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Grading in primary school: for learning or for flaunting?

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Abstract

This thesis revises how grading in primary school may affect views on education and learning. It focuses on how grading is implemented in Swedish primary school by using multiple local and global sources to create a diverse and inclusive review. The articles were analyzed and implemented to answer questions on how grading can affect educational systems, feelings and attitudes towards grading in primary school. The thesis dives deeper into how grading is visible historically and currently and later gives arguments on how grading in primary school can affect teachers and pupils. The findings show that implementing grading in primary school does have negative effects on the pupils and teachers views but is seen as an unavoidable method of assessment. It is found that in order to have positive outcomes, grading should be more consistent, motivational and reliable and is a phenomenon still under development and critique in the field of education.

Abstrakt

Denna avhandling ger en översikt på hur betygsättning i låg- och mellanstadiet kan påverka synen på utbildning och lärande. Avhandlingen fokuserar på hur betygsättning implementeras i svenska låg- och mellanstadiet genom att använda lokala och globala källor för att skapa en mångsidig och inkluderande granskning. Källorna granskades och implementerades för att svara på frågor om hur betygsättning kan påverka utbildningssystem, känslor och attityder mot betygsättning i låg- och mellanstadiet. Avhandlingen går djupare in på hur betyg är synligt både historiskt och för närvarande och ger senare argument på hur betygsättningen kan påverka lärare och elever. Resultaten visar att implementering av betygsättning i låg- och mellanstadiet har en negativ inverkan på elever och lärare, men är också sedd som en oundviklig utvärderingsmetod. Konsistent, motiverande och pålitlig var några av de villkor som blev synliga för att betygsättning skulle få en positiv inverkan vilket är ett fortsatt fenomen under utveckling och kritik inom utbildningssektorn.

Keywords: grading, Sweden, assessment, primary school, teachers, pupils

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Introduction

Educational assessment has throughout time been a key component for progressive and effective learning outcomes and how we ensure good development of knowledge. In the school setting, assessment through grading has given teachers and other interested parties an overlook on where development is needed and if pupils are meeting the required goals.

This thesis will consider grading and assessment as a part of the modern Swedish primary school education. This means that the pupils are in the age between seven and twelve. Usually, grading takes place during the later primary school years but has with time become a topic of discussion and consideration in the younger primary school years in Sweden. The usage of grading at a young stage of a pupil's educational life has raised a number of discussions regarding the validation of the method and have been criticized as an unfavorable form of assessment of not fully developing children.

The main focus area of this thesis will be Sweden and their view of grading in primary school education as this is a current topic amongst teachers and educational professionals in the country. Sweden has also during the past twenty years gone through a number of reforms in their educational systems which is causing the topic to often be discussed and researched. The country's latest reform took place in 2011 where the grading system also changed.

The literature used in this thesis will be from Swedish governmental texts and Swedish- and global research on the topic of grading and assessment. Although the global research might not specifically include Sweden, it strongly supports the issues raised within this thesis and contributes with important knowledge and opinions that needs to be taken into consideration. The usage of both governmental issued texts and research made by professionals within the topic creates an overlook of how institutions and every day practice can work together within the education system.

The aim is to conduct an inclusive and diverse review of grading and assessment in primary school by using multiple sources to discuss a topic focused on a specific country. As I go along I will review the phenomenon of grading as a part of assessment in education. Grading in this context is a form of assessment with numbers and/or letters. The numbers can describe an overall grade or the scored points on a test for example. In Swedish primary school there is a usage of grades with letters A-F and points. There also exists grading in the forms of numbers from four to ten or one to five but are not often seen in the Swedish education systems.

This particular type of assessment can also be called summative assessment. Summative assessment is defined as something that occurs at the end of a learning sequence as a final result or proof of gained knowledge (Grann, 2017; Törnvall, 2001). Summative assessment is used to understand if the intended learning has been successful and is often used to compare results, collect data and in selection processes (Grann, 2017; Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010). This could also be considered as a high stakes form of assessment (Korp, 2003; Lidar, Lundqvist, Ryder & Östman, 2020). Meaning that there could be a lot relying on the results of summative assessment. In other words, we could describe the method as assessment of learning (Grann, 2017) which is commonly used as an overall description of this type of assessment methods by educational researchers.

Although summative assessment gives a general view on learning results, other forms of assessment is often used to further understand learning and knowledge. To be able to understand the learning process and how knowledge is successfully being provided, a form of formative assessment is used. While summative assessment is easier to incorporate when grading takes place (Emanuelsson, 2002), formative methods are used to evaluate the learning process of pupils (Törnvall, 2001). By formative assessment methods, it can be seen where the pupil is, what their own personal goals are and what is needed to reach those goals (Grann, 2017; Schuwirth & Van der Vleuten, 2011). Formative assessment is also a way of ensuring continuous improvement during the process of learning (Tholin, 2006).

The aim of formative assessment is mostly pedagogical (Törnvall, 2001) and goal oriented which makes it difficult to use in selection processes (Grann, 2017; Tholin, 2006) or other systematic comparisons. Because of this, in difference from summative, this method can be considered as a low stake (Korp, 2003) type of evaluation as there lays no risks or expectations outside the personal self. In the educational setting, teachers can use formative assessment to understand their own teaching and how education should be provided for best possible outcome (Grann, 2017). In comparison to assessment of learning, researchers describe this type of assessment as; assessment for learning since the goal is to develop learning and teaching without there being a final outcome (Emanuelsson, 2002).

By incorporating different assessment methods, the thesis will aim to further investigate how grading during primary school years affects views on education and learning by comparing summative and formative assessment methods. The views considered is those of pupils and of teachers that operate in the day to day life and have first-hand experience of grading. Throughout the thesis I will discuss how grading at an early stage could possibly affect the pupils' views on education and their own learning and I will also discuss the different aspects of teacher perspectives and attitudes towards this method of assessment.

I became more interested in the subject of grading when I started doing practices in schools as a teacher student. I then saw an environment that I was well familiar with but now I had the ability to reflect on how we use grades in primary school and found that there is a lot relying on getting high results. During my own school time, grading happened in year seven and further. Nevertheless, the stress and pressure of getting high results resulted in me developing a destructive view on grading which I still struggle with today, almost 12 years later. As I exited Swedish mandatory school, the grading system was reformed and changed to include primary school pupils, which caused me to ponder and question on what basis an educational institution would be willing to put young growing pupils through a stressful learning environment. The thesis reflects my own critical viewpoint but is also an attempt to further understand the reasoning behind the usage of grading in primary school.

Grading in primary school

2.1 Grading as a form of assessment

Assessment as a form of determining the pupil's knowledge level has been a well-used method in the educational setting throughout history (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010). The levels of grading, the usage of it and the time that the grading takes place has differed depending on context, social situation and time period and has been reformed multiple times, especially in Sweden (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2018; Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

In the Swedish history of assessment, it is early seen that assessment was used to determine whether or not a child would be ready to attend school. If a child was not ready to enter school as we today can compare with first grade, they would enter what we today know as pre-school (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010). Criteria that were looked for was often the child's abilities to learn how to read and comprehend learning material and often depended on the child's own development history (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

The child, and future pupil, would be assessed when entering, during and exiting school which had a crucial importance for their future (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010). At this point, school was limited, and education was not guaranteed as it depended on abilities to learn and social backgrounds (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Therner & Johansson, 2008).

Even if pupils often were assessed, there lied a focus on assessing the educators. Such educators consisted of teachers and religious representatives, but also parents.

The need to teach knowledge necessary for the demands to live at the time had a big hold on all educators involved. If the educator would be assessed as unsuccessful there would be implementation of further control and sometimes punishments (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Therner & Johansson, 2008). In other educational contexts, children who did not seem fit for school were encouraged to pursue other paths before schooling became mandatory (Williams, 2011).

Attendance, completion of homework and study morals were not included in the assessment of pupils as they seemed irrelevant to understand if the pupil could continue their education. Separate grades were then given for behavior at school (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010) and in the Swedish curriculum from 1980 it is stated that the grade shall be given based on the performance during the time the grading takes place, such as tests or other examinations (Svenska regeringen, 1980).

Historically, knowledge was considered being something given by the teacher to the pupils and focus was often on memorizing and repeating (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Scherp & Thelin, 2009). Swedish research on assessment has stated that the usage of asking and answering questions in the classroom, which is focused on remembering, could be the way the teachers performed formative assessment at the time (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

The modern education has shifted from the viewpoint of creating functioning citizens to focusing on the pupils own learning abilities and to optimize learning possibilities. This is seen especially in mandatory schools such as primary school (Emanuelsson, 2002). However, heavy focus on summative methods may contradict the goals of modern education.

In theory, there is an aim to use assessment as a tool to understand if the knowledge provided is being successfully taught and if further goals and progress is needed to obtain a certain level of knowledge (Emanuelsson, 2002; Granqvist & Holmlund, 2016) but it has in recent times been noticed to focus more on comparing results and sorting pupils which in its positive intentions can cause negative effects (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2018). The usage of pupil's educational results for comparison between different organizations is not a new phenomenon. But with increased global collaborations, there is suddenly a larger number of interested parties which creates an environment that bases its legitimacy on high results. This increases the pressure of the pupil's personal performance results (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

When the classroom is centered around measuring and grading knowledge, it becomes a classroom where testing dictates both the pupils view on education and the teachers view on teaching methods (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2018). This in turn creates a higher pressure for the need of making sure knowledge is being recorded and impacts how the institution gives instructions and demands (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

Grading as a form of summative assessment in the end of a learning segment is used to collect information on what knowledge has been gained but may fail to understand the learning process of the pupil (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2018). The examinations given on the grounds of grading has to have a neutral and equal approach (Korp, 2003; Skolverket, 2019) but risks again to not acknowledge the learning process and the work put in to gain that knowledge. The test or exam can further be non-beneficial for pupils who prefer other types of methods and does not lay in the best interest of the pupil (McMillan, 2019; Korp, 2003). This can cause negative views on testing and grading for pupils who fail to communicate the gained knowledge through the chosen method and can in turn affect the whole testing and examination process (Grann, 2017; Korp, 2003; Vogel & Schwabe, 2016).

Although grading and its fairness is under critique, it is often used as a form of collecting results of individuals, which can showcase the needs of schools and certain areas (Isaksson, Lindqvist & Bergström, 2010; Korp, 2003). This can become an issue as the comparing divides school into high status and low status schools depending on the grades that are visible within the school even though this type of comparison and separation is highly important (Emanuelsson, 2002; Lindberg & Forsberg 2010). The positive aspects of this comparison are that it gives a clear view of what schools might be in need of extra resources. The sorting becomes an important factor to be able to improve teaching and give fitting support in early stages of a pupils' education and can be an effective way of identifying pupils at risk (Bowers, 2019; Törnvall, 2001). This becomes particularly important when identifying pupils with special needs who might be in need of extra educational- or medical support at school (Isaksson et.al, 2010). The negative results indicate the need for the school and the government or municipality is obligated to take action (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

Positive usage of summative assessment could on the other hand be hindered if pupils and teachers have a negative view on the method (Grann, 2017). Grading as a form of assessment can be used as a tool to further develop education and education systems but is often not considered this way as the negative aspects of grading in the actual schools take up a bigger space in the discussion (Lidar et.al, 2020). Especially in early stages of education, there is a focus on formative assessment as the most useful method. In theory, the two methods of assessment should not oppose each other but complement (Grann, 2017; Tholin, 2006). The methods should be used on cooperation where summative assessment or assessment of learning is used to summarize formative assessment or assessment for learning (Tholin, 2006).

This is stated to ensure good reliability of the methods as they consider different aspects of learning and are based on different set of criteria's (Tholin, 2006). As there is a lack of research based on grading as an assessment method in the primary school classroom both in Sweden and globally (Emanuelsson, 2002) discussion often regards the criteria of grading and the reliability of the assessment method.

2.2 Grading criteria and reliability

To be able to establish the reliability of grading as an assessment method it is important to understand on what grounds criteria are set and who sets them (Emanuelsson, 2002; Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010). The basis of the criterion in the Swedish educational contexts is set by the national board of education, or otherwise called Skolverket. Beyond that it is the municipality and often schools themselves who sets the basis for assessment criteria according to their own teaching plans. The occurring of this often makes criteria between schools and areas differ from each other as many choose to assess different aspects of the same criteria that is given by the state (Emanuelsson, 2002). Controls that has been made regarding this topic has shown differences in how teachers assess and grade (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

The freedom to set local criteria base itself on the fact that pupils' learning abilities cannot be standardized. Assessment and grading should instead reflect the pupils own learning process and results. With the need to include these aspects, many teachers consider working skills, motivation, homework and behavior in their evaluations which can cause dilemmas for teachers who are expected to grade based on the examination (Lidar et.al, 2020; Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010). Social and democratic skills are also a part of the pupil's primary school education and is often seen outside the classroom, meaning that the teacher would need to be able to observe a pupil during breaks (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Skolverket, 2019).

This means that grades can vary between teachers, schools and subjects depending on who is giving the grades and based on what criteria it is given. Since criteria differ on a number of stages, it creates a difficulty in selection processes where the differences between criterions that are locally set are made more visible (Emanuelsson, 2002). It has been a struggle for teachers who find themselves challenged as mentioned earlier with needing to include development of learning rather than how well a pupil can perform on a test (Brookhart & Guskey, 2019) which is the more common goal of summative assessment methods. This part contradicts the neutrality of grading as a form of assessment and can question the reliability of the grade as a complete evidence of gained knowledge according to the criteria.

The basis of grading as a form of assessment may also question its reliability. As earlier mentioned, summative assessment fails to recognize the learning process (William, 2018) and only showcases a small part of the development and for pupils who may lack in testing abilities it can cause negative effects on their results (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016).

Some of the difficulties a pupil may face can be stress caused by testing, special needs or other factors that can affect a pupil's performance in school. This will be further discussed in the next chapter about pupils, but these difficulties are one of the main reasons why formative assessment is the preferred method as it considers the whole process to reach the set criteria. But can again not be used to concretize results that is used for applying for further education and for schools to report their educational results (Tholin, 2006).

As the secondary part of compulsory education in Sweden continues for three years after the primary education the usage of grading in primary school is merely to showcase on what level of knowledge a pupil possesses at a certain time, often at the end of a semester or school year. The official grading often takes place in the end of primary school, but schools may choose themselves when to start giving grades to their pupils as a basis of showcasing results for parents, teachers and themselves (Skolverket, 2019).

In addition to the grading that takes place at the end of primary school, Sweden has additional national tests. These tests take place in year three and six and will be registered nationally to measure the overall educational level of Swedish pupils.

The grades from the national test will affect the pupil's overall evaluation but can differ from the final grade (Skolverket, 2022a).

As the first test that we can consider as high stakes already takes place in third grade when a pupil is ten years old, there is a need to question when the appropriate time to start giving grades is. But additionally, on what grounds the grade is given and if the grading will benefit learning and teaching. During the early primary school years, the pupils are still in a big development phase and the differences between pupil abilities are highly visible (Therner & Johansson, 2008). The pupils cannot be compared in the same way as older ones which causes difficulties when implementing grading as a form of assessment method early on.

How grading affect pupils' views on assessment and learning

2.3 The possible outcomes of grading primary school pupils

Even if grading has been a part of education in Sweden for a long period of time it has lately raised discussions as it is moving towards wanting to grade lower age levels than before. From year 2021 it has been possible to give grades from year four in Swedish mandatory schools, where earlier year six was the first possible grading year (Skolverket, 2022b). In 2022 there was a change in how the grading should be given and on what basis, but the age level was still the same (Skolverket, 2022c). This becomes a problem as we move on to grading younger pupils who are not yet fully developed or possess full understanding of how education and assessment operates (Therner & Johansson, 2008).

Already before the pre-school child can enter primary education, they need to meet a certain type of criteria that will make them eligible to continue (Emanuelsson, 2002). It has been reported that historically, children have felt that evaluation in schools has been based on who they are as children (Emanuelsson, 2002). As we stated in the previous chapter, personal abilities and motivation is often implemented in the grade during primary school (Törnvall, 2001). That further proves that the pupils will be evaluated based on how they perform as people, and as the young pupil does not comprehend the meaning of testing quite yet they cannot separate personal traits and abilities from the active choices they make in school by listening, studying and behaving correctly (Therner & Johansson, 2008; Törnvall, 2001).

How the pupil then absorbs the evaluation given depends on their personal understanding of their own abilities and not can only testing cause doubt in themselves, but the insecurity can increase (Törnvall, 2001). Even if a pupil may not be able to understand the reasoning behind the evaluation given based on their educational achievement, a pupil is able to recognize what they can and cannot do. If a pupil does not do well on a test it can cause further insecurity and negative feelings towards their learning and lower their self-esteem (Therner & Johansson, 2008).

Although individual goals are implemented in the day to day teaching, the importance of results and grading influences how teaching is executed. As classrooms move towards a more test centered education, they lose the focus on personal educational development and lean towards teaching to prepare for testing, and pupils who cannot keep up rest risk to fail (Lidar et.al, 2020; Therner & Johansson, 2008).

If the pupil is exposed to a test-centered environment early on in their education, it shapes their view in a sense that they consider grades as more valuable than written feedback (Therner & Johansson, 2008) even if both should serve the same function (McMillan, 2019). This could on the other hand work quite well if we assume that the pupil has good self-knowledge and ability to understand their own goals in their education (Korp, 2003). The one argument why grades would be used instead of written feedback is that it is seemed as an easier and more effective way of showing if a pupil has successfully met the goal or not. One reasoning for this is that written feedback demands considered language as the feedback need to be motivating but does take longer to produce (Gyllander Torkildsen, 2016; Therner & Johansson, 2008).

For feedback to further development there lays an emphasis on teachers communicating and teaching pupils how to reflect on the written feedback or grading they receive. The pupil needs to be able to discuss their learning goals first and foremost and not only focus on what they need to know for the upcoming test (Korp, 2003) as the educational setting should be a place of learning and development, rather than showcasing one's achievements. In this type of environment and setting, there should be room for the pupil to make mistakes without being assessed (Tholin, 2006) and passing tests should be the norm as not passing can hinder knowledge development and it is important that a pupil feels like they have the abilities to learn more (Emanuelsson, 2002).

A pupil who does not require any special assistance in their education often manages to pass and continue on, but with special needs pupils we may see a different side. In chapter one we mentioned that grading could be used to identify pupils at risk and in need of special attention for their learning. As we identify them, we also tend to label groups of pupils as either the norm or weak (Emanuelsoon, 2002; Högberg, Lindgren, Johansson, Strandh & Petersen, 2010; Therner & Johansson, 2008). This will create a more visible divide between pupils and create separation between groups (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2016).

Some of the main reasons why teachers and educational institutions find testing early in primary school as applicable is the need to identify at risk pupils that may need further investigation or medical examination (Isaksson et.al, 2010). Often, it is up to the classroom teacher to identify the issue and report it further. This also gives the teacher a responsibility to be capable of identifying if a problem is in need of further investigation or if it is a task for the classroom teacher. Due to there being multiple types of special needs issues, it can be hard to determine as the view of what is normal, or mainstream can be different depending on the classroom (Isaksson et.al, 2010). Due to the standards of the mainstream pupil may differ, it can be difficult to acknowledge if a pupil is in fact a special needs pupil or just considered as weaker academically (Isaksson et.al, 2010).

This is further acknowledged when pupils with special needs or seen as weak might not be able to participate in time limited tests and can cause negative outcomes if not differentiated properly. In some cases, pupils are given differentiated tests or extra time when participating to be able to complete the test or examination (Emanuelsson, 2002; Törnvall, 2001). But since testing and evaluation should be neutral and equal, it has to be emphasized that this pupil has passed on different grounds and criteria than other pupils (Emanuelsson, 2002). This statement does affect the pupil's further as it showcases that the pupil is a part of a special group that is often considered as weak in the educational context.

One aspect that is important to note when considering pupil performance on testing or examination is whether the low result is due to learning difficulties or situational outside factors (Isaksson et.al, 2010).

2.2 Pupils' feelings and attitudes towards grading

Similar to most pupils is that the time limits creates stress and a negative feeling towards testing (Törnvall, 2001). The stress caused by the thought and expectation of testing does in its turn influence how the pupil can perform during the test (Törnvall, 2001).

During an episode of increased stress levels on the brain, it can interfere with the pupil's ability to remember and express information that has once been stored. This can cause negative outcomes on a test even if the pupil possesses the knowledge that is required (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016). It is shown that a low level of stress can in fact increase performance and have positive outcomes, but the border between effective and overwhelming is rather small.

In long term, the stress can cause difficulties obtaining new information and storing new knowledge which will in turn affect the pupils whole learning ability (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016). Even in seventh grade, which is a year after primary school, pupils felt that they were more stressed when grades were introduced into their education (Högberg et.al, 2021). In these cases, it is important to make sure that the pupil feels secure and has reached the learning goals needed to do the test and not fail (Korp, 2003).

When the pupil fails it can causes negative feelings on their learning and themselves, while on the other hand, positive outcomes of testing and grading can stimulate the ego and have a more superficial effect (Korp, 2003; Therner & Johansson, 2008) on the motivation but still play a big part in promoting it (Scherp & Thelin, 2009). The Swedish National Board of Education, skolverket, has stated that grades improve motivation, but this statement has been contradicted by the many who claim the opposite (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2016; Korp, 2003). The pupil will further focus on achieving high grades rather than learning valuable information that is remembered for a long time if grades is the most important evidence of accomplishment. And even if motivation is key to further interest in learning (Törnvall, 2001) it can do so on a superficial level and not give any deep learning development.

Gyllander Torkildsen's (2016) research related to pupil's views on assessment found that formative assessment methods assisted them in furthering their learning the most. Some stated that inclusion in the creation of teaching and learning methods helped with the understanding of practices and was often influenced by the general understanding of the school's view on grading. Meaning that if a school had high value of grades, so would the pupil. On the other hand, if the form of assessment was considered as not useful, it would have little to no effect on the pupils view of their performance which in turn hinder development. (Gyllander Torkildsen, 2016)

Teacher attitudes and perspectives on grading

3.1 Teachers' perspectives on grading primary school pupils

Grading as a form of assessment is a task that relies on teachers and the teacher's abilities to successfully understand and implement the method. In theory, grading should be used as a method to understand what knowledge level a pupil is and how far they have to reach their learning goals with the help of the teacher (Therner & Johansson, 2008; Törnvall, 2001). For teachers, who's task is to assist and guide pupils to develop their learning, grading will take several forms already during the primary school years. Grades in today's Swedish education, comes from both tests and personal performance in the classroom. This means, as we earlier discussed, that the pupil is assessed based on tests but also based on abilities that they showcase in the classroom which is a task that lies heavy on the teacher's shoulders (Lidar et.al, 2020).

The test which is produced neutrally by the teacher has been considered unfair when the grading takes place as the teacher is not able to include effort made in the classroom (Therner & Johansson, 2008). It is argued that since all pupils are worthy of being able to develop their learning further (Emanuelsson, 2002) it is important that pupils who are considered weaker get positive results. Similarly, for pupils who often perform well will then need to receive fewer positive results to be able to challenge themselves further (Törnvall, 2001). To be able to successfully and positively do this kind of summative assessment method it is important that the teacher has a well-established relationship with their pupils and know their personal abilities (Therner & Johansson, 2008).

One challenge with having a good understanding of your pupils, is that the phenomenon of "pulling" (McMillan, 2019) for your pupil will occur. This means that a teacher will intentionally give higher grades to a pupil who might not perform as well as others, but still needs personal reinforcement because of their efforts in their learning development (McMillan, 2019). Another challenge that is discussed amongst teachers is the fact that when a teacher has a good understanding of pupils' personal abilities, it develops a certain expectation of their performance and influences the final summative evaluation (Grann, 2017).

Studies that has focused on teachers' opinions on usage of summative methods has shown that many do not have a positive look on using summative assessment or grading as a form of evaluation. Early primary school teachers have stated that the usage of grading and summative assessment causes negative feelings and affect the pupil's mental health (Therner & Johansson, 2008). Similarly, other studies of primary school teachers have shown that grades were not seen as fitting due to the developmental differences in young aged pupils (Grann, 2017) as stated earlier. It has been suggested that grading may start as late as year seven when the pupil starts entering secondary school (Therner & Johansson, 2008) as this is an age where the pupil could be able to fully grasp the method and concept of summative assessment.

3.2 Teachers' views and attitudes towards summative assessment methods

As the method of using grading as a form of summative assessment is flowing and changes throughout time there lies a challenge in how to implement new alternatives and can create an uncertainty amongst teachers (Tholin, 2006). This can cause the implementation to feel forced and take away teachers' attention from beneficial classroom practices (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2016). If the classroom practices are focused on increasing result it can lower the quality of teaching inside the classroom (Lidar et.al, 2020). And if the teacher finds themselves unfamiliar with the process of forming new systems (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2016), it could result in various versions of the method throughout a whole country. Teachers have been stating that there is a need for the state to effectively give out the same instructions to increase reliability of the grades (Therner & Johansson, 2008). This would assist teachers in the grading process and help answer questions about what needs to be done to meet a goal for a pupil (Tholin, 2006), and what methods are considered as applicable and non-applicable (Therner & Johansson, 2008).

The insecurity around successfully implementing summative assessment methods has led to a majority of teachers using easy assessed and graded tests (Therner & Johansson, 2008). Many teachers claim to know why they should be grading their pupils but are unsure on how to do it to further learning development (Therner & Johansson, 2008) since they understand that outcomes can be situational as there is a difference in teacher expectations of pupils and summative assessment methods (Grann, 2017; Tholin, 2006).

Some teachers, who have tried to step away from a grade centered classroom have experienced that assessment that is based on the pupils own abilities has more benefits towards the pupil (Tholin, 2006) but since written or oral feedback as a form of formative assessment needs to have a carefully considered language (Grann, 2017) it increases the workload for teachers (Therner & Johansson, 2008). To be able to change from teaching practices that focus on summative assessment methods towards using more formative assessment methods, there lies a responsibility in the teacher and their abilities to go through with it (Therner & Johansson, 2008). Some have experienced that the requirement for testing increases even if there is no foundation for it to improve learning in the classroom (Lidar, et.al, 2020). It has also been noted that tests can control what type of teacher- and pedagogical identities are acceptable and what is considered valuable learning material and can shape the whole education system (Lidar et.al, 2020; Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

If a teacher feels unable or has negative feelings towards developing formative assessment methods, it can cause that summative assessment methods becomes the method of importance. Often, it is not the teacher themselves who have negative feelings but due to the high workload that a teacher already has, for formative assessment methods can prove challenging to implement due to the need for carefully considered language (Grann, 2017; Gyllander Torkildsen, 2016). But even if grading as a summative assessment method often are seen in a negative aspect, some teachers do still prefer it. Some teachers claim that the grade is proof of educational results and showcases how well the teachers has been able to forward knowledge and is easier to interpret for outside parties (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Törnvall, 2001).

Common for many primary school teachers were that attitudes towards both assessment methods came from their own experiences both as pupils themselves but also as experienced educators (Therner & Johansson, 2008). They thought that experience gave them confidence in assessment and with time they were able to create a more formative form of assessment at the same time as they were able to assess the pupils with neutrality (Törnvall, 2001) and adapt to the pupil (Gyllander Torkildsen, 2016). This did in turn assist the grading process. The discussion about what form of assessment is most useful in primary school education remains current and keeps being an important part of the teacher occupation.

Discussion

As I have reviewed the different aspects of grading in primary school, it is evident that it is not a new phenomenon in the field of Swedish education. Historically, grading has been used to ensure that only the ones who are capable of learning could enter school and had a big impact on the futures of pupils (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Therner & Johansson, 2008; Williams, 2011). Education was limited, and only the ones with the right abilities entered and exited school. Even if then, grading was based on more simple terms as passed and not passed, the aspects that were graded were quite similar to now. Such aspects were performance in subjects in school but also behavior which was given as a grade separated from others (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010). In the modern Swedish school, the same aspects are often considered. But as the interest to compare and showcase educational results and outcome has grown during the last couple of years, the pressure to perform has done likewise (Granqvist & Holmlund, 2018; Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010).

A classroom centered around summative assessment has been seen to increase stress regarding testing and grading in primary school both for pupils and teachers. The prioritization of grades shapes the classroom to teach to prepare for testing and limits the possibilities for all learners to successfully develop (Emanuelsson, 2002; Gyllander Torkildsen, 2016; Törnvall, 2001; Vogel & Schwabe, 2016; William, 2018). Grading, as we also call summative assessment, has become a big part of everyday school practices. It is used to understand if knowledge has been gained but fails to recognize the process to gain it (Brookhart & Guskey, 2019; William, 2018). For that formative assessment methods are often used. The formative assessment method is used to set personal educational goals and functions to give motivational feedback to pupils (Emanuelsson, 2002; Grann, 2017; Korp, 2003; Tholin, 2006; Törnvall, 2001).

Based on the findings of this thesis, most teachers preferred the formative assessment method for younger pupils in primary school years but did not understand the reasoning behind implementing summative methods. By testing the pupils early, it can become visible who might need special assistance at school and with their learning (Isaksson et.al, 2010). It is then easier to showcase the need for resources and support while also categorizing the pupils into different knowledge levels (Emanuelsson, 2002; Granqvist & Holmlund, 2016; Högberg et.al, 2021; Therner & Johansson, 2008).

Even though the categorization has a positive intention, it results in strong comparative environments. The grades, which are used to collect data for comparisons between nations and areas, can also be used as comparison in the classroom. The pressure to need to perform well on testing causes negative effects on pupil's views on themselves and their own abilities. The testing, which is focused on situational performance abilities, can cause the pupils to feel overwhelmed with stress and result in negative outcomes (Grann, 2017; Isaksson et.al, 2010; Korp, 2003; Therner & Johansson, 2008; Törnvall, 2001; Vogel & Schwabe, 2016).

The argument about the negative effects testing can have on pupils was mentioned by both pupils and teachers who have first-hand experience with the phenomena. Especially teachers felt that grades had a negative effect on primary school pupils' mental health and caused stress (Therner & Johansson, 2008) which has also been acknowledged in research (Vogel & Schwabe, 2016). It was also discussed that since the pupils still are developing in the early primary school years, it is harder for them to comprehend testing and the meaning of the assessment method. The pupils would instead of understanding the grade as a form of evaluation for their work or effort, understand it as a judgement of them as persons and could lower their self-esteem (Emanuelsoon, 2002; Therner & Johansson, 2008).

With these arguments many teachers felt like formative assessment methods were better but did demand more work and effort. Due to lack of time many had chosen to use summative methods as it was proven to be easier for all parties interested (Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Törnvall, 2001). As Swedish education most likely will continue to move into an education that focuses on testing and grades, the need for consistency will increase. At this point, many teachers felt that grades differed a lot depending on teachers, environments and expectations and were hard to justify in selection processes (Emanuelsson, 2002; Grann, 2017; Lidar et.al, 2020; Lindberg & Forsberg, 2010; Tholin, 2006).

In attempts to conclude these parts, it is seen that there is a need for improved summative assessment methods. As there is a lot of freedom with grading today, grades fluctuate and can depend on different criteria both within schools but also within classrooms. This especially occurs in early primary school years as it is difficult to standardize young developing children and for them to understand the evaluation without increasing their stress and showing that grades are most important. Grades increase feelings of accomplishment but can also increase the lowering of confidence and the pupils' trust in their own abilities which will shape how they will approach grading and testing later on in their education. It is therefore important that grading criteria is carefully reasoned to fit the appropriate age or reconsidered as a form of assessment method if it does not serve any beneficial purposes rather than simplifying knowledge levels.

In the end, I have been able to showcase the issues regarding grading in primary school years and made it visible that there is a need for further research on the subject. Especially in terms of pupil's feelings and ideas as this was the most difficult part to find already existing reliable research on. Teachers have often spoken up regarding grading early in education, but there have not been many interviews done with primary school pupils who are currently in grades lower than six. Meaning that there is a large number of voices missing on the topic.

If there are crucial voices missing from the discussion it can cause lacking in the improvement of summative and formative assessment as collaborative assessment methods.

It would be ignorant to state that grades should be dismissed completely as it is and has always been a big part of Swedish primary education. But it could be concluded that it needs to be carefully considered if it is a method used to develop learning or if it is used to as a tool to showcase accomplishments. The approach and intention of grading can prove to be vital for the educational views of grading and assessment for everyone who is included in primary school education.

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