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The assessment process in two different year-five classrooms in Sweden

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore, describe and analyse the assessment process in two different Swedish year-five classrooms. The study is mainly based on observations and interviews with pupils and teachers. The data were analysed in relation to Bernstein's (1977, 2000) theoretical concepts of classification, framing, codes, and pedagogic device. The analysis indicated differences in the assessment process between the two classrooms: first, in the systematicity and transparency of the learning goals; second, in the approach to teaching; and third, in the focus of the assessment in the classroom. This study argues that the assessment process in the classrooms was affected by external influences. Direct impacts on it include the official national guidelines, the tools provided for pupil documentation and the teachers' in-service training.

Keywords: assessment process, classroom, recontextualisation, classification, framing

Introduction

“Assessment in school is meant to show what you have learned. The teachers usually ask questions, and then you answer them” (12-year-old girl).

Assessment in everyday classroom practice has several purposes. It can aim to map or support pupils' learning or shape further teaching. In practice, these purposes are often intertwined. The opening quotation itself can be understood in more than one way. The answer a pupil gives to a teacher can be used for different purposes, even though the information has been generated by the same act. When the pupil shows through performance what has been learned, the teacher will be able to use the information for any of these assessment purposes.

In this study, the Swedish compulsory school is the scene of the action. The Education Act (Skollagen 2010) as well as the national curriculum and syllabuses (Skolverket 2011a) require the school to promote learning. According to these documents, the assessment of pupil learning should be conscious and systematic. There are specific goals and knowledge requirements teaching should be directed towards, and pupil performance should be assessed in relation to these knowledge requirements.

In everyday classroom practice, pupil learning is reflected by a continual variety of activities. However, it is not always obvious from the official requirements what to

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assess and how to assess it. In classroom practice, the learning goals may be unclear, and teaching and assessment activities may not be synchronised. These activities are related and compose a 'whole', although this entity may have very different forms in different classroom contexts.

This study takes a closer look at the 'whole' of learning goals, teaching and assessment – a relationship called the "assessment process" (see Olovsson, 2014). Assessment in educational contexts does not occur in a vacuum any more than learning or teaching do; the components are, in one way or another, related to each other.

The concept of *assessment process* can be coupled with the well-known concepts in assessment research of *formative* and *summative* assessment. A common definition of the former is that it promotes learning and teaching, while the latter is usually described as the assessment of learning that has taken place. The approach in this paper, like in Brookhart (2007, 45), is to view formative and summative assessment not as being linked to disparate activities or contrasting with each other but, in classroom practice, as being often interwoven. One may also argue that there is currently a certain consensus in the research that formative and summative assessment are not different kinds of assessments, but serve separate purposes (e.g., Wiliam 2010, 24; Harlen 2012). But classroom practices can be characterised to different extents by formative or summative approaches. There may, therefore, be reasons to distinguish between assessment purposes (Skolverket 2011b). In this study, the assessment purposes can be more or less explicit, as articulated by the teachers – but the different expressions of the assessment events are then described by the concept of assessment process.

For some years, the Swedish education system has seen much interest in assessment issues. Assessment of pupils' learning evokes strong interest and commitment on multiple levels (Lundahl and Folke-Fichtelius 2010; Hult and Olofsson 2011). On the national level, the present (at the time for the data collection) government has inserted several assessment reforms intended to tighten control over pupils' performance. One of these reforms is the demand for written assessments in the compulsory-school ordinance (Grundskoleförordningen): "At the parent-teacher conference the teacher must in a written individual development plan: 1. provide assessments of the pupil's knowledge development in relation to the goals in each subject in which the pupil receives teaching" (2008: 525, in Swedish, author's translation). Another reform is end-of-term grading in year six, introduced in autumn 2012 for pupils aged 12–13 years (previously, grades were not assigned until year eight): "Grades must be awarded at the end of each term, from year 6 to the autumn term in year 9 in all subjects" (Skollagen 2010, 10: 16, in Swedish, author's translation).

Swedish compulsory schools have recently introduced new steering documents for classroom work. The new national curriculum and syllabuses (Skolverket 2011a) came into effect at the beginning of the autumn term in 2011. The syllabus for each school subject is composed of aim, core content, and knowledge requirements,

forming a basis for teachers' planning. Pupils' learning should be assessed in relation to the requirements in each subject. Skolverket (2011a) explains, "The knowledge requirements define acceptable knowledge and the different grades" (Introduction). The requirements are formulated for years three, six and nine. The choice of design of the structure and content in the new national curriculum is related to criticism of the previous national curriculum and syllabuses (Skolverket 2006, 2008). The criticism is formulated in a government report (SOU 2007: 28, 2007): "The curriculum and particularly the syllabuses have become too abstract, which have meant that teachers have had obvious difficulties in interpreting and applying the steering documents" (p. 16). This government report suggests areas of improvement in the new national curriculum: "The goal system for compulsory school must be straightforward", "The goals of the syllabus should much clearer than today cover subject knowledge. The goals must therefore specify the knowledge in the subject that teaching should be directed at" (p. 18, in Swedish, author's translation). In consequence, the new national curriculum (Skolverket 2011a), with its more explicit learning goals, is a significant step towards stronger governing by the state compared with the previous national curriculum.

The apparent tendency of the central state having an ever stronger grip on what transpires in pedagogic practice is also evident around the world: "The role and the work of schools and teachers have been increasingly prescribed by central government" (Ball et al., 2012, p. 9). Underlying this trend is a worldwide spread of discourse about accountability, assessment and evaluation (Ball 2003). "Most countries around the world have entered the 21st century with increased focus on and requirements for educational accountability, expressed through a variety of assessment regimes and policies" (Maxwell 2009, 263). Broadfoot and Black (2004) highlight the relation between educational assessment and state control: "in recent years the importance of assessment as a policy tool has grown enormously as governments have increasingly come to realize its powerful potential as a mechanism of state control" (p. 9). In addition, putting policies into practice has been studied extensively, most often discussed as a complex process (Braun et al. 2011; Ball et al. 2012).

Regarding the increase in national control, the development in classrooms all over Sweden seems to be moving toward more controlled planning, teaching and assessment. It is, however, most likely that this is still not occurring in all places, and it is reasonable to assume that general differences exist between classrooms throughout the country.

The aim of this study is to explore, describe and analyse the 'assessment process' in two different year-five classrooms in Swedish schools with pupils aged 11 to 12 years. The research questions are: How is the assessment process put into practice? Are there any differences between the classrooms? If there are differences, what could they be related to, and are there any consequences for the pupils in terms of socialisation of particular approaches to knowledge, learning and assessment? The study

was conducted in light of the introduction of the new reforms described earlier that can affect classroom practice. The reforms were decided at the national level, whereas municipalities and schools are responsible for implementing them. Therefore, it is interesting to investigate classrooms in schools from different localities and municipalities, with different prerequisites for implementing the new reforms.

Differences in classroom assessment

The concept of assessment process employed in this study has not been used or elaborated on to any great extent in previous research. It is, however, a concept connected to classroom assessment, which has been the subject of research for several years. Research on classroom assessment describes issues closely related to the assessment process in daily classroom practice. For example, McMillan (2010, 43–45) describes a continuum of characteristics of formative classroom assessment that implies three different versions: low-level, moderate-level, and high-level. At one end of the continuum is low-level formative assessment, which primarily includes teacher-determined working tasks, assessment after teaching units, and usually delayed general feedback. High-level formative assessment is at the other end of the continuum, implying that teacher and pupil commonly decide adequate working tasks and assessment, with feedback usually given during teaching. Yet the feedback is also individually adapted in time, depending on whether a pupil is a low- or a high-achiever.

Torrance and Pryor (1998, 153–155) use other terms to describe somewhat similar practical implications in classroom assessment. They identify two different approaches to classroom assessment: convergent formative assessment and divergent formative assessment. Convergent assessment is characterised as predominantly behaviouristically influenced, with strong teacher control and mainly closed questioning. Divergent assessment concerns more dialogic pedagogy and is to a greater extent directed towards supporting pupils' learning. Overall, this approach is in accordance with a social constructivist view of learning. Torrance and Pryor (1998), as well as McMillan (2010), describe these concepts as two ends of a continuum, emphasising that the two should not be seen as separate categories or as representing 'better' or 'worse' practices.

Harlen (2012, 89–92) offers other frameworks – assessment for formative purposes and assessment for summative purposes – neither of which describes classroom assessment practice or represents classroom lessons. In practice, the distinctions are blurred. Harlen's models support an understanding of assessment for different purposes. Assessment for formative purposes benefits both teaching and learning. To achieve the lesson goals, evidence is gathered in activities, and feedback supports the next step in both teaching and learning. The framework assessment for summative purposes is also about gathering evidence during lesson activities, but the emphasis is on what has been produced in the activity. The purpose of this assessment is to report what the pupils have learned.

Classroom assessment concepts

The concepts of formative and summative assessment, although not explicitly used throughout the section above, are often used to describe different views of classroom assessment. A concept generally used synonymously with formative assessment is *assessment for learning* – also part of a research field in which the amount of literature has steadily grown in recent years. Assessment for learning in classroom practice shares many elements with the assessment process, which is the focus of this article. Assessment for learning is described as a process as well as an approach to classroom assessment (Stobart 2008, 145). As described by Gardner (2012), its principles can be related to the components of the assessment process and are also of particular interest for studying the assessment process. According to Stobart (2008), assessment for learning “is best treated as assessment which is embedded in the learning process” (p. 145), and emphasises the importance of assessment in learning (Gardner 2012). In contrast, assessment for learning has also been subject to criticism: its claimed effectiveness for facilitating learning (e.g., Black and Wiliam 1998) has been challenged by Bennett (2011), but criticism is also apparent in, for example, the work of Stobart (2008). These authors argue that there is only a small amount of empirical evidence of the approach’s effectiveness for achievement. Other criticism involves how formative assessment, in terms of overly detailed feedback from teacher to pupil, may lead to learning being replaced by criteria compliance (Torrance 2007). What counts as most important will then be to improve scores instead of learning, which conflicts with the actual *spirit* of assessment for learning (Stobart 2008), since “results and learning are not equivalent” (Stobart 2008, 157).

McMillan (2010) and Torrance and Pryor (1998) characterise formative assessment as a continuum, with more formative approaches on assessment at one end, and summative approaches at the other. Harlen (2012, 98) uses the word *dimension* for the range of assessment purposes and practices. Torrance and Pryor (1998) argue: “formative assessment is an ‘inevitable thing’, *i.e. all assessment practices will have an impact on pupil learning*, but whether or not it is a ‘good thing’, and if it is, how this is actually accomplished in practice, is an empirical question” (p. 10).

Theoretical framework

Bernstein (1977) discusses educational knowledge codes, realised in educational practice, as described in three message systems: curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation (assessment). The organisation of knowledge communication and processes in the three message systems in classroom practice may be analysed by the concepts of classification and framing (Bernstein 1977, 2000). Classification is based on power structures and refers to relations and boundaries between categories, such as relations between school subjects. If the boundaries are clear, the classification is considered to be strong; if the boundaries are somewhat indefinite, the classification is weak.

Framing is about who holds control of the pedagogical processes; it concerns to what extent the teacher or pupils control aspects such as the selection of communication, sequencing, pacing, and assessment criteria. Strong framing implies a higher level of teacher control, while weak framing implies that it is learners who more closely control the aforementioned aspects.

To describe the relation between classification and framing, one may use educational knowledge codes, collection code and integrated code (Bernstein 1977, 90–94). The collection code is based on strong classification and framing, whereas the integrated code is characterised by a weak classification and a shifting strength of framing. The different strengths of the two codes, according to Bernstein (1977), may in practice imply different processes of socialisation.

These concepts – classification, framing, collection code, integrated code – indicate the nature of the pedagogic discourse and are applicable to classroom practice. It is, however, well known that a classroom is part of a larger context and so, to further understand processes in the classroom, including the assessment process, one ought also consider underlying social and political circumstances. With this in mind, the concept of pedagogic device (Bernstein 2000, 25–39) may be helpful. The pedagogic device describes how pedagogic discourses are constructed and maintained. It illuminates the relay of knowledge to the learners, making the “intrinsic grammar” of the pedagogic discourse available through three rules: distributive rules, recontextualising rules, and evaluative rules (Bernstein 2000, 28–39). Distributive rules concern how various forms of knowledge are disseminated, establishing the patterns and form of communication. Recontextualising rules steer the construction of the pedagogic discourse and also generate the evaluative rules that form pedagogic practice. The principles of the pedagogic device are active in three fields (Bernstein 2000, 113–115): production, recontextualising and reproduction. The recontextualising field is at the centre of the device, elaborating on ideas and forming discourses. Bernstein (2000) asserts:

The recontextualising field always consists of an official recontextualising field, created and dominated by the state for the construction and surveillance of state pedagogic discourse. There is usually (but not always) a pedagogic recontextualising field consisting of trainers of teachers, writers of textbooks, curricular guides, etc., specialised media and their authors (p. 115).

In the pedagogic recontextualising field (PRF), education and assessment policies constituted in the official recontextualising field (ORF) are interpreted and then directed to pedagogic practice (the reproduction field), which involves individual schools. The principles of official pedagogic discourse may be substantially transformed by the differing interests of agents in the PRF and different approaches and implementations in pedagogic practice. Interpreting the pedagogic device, Neves and Morais (2001) argue that the recontextualising process continues in pedagogic

practice: “In this way, discourse reproduced in schools and classrooms is influenced by the relationships which characterise its specific transmission contexts. It can also be influenced by relations between schools and family and community contexts” (p. 226). Bernstein’s framework, although originating in a different context, is largely applicable to the current Swedish school system. Nevertheless, it is important to stress that, in the case of Sweden, the influences between the ORF, the PRF and pedagogic practice move in more than one direction and that in several areas there is a continuous exchange among fields.

The recontextualising process in the Swedish context

The official steering documents for schoolwork in the two classrooms, in the Swedish context, are the Education Act and the national curriculum and syllabuses as decided on the national level (ORF). Decisions that affect the capacity to support pupils in achieving the national goals are also made on the local political level since the municipalities are the principal organisers of schools. Thus, the ORF is present at both the national and local levels. The PRF is also present nationally and locally to help schools meet the requirements formulated in the ORF. The principal organiser contains both a political component (ORF) and a civil-service component (PRF). Head teachers in schools are subject to the principal organiser’s civil-service component and are responsible for implementing the political decisions in pedagogic practice. It is then up to teachers to interpret the decisions – in this case, the goals and knowledge requirements for pupils’ learning.

The national syllabuses (Skolverket 2011a) for each school subject specify the goals and knowledge requirements. In this system, there is a certain freedom from restriction; schools and teachers can specify how they will attain the goals in the steering documents. Nationally, the ORF intends this system to provide pedagogical latitude for the teaching profession.

However, one change in the ORF in the Swedish context is a new state publication (Skolverket 2011c) that was introduced around the time the new national curriculum was launched in 2011. It thus seems that, by providing clear recommendations, the ORF aims to strengthen its control over what is happening in the classroom. The ORF recommends (Skolverket 2011c), among other things, that teachers “clarify what parts of the subject’s aim that teaching in the field of work should focus on” (p. 12), “continuously give each pupil constructive feedback on his or her knowledge development and clarify what needs to be developed further” (p. 18), and “continuously analyse the knowledge that the pupil shows based on what is addressed in teaching” (p. 22, in Swedish, author’s translation). These recommendations have in part influenced the increased control from the ORF that was announced in the aforementioned government report (SOU 2007: 28, 2007): “It is not only by clarified goals that the state is controlling but it is through a comprehensive clear message. Goals, subject content, comments and specific examples should taken together

contribute to a greater state control of the school” (p. 20, in Swedish, author’s translation).

The role of the class teacher

In the lower and middle years of Swedish compulsory school, the ‘class teacher’ practice is common: one or two teachers follow a class of pupils for some years, teaching most of their school subjects. The teachers are also responsible in other ways for the pupils, regarding parent contacts, for example. The class teacher practice is found in both classrooms investigated in this study, although the two classrooms are organised in slightly different ways. In the class teacher practice in Sweden at large, if more than one teacher teaches the same pupils in most subjects, the teachers usually plan parts of their teaching together. Most often, the teachers are responsible for some subjects each and carry out teaching individually, but for some lessons they may plan and carry out teaching together. Regardless of the practical situation in their classroom work, the teachers collaborate on many issues. While they hold individual responsibility for certain aspects of schoolwork, since they are teaching the same pupil group they also find that their work is facilitated by developing a common view on issues related to the pupils. A team of class teachers with the same basic approach to teaching and learning can greatly influence the pedagogic discourse in a classroom, and act relatively independently of other fields. In practice, however, they must of course relate their work to the principles set out by the ORF and PRF.

Methodology

This study is based on daily observations in two year-five classrooms in two schools, *Fir* and *Pine*, in northern Sweden. Each classroom was observed for two weeks (approximately 35 hours in each classroom), the *Fir* classroom in April 2012 and the *Pine* classroom in May of the same year. The observations were supplemented by interviews with 18 pupils (12 girls and 6 boys) and 4 class teachers (3 female and 1 male). The observations focused on the assessment process – that is, the relation between learning goals, teaching and assessment. The use of observation methods can be understood through Patton’s (2002) description of observation strategies. Patton argues that strategies are distinguished by the extent to which the observer is participating in the studied setting. “The extent of participation” he says, “is a continuum that varies from complete immersion in the setting as full participant to complete separation from the setting as spectator, with a great deal of variation along the continuum between these two end points” (2002, p. 265). Most of the observation time in the two classrooms was conducted quite near one end point of the continuum, close to the role of a spectator, or an “onlooker observer” (Patton 2002, 265).

Occasionally, however, informal conversations were also carried out in connection to the observations, which meant the observer sought contact with a pupil or teacher about issues concerning the current working activity. The informal conversations should be viewed as a method of supporting the interpretation and understanding of the empirical material. They provided information that assisted in understanding the classroom contexts.

To study the assessment process, the observations focused primarily on finding situations related to assessment. The observations were meant to address what was assessed, who did the assessment, and how. They were mainly documented using a hand-written protocol and recorded as running notes. The observation notes included many direct comments from teachers and pupils, such as: “You have done a fairly good job this lesson, but some of you spend too much time playing instead of working!” (Teacher, female).

The observations are the empirical basis for the study, although the interviews were used as a source to supplement and explain some of the observed events. In addition to the observations and interviews, documents such as national syllabuses, teaching materials, and pupils’ written assignments comprised part of the analysis of the classroom activities.

The schools were selected with an underlying idea that the schools should differ in some aspects. The main factors underlying the selection were that the schools should come from locations of different sizes and geographic areas, and also that the schools should vary in terms of parents’ educational backgrounds. Given these differences, there were a priori reasons to believe that there would be differences in the assessment process as well. As for the selection of pupils to be interviewed, the researcher requested a balance between boys and girls and a mixture of high-average- and low-achieving pupils. Being aware of these requests, the teachers asked willing pupils to participate.

Teachers and pupils were informed in advance that the study was focusing on assessment. There may therefore be reason to believe that the presence of the researcher might have influenced the classroom events. To some extent, this is probably the case, although the researcher stressed in conversations with the teachers and pupils that they should act in their usual manner and not put any emphasis on the researcher’s presence. By taking on a modest role in the classroom, the researcher tried to limit the impact on classroom practice, while still creating a good relationship with the teachers and pupils.

Ethics

The study followed ethical requirements according to the Swedish Research Council (Vetenskapsrådet 2002) and was reviewed by the Central Ethical Review Board at Umeå University. From the outset, the teachers, children and children’s guardians were informed about the aim and approach of the study and the presumptions of

their participation. The participants' confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed. They were also informed that participation was voluntary. Consent was obtained from the teachers, children and children's guardians. Concerning the informal conversations that were carried out in connection to the observations, the parents and guardians were given information in letters that were sent out to them before the field study began. The children were specifically informed about the informal conversations, orally, on the first day of the field study.

The schools, teachers and pupils

Fir School is located in a small town in a sparsely populated region. Compared with Pine School, Fir School has a smaller proportion of parents with high educational levels. The year-five class consists of 24 pupils: 17 girls and 7 boys. The class has two teachers who do most of the teaching: a male (about 55 years old, with 15 years of service) teaches social studies, science, Swedish and art, and a female (45 years old, with 15 years of service) teaches English and mathematics. These teachers have attended teacher education in the subjects they teach and are educated for the age of their pupils. Both are also qualified to teach in the upper years of compulsory school. The lessons in the Fir classroom that formed the empirical basis for this study were in the subjects of English, mathematics, Swedish, art, social studies, and science. The pupils seemed generally positive in their attitude to schoolwork; the interviewed pupils noted they wanted to perform as well as possible. The pupils seemed generally open and quite outspoken. Occasionally, some pupils provided suggestions to the teacher about how the schoolwork should be organised.

Pine School is centrally located in an expanding coastal city. Compared with Fir School, Pine School has a bigger proportion of parents with high educational levels. The year-five group consists of 20 pupils: 13 girls and 7 boys. The school has a total of 55 pupils in year five, who are divided into two classes. For most of the time, the pupils are organised in three fixed groups circulating among three different classrooms. The pupil group in this study was one of these fixed groups. A female (about 35 years old, with 13 years of service) teaches English and social studies; a male (about 30 years old, in his first year of service) teaches mathematics and science; and the third teacher is a female (about 45 years old, with 8 years of service) who teaches Swedish and art. These teachers have attended teacher education and are educated for the age of their pupils. The lessons in the Pine classroom that formed the empirical basis for this study were English, mathematics, Swedish, art, social studies, and science. The pupils in the Pine classroom generally worked quite diligently on their tasks. Those interviewed stressed that they always tried their best and wanted to perform as well as possible. In schoolwork, most pupils in the group were relatively withdrawn and silent. They proceeded according to teachers' instructions, without so much questioning and with little input into how the schoolwork should be conducted. The Pine classroom uses a digital tool to document the pupils'

academic and social development. This is mandatory for all compulsory schools in the municipality, according to a decision by the ORF on the local level. The tool is mainly used to document each pupil's development, in conjunction with the completion of the individual development plans, once every term. These plans specify the pupils' learning in relation to the stipulated requirements and describe the pupils' progress. The teachers are responsible for the documentation, but parents and pupils also have access to the digital tool, including the ability to comment and, to some extent, interact with the teachers.

The classrooms

This account of the pedagogic discourse is organised in three components: learning goals, teaching, and assessment. However, in some respects the components may in practice be interwoven and difficult to separate in the analysis.

Learning goals

The Fir classroom

There are defined slots for each subject in the schedule, but in social studies, science, Swedish, art and to some extent mathematics there are frequent opportunities to work with tasks in other subjects in addition to the requirements of the scheduled subject. When English is on the schedule, English is typically taught for the entire lesson. The basis for teachers' planning in the subjects comprises the national syllabus, textbooks and other teaching material. The latter seems to steer teaching more than the syllabus. It is unclear, however, to what extent the new national syllabus is recontextualised in the teaching material. In the Fir classroom, the official learning goals for teaching (termed *aim* in the syllabus) are rarely communicated to the pupils. As one girl points out:

If I see them [the syllabus goals] then I perhaps, yeah, it was this and that! But I can't say now that in, for example, Swedish, the aim is to learn a text by heart and things like that.

The pupils seem to have relatively vague ideas about what the syllabus goals are; they chiefly work to solve each task as well as possible.

The Pine classroom

There are definite slots in the schedule for each of the subjects, and the specified subject applies to the entire lesson. Teachers make their own individual plans for the subjects they teach based on the national syllabus, textbooks and other teaching material. In the Pine classroom, as in the Fir classroom, it is unclear to what extent the new syllabus is recontextualised in the teaching material. At times, the pupils seem to have fairly clear ideas about which learning goals to attain, even if the knowledge requirements are not communicated to a great extent in advance.

The pupils focus on the tasks to solve them as well as possible. But the teachers in this classroom, especially in art and Swedish, strongly communicate the aim and core content of different areas of the work. One girl states:

I think there are notes on the walls that say: These are the goals for year five. In Swedish [the subject], the teacher tells us that this is one of the goals and how to work to attain it.

Teaching

The Fir classroom

Teaching is flexibly structured in the sense that there are many opportunities for changes in the lesson organisation. Pupils often work on tasks they have decided on themselves, and time pressure does not appear to be present. They often choose how they work, sometimes individually but mainly in pairs or in small groups, in adjacent study rooms or in a study hall. They have access to two computers in the classroom as well as a number of others in the study hall, and other pupil groups use the computers as well. The computers are used frequently. The male teacher states:

I have to sort of dance through the study hall and the classroom and keep many things going on at the same time, but I still think it works well.
I think they learn a lot in this way of working, in that it requires quite a lot.

Pupils are often encouraged to pursue their own initiatives in schoolwork. Most areas of work involve an element in which pupils have to report to each other verbally. The male teacher emphasised the importance of giving pupils the opportunity to practice speaking in front of a group. Reprimands of pupil behaviour, such as disruptive social interaction between pupils, occur occasionally, especially when the entire class is present.

The Pine classroom

Teaching is mainly teacher-led, and the pupils work almost exclusively on one subject and task at a time. In mathematics and science, pupils can choose to work individually or in small groups in a study hall. In the other observed subjects, the whole group stays together throughout the lesson, and the work is mostly individual. Teachers often emphasise the importance of finishing tasks within a particular time period. One female teacher points out:

If I take geography as an example, then I've written that this or that amount of time we'll work with Finland, and this amount of time with Norway, and what we then are supposed to keep up with and do. And then I check with the kids to see how far they've reached individually.

Reprimands from teachers aiming to correct pupil behaviour are rare. Classroom work is mainly performed with 'traditional' tools such as pencils and paper.

A number of laptops are kept in a cupboard in the study hall, but during the observations they were not used to any great extent.

Assessment

The Fir classroom

There are many assessment situations related to individual pupils' specific tasks. Most often, the situations take the form of a pupil asking the teacher for help in order to move ahead in work. The teacher hurries to the pupil to get to the root of the problem. The teacher might pose a few questions and perhaps give a clue. The support is not overly firm, leaving plenty of room for the pupil to figure out how to solve the problem.

Assessment that pertains to the group or to individual behaviour (and to a lesser extent personal qualities) also takes place. Assessments of pupils' behaviour and personal qualities are often linked, though not exclusively, to task performance. Sometimes the tasks are constructed in a manner which gives the pupils the chance to demonstrate more complex abilities, but the criteria are not formulated for the pupils in advance. They are not informed about what is expected in the form of quality, derived from the knowledge requirements of the syllabus. Skills and abilities demonstrated by pupils in everyday schoolwork are not captured in any systematic, written form. The pupils ask for assistance when necessary, and receive oral teacher feedback to continue. But their performances are not visibly documented, neither at the time of inquiry nor later when the unit of tasks is finished. The pupils simply continue to work, and if they believe the work is running smoothly, they move on to the next task, or unit of tasks, without consulting the teacher.

According to the teachers, documentation of pupils' learning (prior to, for example, parent-teacher conferences) is mainly based on what they actually remember of pupils' performances, although there is written documentation to a smaller extent in terms of test scores. Further, pupils tend to experience assessment somewhat differently among themselves. A girl states:

You get assessed in many different situations. When you show something and things like that. When you've got a result and they want to know how I solved it.

In relation to the letter sent home each term before the parent-teacher conference, a boy states:

I don't really get to know my assessment in school; but I get an assessment letter, with all the subjects. The letter says what I am good at and what I have to learn.

The Pine classroom

Assessment situations related to what pupils are currently working on are frequent. Particularly in the subjects of Swedish and art, how tasks are connected to the core content of school subjects is pointed out, sometimes with an extensive description.

To some extent, the relationship between the tasks and the knowledge requirements is noted. Group or individual behaviour is also assessed, although to a relatively small extent, and this occurs more in some subjects than in others. Assessments of pupils' behaviour and personal qualities are often linked, but not exclusively, to the working tasks.

There is a great emphasis on completing the working tasks, and teachers document pupils' learning, mainly in writing. Initially, the documentation consists of the teachers' personal records, which are later transferred to the digital documentation tool. Most of the everyday working tasks are submitted or reviewed by teachers and checked off on various lists. There is a strong emphasis on marking and correcting pupil work. Pupils often go to the teacher to show their tasks. Pupils put a lot of time into correcting work, responding to teachers' comments and feedback. One girl points out:

I think the teachers assess almost all the time. They write down or think about it and check through our work. It takes place every now and then, when they have time.

Working tasks are occasionally designed in a manner which gives the pupils the chance to display more complex abilities. Overall, the documentation of pupils' learning is done continuously and accurately, mainly in writing, and it can be considered to be systematically organised. However, this applies to a greater extent with regard to pupils' factual knowledge and basic skills than to more complex abilities and deeper understanding.

Classroom characteristics

Drawing on Bernstein's (2000) concepts of classification and framing (see also Table 1), the boundaries and communication in the two classrooms (which are linked to the assessment process) are somewhat different.

The Fir classroom

The Fir classroom has a relatively strong classification in the sense that pupils work with one subject at a time. However, framing with regard to the selection of the lesson content may be considered weak. Individual pupils have relatively free choices regarding when to work on different subjects, and occasionally they also choose their own working tasks. This means the whole group may be working on three or four subjects simultaneously. Pupils in the Fir classroom often work on subjects that are not in the current schedule slot, perhaps partially because the same teachers teach two or more subjects. In other aspects, framing in the Fir classroom may be considered weak. Pupils can largely choose when to work on a specific task and, since schoolwork quite often proceeds without any significant time pressure, pupils often have the opportunity to work at their own speed. The fact that all pupils in the

Table 1. Values of classification and framing in the Fir and Pine classrooms

	Fir classroom	Pine classroom
Framing (F)		
Selection	Weak	Very strong
Sequence	Weak	Strong
Pacing	Weak	Strong
Assessment criteria	Less strong	Less strong
Classification (C)		
Subject boundaries	Strong and weak	Strong

classroom seldom work on the same school subject at the same time implies that any significant differences between the subjects concerning framing, in the aspects of selection, sequencing and pacing, cannot be observed.

The Pine classroom

In the Pine classroom, the classification is relatively strong in terms of the categorisation of the school subjects, although some subjects are occasionally integrated. However, the teachers only teach a few subjects, which may reduce the opportunities for pupils to work on anything else but the current subject.

The Pine classroom is characterised in several aspects by strong framing in all school subjects; that is, the teacher controls the lesson content, the order of the working tasks, and how time is allocated to different tasks. In the subjects of Swedish and art, more than in other subjects, pupils occasionally have a clearer view of what is expected of them when they begin working on a particular unit or task.

Assessment in the Fir and Pine classrooms

Assessment criteria are not particularly well clarified for pupils in either of the two classrooms. Occasionally, pupils are clear regarding expectations when they begin working on a particular unit or task, especially in the Pine classroom, and in some subjects more than others. In both classrooms, on the whole there is a tendency for criteria in mathematics to be more straightforward than in other subjects. The most usual occasions when the teacher makes criteria explicit are when a pupil 'gets stuck' on a task or submits tasks for assessment and marking. Rarely does the teacher inform the pupils about criteria in advance, before they begin an area of work or a lesson. Nevertheless, while the assessment and marking of subject tasks are more systematically and frequently performed during lesson time in the Pine classroom, pupils' behaviour is more often assessed in the Fir classroom.

The assessment process in values of classification and framing

In terms of codes (Bernstein 1977), the analysis indicates that the code in the Fir classroom is more integrated, while in the Pine classroom it is characterised by

quite a significant collection code. The focus in the Fir classroom is on the individual pupil to a greater extent than on the school subject, while in the Pine classroom it is quite the contrary. In addition to the influences on the assessment process in the two classrooms, the differences in codes, classification and framing also affect the socialisation process of the pupils in the two classrooms.

The assessment process and the pedagogic device

The previous section described the differences that emerged between the classrooms in the systematicity and frequency of assessment and documentation. It also revealed clear differences in the teaching approaches. In the Fir classroom, for example, there were greater opportunities for pupils to choose tasks individually. While there were certain distinctions in how the goals and criteria for schoolwork were clarified, the similarities between the two classrooms in this respect might have been greater.

The differences in the assessment process in the classrooms may be partly explained by choices and decisions in the current Swedish school system, taken by the ORF, regarding how to deal with the increased requirements for the documentation of pupils' learning. These requirements are handled in somewhat different ways in both classrooms. The Pine classroom uses the abovementioned digital tool for pupil documentation. Based on what is identified as needing development, long-term goals are set in the digital tool. As formulated in a boy's own words: "To improve in reading, I must be more focused. I must read during the reading lessons and not look at what the others are doing". During the next term, this boy made significant progress, according to the teacher, who commented, "What a tremendous improvement in your reading speed and reading comprehension!" (extracts from the digital tool, from years 4 and 5). The everyday classroom practice in the Pine classroom, which in most aspects demonstrates strong framing (Bernstein 2000, 99–100) may stem partly from teachers' obligation to carefully document and follow up on pupils' learning progress. Decisions taken by the ORF also imply in-service teacher training and discussions on assessment issues within the school and between neighbouring schools. As a female teacher at Pine School reports:

In our school management area we have [this school year] met one whole day and several afternoons. We have worked in groups, discussing the new syllabuses and how to think when doing assessments in relation to the new knowledge requirements.

This has resulted in some common understanding, although the teachers at Pine School argue they can do more to clarify the national syllabuses' knowledge requirements. As expressed by a female teacher: "It feels like we would need to help each other even more to make it more understandable for the pupils".

Fir School is also obliged to communicate pupils' learning to the pupils and parents regularly, but seemingly not under the same pressure from the ORF as

at Pine School. These circumstances may also result in the assessment process in the classroom being somewhat different from that of the Pine classroom. One interpretation is that the teachers in the Fir classroom do not have the same need for continuous marking, assessment and documentation.

The teachers in the Fir classroom are somewhat insecure in their assessment work related to the new national syllabuses. They have had in-service training in assessment issues, but this took place within the framework of the old national curriculum. One female teacher states:

But we haven't come so far in the work with this new one yet. Sometimes I feel when this new [national curriculum and syllabuses] comes that, ugh! I thought that I was quite familiar with the previous, and had found the approach that worked – and now it starts again!

Previously, there was teacher collaboration on assessment issues within the school and between other schools in the municipality. At present, however, the teachers largely make individual decisions on how to assess and document pupils' learning. As the male teacher at Fir School puts it, "Nah, that's just me [making decisions]. Then maybe I choose to trust my own intuition very much".

The relationship between the ORF, the PRF and pedagogic practice is not static in the Swedish context; exchanges and communication may differ substantially between contexts (e.g., between municipalities and individual schools). In the two municipalities in this study, the principal organisers are found in both the ORF and PRF. Decisions are made in the ORF, and in the PRF the principal organiser can be viewed more as assisting local schools on different issues, following the requirements of the ORF. However, it is quite clear that Fir School, compared with Pine School, is more autonomous in relation to the ORF of the municipality. Fir School's municipal council has not been as controlling in the ORF. In other words, the ORF has not made decisions affecting Fir School that teachers are forced to embrace in pedagogic practice. This is reflected in a statement by one teacher, regarding one part of the reforms – a decision by the ORF about imposing the use of binders for pupil documentation. The male teacher at Fir School states:

They have not been able to convince us. We do as we have done before; it has worked. And if they don't come with a large club or something, we do as we want to.

Discussion

The assessment process in the two classrooms had similarities and differences in classification. In framing, the differences were apparent and mainly regarded selection, sequencing and pacing. The Pine classroom's framing in these aspects was strong, whereas that of the Fir classroom was weak. In terms of assessment criteria, framing was *less strong* in both classrooms. Certainly the teacher was in control of the criteria, even though the criteria were often implicit and not entirely obvious to the

pupils. Still, assessment was constantly present in all components of the assessment process; for, as Bernstein (2000) states, “the key to pedagogic practice is continuous evaluation” (p. 36).

Assessment issues, ubiquitous in the classroom assessment process, allow analysis of the aspects of classification and framing from an assessment perspective. This particular study concludes that assessment-related factors (such as the digital tool for documentation and the teachers’ in-service training in assessment) have an impact on, among other things, the content selection in teaching and the choice of working methods. In other words, external assessment factors affect the discourse within the assessment process.

These external factors could contribute to the differences observed between the classrooms. In the Pine classroom, compared to the Fir classroom, teachers were obliged to use the digital tool to monitor and document pupils’ learning, and they received more thorough and strategic in-service training. These factors are based on a fairly straightforward transfer between the ORF and PRF. The ORF in the Pine School’s municipality, at quite an early stage, reflected on the consequences of political decisions at the state level and communicated with agents in the PRF. In the Fir School’s municipality, the ORF and PRF functioned in other ways. Although they were also obliged to implement reforms, the changes have not thus far resulted in the same consequences for pedagogic practice as in Pine School. The observed and analysed differences between the assessment process in the two classrooms indicate that reforms decided on the state level can be received in different ways and progress differently in the ORF, the PRF and pedagogic practice. Interestingly, Braun et al. (2011) and Ball et al. (2012) also use the concept of recontextualisation, with a similar significance to how Bernstein uses the term (although they do not use it as a key concept), in discussing the process of putting policy ideas into practice, and when indicating differences in implementation (using *enactment*) in various school contexts.

The somewhat differing course of action in the recontextualising field related to Fir School enables teachers at Fir School to maintain a hesitancy toward centralised policies and reforms, although this does not mean they totally refrain from implementing them. The male teacher at Fir School argues:

Recording [pupils’ learning] is a directive from above, and maybe I handle it in a bad way compared with other teachers. But I will still never stop thinking; every minute I spend with the kids or getting to know them is in the long run a better investment than putting lots of time into documentation.

This declaration by the teacher from Fir School may be representative of the role of the class teacher within that school. The teacher would probably not be able to hold this view if it was not accepted by his immediate colleagues. Among the teachers,

there is most likely a common view that influences the pedagogic discourse. The school subjects are not the main focus – the teachers relate in an open manner to the subjects, and to each other. The different approaches between the classrooms also imply that assessment in Fir is more directed at the pupils and their behaviour, and in Pine more directed at subject knowledge.

Along with the overall depiction of the assessment process in the two classrooms, this may imply different modes of socialisation – the emphasis is placed on different abilities. The classroom differences may be attributed to the two codes described by Bernstein (1977); The Pine classroom to the collection code, and the Fir classroom to the integrated code. The pupils in the Pine classroom are socialised in a more obvious manner: Teachers' exercise of power is apparent, pupils only have a few choices for classroom work, and pupils are on the whole kept more together. Fir classroom socialisation is more covert, a relatively large part of the responsibility is handed over to the individual pupils in terms of organisation of the schoolwork. In the Fir classroom, the pupils are largely encouraged to make their own decisions and 'walk their own paths', which means the conditions for the development of abilities such as creativity and initiative-taking are probably higher than in the Pine classroom. However, in a classroom such as Fir, due to the integrated code the individual is more emphasised than subject knowledge, and some uncertainty may therefore exist regarding all pupils' chances to acquire basic knowledge. It is feasible that they have not been given equal chances to develop learning, considering the pupils' varying initial prerequisites.

The identified factors contributing to differences in the assessment process between the classrooms – and hence contributing to the consequences that may result for the pupils in terms of socialisation – thus concern differences in how municipalities, schools and teachers have received and implemented new school and assessment reforms initiated by the ORF.

Regardless of the schools' and classrooms' different locations and prerequisites, all pupils in Swedish compulsory school have the right to an equal education, which encompasses both basic knowledge for everyone and opportunities for pupils as individuals to actively participate in their own development. Based on the findings of this study, awareness and openness in discussions is needed in the ORF and PRF as well as in pedagogic practice concerning the differences in the impact of reforms in various locations and classrooms, and which consequences these differences could have for pupils.

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