagande.

**Resultat.** Resultaten av projektet kommer förutom sedvanlig projektrapport att spridas genom facktidskrifter, fortbildningsdagar, seminarier, konferenser och finnas tillgänglig på Internet (på hemsidan för Enheten för språk och litteratur, Göteborgs universitet).

**Frågor.** Frågor om projektet kan ställas till forskarstuderande Anne Dragemark. 031 - 773 23 83 ([Anne.Dragemark@ped.gu.se](mailto:Anne.Dragemark@ped.gu.se)) .

*Anne Dragemark*



## Appendix 3:

### Classroom Writing Assignments

#### 3.1 Course A: Letter

**Introduction:** First of all, think about the question we brainstormed and created a mind map on: “If you had to compare yourself and your life to a person living in for example India, what things would you consider?”

After that, think about the things that came to mind and which you wrote down when you answered this question.

Then, think about what kind of things you could compare when you ponder the country that you are working on at the moment. List these things.

Have all these things in mind when you look for a story about a person from the country of your choice. The idea behind this is to write a letter to that person and compare your different life styles (= cultures). You should try to find both similarities and differences.

**Aim:** Write a letter (at least 1 A4/computer written) to an English speaking person in a short story that you have just read.

In this assignment you will show your ability to:

- kunna läsa och förstå lättillgänglig skönlitteratur och genom litteraturen förvärva kunskaper om kulturtraditioner i engelskspråkiga länder
- kunna formulera sig i skrift för att informera, argumentera och uttrycka känslor och värderingar samt ha förmåga att bearbeta och förbättra den egna skriftliga produktionen
- ha kunskap om samhällsförhållanden, kulturtraditioner och levnadssätt i engelskspråkiga områden och kunna använda dessa kunskaper för att jämföra kulturer

(ur Kursplanen för Engelska A 2000)

**Audience:** After you have completed this assignment your classmates will take part of and discuss what you have written.

**Method:** In order to pass this assignment (Godkänd) you need to do the following:

Read a short story or an extract from a novel from a country that you are working on in the project "People and Culture". You can find some interesting stories in the books called *Writing from Australia, Canada* etc and in *New Zealand Short Stories*. Choose a story with a character that you feel that you could say something to when it comes to comparing cultures, yours and his/hers.

Write a letter to the person or to the author. Compare differences and similarities between you and the character in the story. Follow the required format of a letter (see page 4).

## **Betygskriterier**

### ***Kriterier för betyget Godkänd***

- Eleven tillägnar sig huvudinnehållet i tydliga texter på sakprosa, facktexter och skönlitteratur samt tillgodogör sig detaljer vid en noggrannare läsning.

In other words, you should show that you have read a story and thought about the contents of it by referring to what happens in the story when you compose your letter. You should also have read a text about the culture of the country to become more informed about the country and its people.

- Eleven skriver med klart och tydligt språk, personligt hållna meddelanden, berättelser och reflexioner som har att göra med egna intressen och egen studieinriktning.

In other words, focus on the similarities and differences that you find important. Write your letter in simple and clear language. You need to show that you have the motivation and an ability to use your English in order to express your opinions.

- Eleven gör, på grundval av kunskaper om samhällsförhållanden, seder och bruk i områden där engelska talas, jämförelser med egna kulturella erfarenheter.

In other words, make comparisons with your own culture (whether it is Swedish, Chinese or Indian does not matter). Point out similarities and differences between you and the character in the story. Make at least two comparisons. All of the things that you compare do not have to be in the short story. You could also compare things that you have discovered along the way as you have worked with the country of your choice.

- Eleven tar ansvar för att planera, genomföra och utvärdera sitt arbete samt använder lämpliga hjälpmedel.

In other words, you need to choose a short story, hand in what you have written in time, assess the result of your own work (the letter) and be able to comment on the process (the planning). You may use a dictionary, grammar book or whatever else you need to complete the assignment to the best of your ability. Once you get your work back, with comments, you will be asked to re-write your letter and assess it once again. (See separate *Assessment Guidelines*)

### ***Kriterier för betyget Väl godkänd***

Som för Godkänd samt att:

- Eleven skriver brev, kommentarer och sammanfattningar till inhämtat stoff på ett tydligt och informativt sätt och med anpassning till några olika syften och mottagare.

In other words, the criteria for a pass but also with a focus on the similarities and differences that you find important. Make sure your letter is informative. Keep in mind the reader of your letter and adapt your language to him/her. Is the character a younger or older person? Is it someone who could be your friend or is it a person with some official status, like a teacher or doctor for example, that you have to consider.

### ***Kriterier för betyget Mycket väl godkänd***

Som för Väl Godkänd samt att:

- Eleven skriver med sammanhang och variation, använder språkets ord och strukturer med säkerhet samt kommunicerar skriftligt med anpassning till olika mottagare.

In other words, the criteria for a pass with distinction but also with a focus on the language. Make sure that your letter is structured and that you use paragraphs etc. properly. Your language must be appropriate, cohesive and varied. Your use of the English language should demonstrate that you are a confident user. Keep in mind the reader of your letter and adapt your language to him/her. What style do you need to use? Is it a formal letter or a more personal one?

Finally include which story you have chosen, the author's name and in which book you found it. This passage should not be a part of the actual letter.

An example of a proper English letter

**(Heading – the writer’s address and date)**

Street address

City

September 18<sup>th</sup> , 2002

Ms. Jane Eyre

Lowood School, Rochdale

Yorkshire **(Inside address, only used in more formal letters)**

Dear Jane, **(Salutation)**

An introductory passage, for example asking how the person is feeling etc. Remember to introduce yourself. You decide yourself how much you need to reveal about yourself.

Tell the person why you are writing to him/her.

Make comparisons between your cultures: similarities and differences (you decide what to deal with first).

Tell the person what you would like him/her to do with your letter.

A concluding passage.

Love, **(Complimentary closing – type depends on level of formality)**

*Helen (Burns)* **(Signature – use surname only in more formal letters)**

P.S. If you want you can add a post scrip

### 3.1.1 Assessment Guidelines

#### Riktlinjer för bedömningsarbete

*Assignment: Letter* är inte ”rättad” i vanlig bemärkelse, utan Du får snarare en respons på ditt arbete genom markeringar på olika vis. Meningen med detta är att Du skall få hjälp att *själv värdera* (och åtgärda) det Du skrivit. Det är din egen bedömningsförmåga som vi framför allt vill studera i projektet.

Dessa markeringar kommer bedömaren att använda (där det passar):

En dubbel understrykning är för sådant som är särskilt viktigt att ta ställning till men enkel för en vanlig fokusering. Vidare innebär en prickig linje att bedömaren bara undrar lite över hur Du har tänkt eller hur lämpligt något är i ett visst sammanhang.

#### *Innehåll*

Innehållet kommer om möjligt att kommenteras i frågeform snarare än som påståenden. Kommentarer är inte värderande, varken positivt eller negativt. Detta är för att få dig att själv fundera över det Du presterat och inte göra dig beroende av någon annan.

#### *Språk*

Alla språkliga fel kanske inte markeras. Det beror på om bedömaren anser att Du bör fokusera speciellt på några enstaka områden eller om Du kan ta itu med flera.

#### *Struktur*

Brevets uppställning kommenteras, även här i frågeform där det är möjligt.

#### *Sammanfattning*

Du skall så mycket som möjligt själv fundera över det Du producerat. Du skall bearbeta ditt brev på grundval av egen eftertanke och bedömning, men Du får hjälp av bedömarens markeringar. Sedan skall Du svara på våra frågor i *Självbedömningsformulär II*. Där får Du ange vad Du tycker om det här tillvägagångssättet som alltså mycket bygger på reflektion kring och bedömning av ditt eget uppvisade arbete.

### 3.1.2 Self-Assessment Form 1

Mål och bedömningskriterier enligt kursplanen 2000 samt bedömningsfaktorer för *Writing Engelska A* bifogas

#### Självbedömningsformulär I

För att hjälpa Dig nå läroplanens och kurplanens mål dvs. att ta ansvar för att utvärdera det egna arbetet, och som ett led i självbedömningsprojektet ber vi dig att fylla i detta formulär när du lämnar in uppgiften *Letter* första gången.

#### 1. Innehåll

Det jag tycker jag uttryckt väl när jag skrev om skillnader i kultur och levnadssätt mellan min egen kultur och den persons kultur som jag skrev till var

.....  
.....  
.....

Likheter mellan min egen kultur och den persons kultur som jag skrev till var

.....  
.....  
.....

men jag tror att jag kan förbättra följande

.....  
.....  
.....

#### 2. Språk

I uppgiften är jag nöjd med min

grammatik

stavning

ordkunskap

meningsbyggnad

styckeindelning

kommatering

annat:

.....

Men, jag tror att jag kanske behöver förbättra eller kan ha gjort fel i fråga om

grammatiken

stavningen

ordvalet

meningsbyggnaden

styckeindelningen

kommatering

annat:

.....

### 3. Brevform

Jag har använt korrekt brevform: Ja                  Nej

Ev synpunkter

.....

4. Jag bedömer min prestation på den här uppgiften, som den ser ut NU (även om den inte är färdig) till betyget \_\_\_\_\_

Av följande anledning

.....

.....

5. Synpunkter på min egen planering och mitt ansvarstagande i den här uppgiften.

.....

### 3.1.3 Self-Assessment Form 2

Mål och bedömningskriterier enligt kursplanen 2000 samt bedömningsfaktorer för *Writing Engelska A* bifogas

#### Självbedömningsformulär II

För att hjälpa Dig nå läroplanens och kurplanens mål dvs. att ta ansvar för att utvärdera det egna arbetet, och som ett led i självbedömningsprojektet ber vi dig att fylla i detta formulär när du lämnar in uppgiften *Letter* andra gången.

1. Du har nu bearbetat din skrivuppgift. Vad tycker Du att Du har lärt av det?

I fråga om innehåll:

.....  
.....  
.....

I fråga om språk:

.....  
.....  
.....

I fråga om brevform:

.....  
.....  
.....

2. Om jag jämför med vad som står om målen för *Writing* i kursplanen tycker jag att jag NU kan

.....  
.....  
.....

men tycker jag att jag behöver förbättra

.....  
.....

3. Efter att ha bearbetat brevet, ger jag mig NU betyget \_\_\_\_\_ på denna uppgift.

Motivering:

.....  
.....

## 3.2 Course B: Media

*Marshall McLuhan once wrote: The medium is the message, therefore the audience is the content. What do you think he meant by that?*

Start writing this assignment from ideas you had after our discussion about media and the mind map we drew on the white board. Try to use all your former knowledge about this subject, linking it with the things we have talked about. Furthermore, it is important that you use your understanding of how to write an article. (See *How to Write an Article*)

Write an article, where you discuss the significance of media and one medium in particular on everyday life. Illustrate your thoughts by giving numerous examples from the society we live in and from your own experience. Your article should be at least 1 A4 page (computer written). Remember to concentrate on one medium even if you compare it with others. The compulsory questions below have to be included in your article in order to pass. The other questions are there to help you but remember they should be answered with your chosen medium in mind.

### **Compulsory questions**

- What is media (the general term) to you? Your own definition!
- Is the medium good or bad? Discuss the pros and cons of the medium you have chosen to write about.
- What influence does your chosen media have on you in your daily life?
- Is your chosen medium = power? Explain!
- What is the target group that your chosen medium is directed at?

### **Other Questions**

- What basic human need does your chosen medium fulfil?
- Can the chosen medium use us in any way? How can we use it to our own advantage?
- What would our present society be like without the medium?

In this assignment you will show your ability to

- kunna läsa och tillgodogöra sig texter med varierat sakinnehåll, särskilt sådana texter som anknyter till studieinriktningen eller egna intresseområden

- kunna formulera sig i skrift för att informera, instruera, argumentera och uttrycka känslor och värderingar samt ha förmåga att bearbeta och förbättra den egna skriftliga produktionen
- kunna självständigt hämta information från olika källor samt bearbeta och strukturera den information som tagits fram

## **How to write an article**

Always remember to explain the purpose of your article to yourself before you start writing; why and what are you writing?

*Article* - a piece of writing in a newspaper or magazine on a particular subject

*Headline* - what is the article about? The key message i.e. the news, printed in big letters at the top of a newspaper article telling you what the story is about.

*Introduction* (ingress) - the most important thing in your article, where you present your topic, in the form of a short summary. Here is also where you present the medium of choice. Write it in bold (fetstil).

*Article text* (brödtext) - your article. Place most important facts and opinions first.

*Paragraphing* - you need a few indentations (usually five spaces) before the actual text in each paragraph.

*Small Headings* (mellanrubriker) - makes the article easier to read.

*Language* - Use an appropriate language level - usually more formal than you normally do, but not too stilted

*Contents* - start with the most attention-grabbing bits in order to create interest and follow up with more general and detailed information.

## **Betygskriterier**

### ***Kriterier för betyget Godkänd***

- Eleven presenterar och kommenterar ett innehåll hämtat från olika intresse- och kompetensområden.

In other words, you must show that you can present and comment on the topic by handing in an article on a specific form of media. You must also show that you have understood its purpose.

- Eleven uttrycker sig och interagerar skriftligt med sammanhang, struktur och allt större variation kring innehåll hämtat från ett flertal områden.

In other words, you have to be able to express yourself more or less fluently in English about the subject.

- Eleven planerar, genomför och utvärderar sitt arbete på ett effektivt sätt.

In other words, you are required to hand in an article on the media. It should be at least 1 A-4 page (computer written) on time (Thursday, October 11<sup>th</sup>, week 41). You must show that you master the art of writing articles, as explained above. Furthermore you will be asked to evaluate it twice yourself before getting the final grade from your teacher. You are asked to do this because this is one way to find out to what extent your assessment of your level of ability differs from your teacher's.

### ***Kriterier för betyget Väl Godkänd***

- Eleven skriver nyanserat och variationsrikt.

In other words, even higher demands are put on your writing.

### ***Kriterier för betyget Mycket Väl Godkänd***

- Eleven analyserar hur texter på olika sätt anpassas till syfte och mottagare.

In other words, you are well aware of who your audience is and why you write this article. You use appropriate language and style.

- Elevens skriftliga framställning kännetecknas av klarhet, precision och variation.

In other words, your written English is as good as perfect.

## 3.2.1 Assessment Guidelines

### Riktlinjer för bedömningsarbete

Bedömningsarbetet innebär inte ”rättning” i vanlig bemärkelse, snarare respons genom markeringar på olika vis, t ex med hjälp av understrykningar, inringning eller överstrykningspenna. Meningen med detta är att eleverna ska motiveras att *själva värdera* (och åtgärda) det de skrivit. Det är elevernas egen bedömningsförmåga som vi framför allt vill studera i projektet.

Man kan variera markeringarna på så vis att man har en dubbel understrykning för sådant som är särskilt viktigt att ta ställning till men enkel för en mer allmän fokusering. Vidare kan en prickig linje innebära att man bara undrar lite över hur det är tänkt eller hur lämpligt något är i ett visst sammanhang. Du måste förstås tala om för eleverna vad du menar med dina olika markeringar.

### *Innehåll*

Kommentera innehållet, om möjligt i frågeform snarare än som påstående. Kommentarer bör inte vara värderande, varken positivt eller negativt. Genom att kommentaren formuleras som en fråga där det går, blir det mer nödvändigt för eleverna att begrunda det de presterat.

### *Exempel:*

Är du nöjd med det allmänna innehållet i artikeln?

Hur anknyter det här (*understruket*) till resten?

### *Språk*

Om eleven är duktig i språket kan så mycket som möjligt lyftas fram. För de elever som är lite svagare bör man fokusera på färre saker för dem att titta på. Det är dock viktigt att de förstår att alla språkliga fel inte markerats av dig.

### *Exempel:*

...the best of luck in the path of finding what you are looking for.

The reason I'm writing this article is that my teacher made me.

I like horseback ridings a lot.

What do you mean i did it?

Langwitch who she speaking calld they Imharic.

What kind of music does you listning to?

### *Struktur*

Kommentera artikelns struktur. Även här är frågeformen att föredra.

### *Exempel:*

Är du nöjd med artikelns utseende? Har du använt en passande ingress?

Har du haft en tanke med att bara ta upp negativa aspekter med TV tittande?

### *Sammanfattning*

Eleverna skall så mycket som möjligt styras in på att själva fundera över det de producerat, ur kvalitetssynpunkt och i relation till kursmålen och kurskriterierna. De skall bearbeta sina alster på grundval av egen eftertanke och bedömning, som de fått lite hjälp på traven med av dig som lärare. Sedan ska de bl.a. svara på våra frågor om vad de anser om ett sådant tillvägagångssätt, som alltså mycket bygger på reflektion kring och bedömning av egna uppvisade arbeten.

### 3.2.2 Self-Assessment Form 1

Mål och bedömningskriterier enligt kursplanen 2000 samt bedömningsfaktorer för *Writing Engelska B* bifogas

#### Självbedömningsformulär I

För att hjälpa Dig nå läroplanens och kurplanens mål dvs. att kunna utvärdera ditt arbete som ett led i att förändra och förbättra lärandet och som ett led i självbedömningsprojektet ber vi dig att fylla i detta formulär när du lämnar in uppgiften *Assignment: Media* första gången.

#### 1. Innehåll

Det jag tycker jag uttryckt väl när jag skrev om media i allmänhet var

.....  
.....  
.....

Det specifika medium jag fokuserade på var

.....  
.....  
.....

men jag tror att jag kan förbättra följande

.....  
.....  
.....

#### 2. Språk

I uppgiften är jag nöjd med min

grammatik

stavning

ordkunskap

meningsbyggnad

styckeindelning

kommatering

annat:

.....

Men, jag tror att jag kanske behöver förbättra eller kan ha gjort fel i fråga om

grammatiken

stavningen

ordvalet

meningsbyggnaden

styckeindelningen

kommateringen

annat:

.....

### 3. Artikel form

Jag har använt korrekt form:      Ja              Nej

Ev synpunkter

.....

4. Jag bedömer min prestation på den här uppgiften, som den ser ut NU (även om den inte är färdig) till betyget \_\_\_\_\_

Av följande anledning

.....

.....

5. Synpunkter på min egen planering och mitt ansvarstagande i den här uppgiften.

.....

.....

### 3.2.3 Self-assessment Form 2

Mål och bedömningskriterier enligt kursplanen 2000 samt bedömningsfaktorer för *Writing Engelska B* bifogas

#### Självbedömningsformulär II

För att hjälpa Dig nå läroplanens och kurplanens mål dvs. att kunna utvärdera ditt arbete som ett led i att förändra och förbättra lärandet och som ett led i självbedömningsprojektet ber vi dig att fylla i detta formulär när du lämnar in uppgiften *Assignment: Media* andra gången.

1. Du har nu bearbetat din skrivuppgift. Vad tycker Du att Du har lärt av det?

I fråga om innehåll:

.....  
.....  
.....

I fråga om språk:

.....  
.....  
.....

I fråga om artikel form:

.....  
.....  
.....

2. Om jag jämför med vad som står om målen för *Writing* i kursplanen tycker jag att jag NU kan

.....  
.....  
.....

men tycker jag att jag behöver förbättra

.....  
.....

3. Efter att ha bearbetat brevet, ger jag mig NU betyget \_\_\_\_\_ på denna uppgift.

Motivering:

.....  
.....

## Appendix 4:

### Self-assessment after Writing Test A / B (SAWT)

Namn (alt kodnummer).....

1. Vilket betyg tror du att du kommer att få på *Focus: Reading*?

- IG  
 G  
 VG  
 MVG

Hur säker är du på att din bedömning är rätt?

- Mycket säker  
 Säker  
 Osäker  
 Mycket osäker

Varför tror du att du får just det betyget?

2. Vilket betyg tror du att du kommer att få på *Focus: Listening*?

- IG  
 G  
 VG  
 MVG

Hur säker är du på att din bedömning är rätt?

- Mycket säker  
 Säker  
 Osäker  
 Mycket osäker

Varför tror du att du får just det betyget?

3. Vilket betyg tror du att du kommer att få på *Writing*?

- IG  
 G  
 VG  
 MVG

Hur säker är du på att din bedömning är rätt?

- Mycket säker  
 Säker  
 Osäker  
 Mycket osäker

Varför tror du att du får just det betyget?



## Appendix 5:

### Interview Questions

#### 5.1 Students

##### Gruppintervjuer med elever

(Intervjufrågor efter försöksomgång oktober 2002)

- Repetera syftet med projektet.
- Be eleverna säga sina namn för röstidentifikation.
- Förklara fast frågeschema.

*Inledning fråga 1:* Ni har nu genomfört en uppgift där ni bl.a. fått bearbeta det ni först skrev. Ni lämnade in uppgiften och fick tillbaka den för bearbetning. Men kommentarerna var i form av markeringar av sånt som kunde förbättras – inte *rättelser* av läraren. Det var bara understrykningar i det ni skrivit och andra kommentarer var i form av frågor. Avsikten med det var att ni själva skulle få fundera över vad som skulle ändras, och hur. Den här gången fick ni alltså *själva* göra bedömningar av er engelska.

**Fråga 1: Hur tyckte ni den här metoden fungerade för er? Varför? Varför inte?**

*Inledning fråga 2:* Ni fick också information om vad kursplanen säger att ni ska kunna i fråga om *Writing*. Ni fick också se på uppsatser på olika betygsnivåer. Sedan fick ni ge er själva betyg på er egen skrivuppgift. Anledningen var att vi ville se hur bra ni själva kan bedöma vilken betygsnivå ni ligger på.

**Fråga 2: Anser ni att det är möjligt för er att sätta betyg på er själva (i engelska)?**

*Inledning fråga 3:* En del anser att man *lär sig* bättre om man ”tvingas” att själv granska och värdera det man presterar. Det skulle alltså vara nyttigt att få övning i att bedöma det man själv gör. Andra anser att man naturligtvis inte

kan ha någon uppfattning om kvaliteten i sånt som man håller på att lära sig. Tänk på det ni nu gjort i den här skrivuppgiften och svara sedan på frågan:

**Fråga 3: Kan betoningen av egen självbedömning göra att man också lä sig engelska bättre, eller tror ni att självbedömningen inte spelar någon roll?**

*Inledning fråga 4:* Det här är ett pilotförsök och vi ska försöka förbättra de metoder vi prövar i projektet. Andra grupper medverkar också och så småningom ska vi skriva en rapport över resultaten. Därför undrar vi:

**Fråga 4: Har *ni* några förslag om hur man skulle kunna ändra arbetssättet på engelsklektionerna så att eleverna får en mer aktiv roll i bedömningen av inlärningsresultaten (av egna färdigheter)?**

## 5.2 Teachers

### INTERVJUFRÅGOR - DELTAGANDE SPRÅKLÄRARE

(Frågor anpassade från US 98)

#### **BAKGRUNDSFRÅGOR** (anges av intervjuaren på bandet)

- a) Kön, skolans namn och datum
- b) Undervisningsämnen
- c) Andra pedagogiska erfarenheter
- d) År/terminer tjänstgjort som lärare

#### **FRÅGA OM SPRÅKEN UTANFÖR SKOLAN**

*Syfte fråga 1:* Att ta reda på hur lärarna uppfattar betydelsen av att eleverna möter språket utanför skolan och *vad detta innebär för lärarens undervisning och elevernas inläring*. Det sista ("vad detta innebär för lärarens undervisning och elevernas inläring") viktigast.

*Inledning fråga 1:* Under de senaste årtiondena har kontakter med andra länder ökat och de främmande språkens roll förändrats. Idag kan eleverna möta det engelska språket dagligen i olika former, mestadels genom media. Andra språk har eleverna möjlighet att komma i kontakt med, men inte i samma omfattning.

**Fråga 1: Vad innebär det för dig som språklärare att eleverna alltmer kommer i kontakt med engelska utanför skolan?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

- a) Inverkar detta på något sätt på din undervisning?
- b) Får du frågor om engelska från eleverna om sånt de stött på utanför skolan?
- c) Vad tycker du eleverna lär sig av språket utanför skolan?
- d) Tycker du att du för din egen del har möjlighet att "hänga med" i språkens utveckling?

#### **FRÅGOR OM SPRÅKEN I SKOLAN**

*Syfte fråga 2:* Att ta reda på vad språklärare lägger störst vikt vid i sin undervisning.

*Inledning fråga 2:* Som du vet har språkundervisningens inriktning skiftat kraftigt över åren. Språkundervisningen förändras ständigt och dessutom förändrar väl många gånger den enskilde läraren sin undervisning allteftersom. Det kommer ju nya läroplaner och man för diskussioner med kolleger osv. Det finns också många lärare som jobbar utifrån sin mångåriga erfarenhet och på ett sätt som de tycker fungerar bra. Så jag skulle vilja fråga dig ..

**Fråga 2: Vad lägger *du* störst vikt vid i din undervisning?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

- a) Varför betonar du just detta?
- b) Tycker du att du har möjlighet att jobba med detta så som du vill?
- c) Finns det moment som du skulle vilja ha med i undervisningen men som du inte har möjlighet till?
- d) Varför skulle du vilja ha med det?
- e) Varför kan du inte ha med det?

*Syfte fråga 3:* Att ta reda på hur lärarna uppfattar begreppet ansvar och hur de bedömer möjligheterna för eleverna att ta ett personligt ansvar för sina språkstudier.

*Inledning fråga 3:* Som vuxen är det väl självklart att man tar ansvar för sig själv och sitt eget arbete. Men vad menas egentligen med ansvar? Och hur är det med eleverna? Lär de sig att ta ansvar på det sätt som läroplanen tydligt anger? "Skolan skall sträva efter att varje elev tar ett personligt ansvar för sina studier och sin arbetsmiljö"?

**Fråga 3: Vad är för *dig* innebörden av målsättningen "att varje elev tar ett personligt ansvar" för sina språkstudier?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

- a) Vad anser *du* om målsättningen att eleverna skall ta ansvar för sina studier?
- b) Vilka möjligheter ser du att ge eleverna ett personligt ansvar för sina språkstudier?
- c) Vilken innebörd tror du *eleverna* lägger i formuleringen "ta ansvar för sina studier"?
- d) Kan du ge exempel på sådant som du anser att eleven *kan* respektive *inte kan* ta ansvar för själv?

*Syfte fråga 4:* Att ta reda på hur lärarna tolkar läroplanens mål att eleverna skall ha inflytande över språkundervisningen och dess innehåll.

*Inledning fråga 4:* Enligt läroplanen skall eleverna ha ett verkligt inflytande på undervisningen i alla ämnen. Och de ska efterhand ha ett allt större inflytande över sin utbildning. Frågan är vad detta innebär och hur man åstadkommer inflytandet? Tidigare har ju denna målsättning inte framhållits lika tydligt som nu.

**Fråga 4: Vad lägger du in i formuleringen att eleverna ska ha inflytande över sin utbildning i engelska?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

- a) Vad anser du om målsättningen att eleverna ska ha inflytande över sin utbildning och arbetet i skolan?
- b) Vilka möjligheter ser du att ge eleverna större inflytande över sin utbildning?
- c) Kan du ge exempel på sådant som eleverna kan ha ett inflytande över och sådant som inte lämpar sig alls?

**FRÅGOR OM PROJEKTET OCH STUDIEN**

*Syfte fråga 5:* Att ta reda på lärarens förståelse av begreppet självbedömning.

*Inledning fråga 5:* Du har deltagit i projektet Självbedömning av inläring – Exemplet språk under 2 alternativt 4 terminer i egenskap av lärare i engelska. Med den erfarenheten undrar jag:

**Fråga 5: Vad lägger du in i begreppet självbedömning i språkundervisning?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

- a) Är det t ex vad man kan, eller är det att eleven skapar egna kriterier, kontrollerar sina prestationer mot kriterierna och ta egna beslut enligt de resultaten.
- b) Anser du att dina elever kan bedöma sina egna färdigheter i engelska?
- c) Vad anser du är positiva och/eller negativa aspekterna av självbedömning?

*Syfte fråga 6:* Att ta reda på hur lärarna tolkar läroplanens metakognitiva mål i praktiken.

*Inledning fråga 6:* I kursplanen 2000 uttrycks tydligt att de studerande skall kunna ta ansvar för sin egen inläring. Det står bl.a. att skolan skall sträva

mot att de studerande ”utvecklar en insikt om sitt eget sätt att lära och en förmåga att utvärdera sitt eget lärande” (Lpf 94, s 29) samt ”kan bedöma sina studieresultat och utvecklingsbehov i förhållande till kraven i kursplanerna” (Lpf 94, s 35). I kursplan 2000 för Engelska A är kravet för betyget Godkänd att den studerande ”tar ansvar för att planera, genomföra och utvärdera sitt arbete”. För Engelska B är ett av målen att den studerande skall ”kunna utvärdera sitt arbete som ett led i att förändra och förbättra sitt lärande”.

### **Fråga 6: Hur ser du på de praktiska möjligheterna för eleverna i gymnasieskolan att utvärdera sina färdigheter i engelska?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

- a) Hur motiverade är dina elever för språkundervisning i engelska?
- b) Hur stor tilltro till egna förmågan att lära sig engelska anser du att dina elever har?
- c) Finns det några språkliga färdigheter som eleverna lärt sig utanför klassrummet som du anser att du inte har en chans att ta hänsyn till och ta med i din bedömning?

*Syfte fråga 7:* Att ta reda på hur lärarna uppfattade och påverkades av projektets innehåll.

*Inledning fråga 7:* Formella färdigheter i språk är relativt lätta att mäta ”externt” och riskerar därför att bli överrepresenterad som bedömningsmetod.

### **Fråga 7: Anser du att projektets innehåll, i stort, haft några effekter på ditt sätt att undervisa och bedöma elevers färdigheter i språk? Under terminen och/eller efter projektets slut?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

- a) Om ja, kan du säga på vilket sätt?
- b) Är det något speciellt område/någon speciell uppgift/instrument som påverkat dig mer än de andra? Om ja, kan du säga på vilket sätt?

*Syfte fråga 8:* Att ta reda på hur lärarna uppfattade att eleverna uppfattade projektets innehåll.

*Inledning fråga 8:* Projektet syftar allmänt till att öka kunskapen om hur och med vilka resultat studerande kan göra självständiga bedömningar av den egna inläringen och dess resultat. Särskilt eftersträvar vi bättre kännedom om självbedömningars validitet och deras betydelse när det gäller frågan om möjligheter att uppnå individuellt uppsatta mål.

**Fråga 8: Hur tycker du att eleverna har reagerat på självbedömningsuppgifterna/instrumenten (under terminen och/eller efter projektets slut)?**

*Eventuella följdfrågor:*

a) Är det något speciellt område/någon speciell uppgift/instrument som påverkat eleverna mer än de andra? Om ja, kan du säga på vilket sätt?

*Syfte fråga 9:* Att ta reda på om lärarna funderat över ytterligare sätt att nå målen med projektet.

*Inledning fråga 9:* Vi har bara prövat några exempel på hur man kan arbeta på detta sätt i projektet.

**Fråga 9: Har du ytterligare förslag till andra sätt att främja elevers egna reflektioner kring sitt eget lärande, dvs. hur man får eleverna att tänka omkring de här frågorna?**



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