"It is in the head"

A case study: two teachers of English at upper secondary level in Sweden discuss and demonstrate how they assess and correct written texts

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Author: Marie Fritzell

Abstract

This study is a result of trying to grasp what teachers look at when they assess writing. The motive is to better understand what goes on inside a teacher’s mind when correcting a written piece of work and to raise the level of awareness of what teachers actually do. Background information as to what the teachers support their assessment on and how they acquired their “correcting skills” is also treated. The study brings up both what teachers say and what teachers do. It is an exploratory and open ended investigation. To perform this exploration a qualitative method is used. Interviews with open questions and observations of the assessment situation with think aloud protocols are performed. Examples of the teachers’ real life marking in students written texts are also considered.

The findings show that teachers possess an intuition based on knowledge which has been constructed by themselves and that they cannot depict easily. Their own awareness of what they do seems to be mixed with what they would like to do at occasions. Linguistic topics such as morphology, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling and idiomaticity are considered by both teachers showing that surface errors are of importance. Coherence and thematic treatment are also taken into consideration when teachers assess but the way they value these aspects together with views on what writing is, what communication is together with other possible choices shows that correction and assessing is highly subjective. In addition, this study points at the possibility that a teacher progresses from analytic to holistic with time and that writing as a process is more valid when a teacher becomes more experienced.
Thank you,
Veronica,
for believing and inspiring, there should be one of you for every single person on earth.

Lily,

my light.

Boris,

my rock.
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Might not the philosopher elevate himself above faith in grammar?

Friedrich Nietzsche
1. Introduction

When you write any little piece of text, be it a shopping list, a reminder-note or a short poem, have you ever stopped to think of what it really implies? What are those funny little characters we produce and what skills do we have to acquire to perform such a seemingly trivial act? Writing might seem as a matter of course to us all but what IS writing?

Well, writing began when humans started to express themselves with images. Cave paintings of animals and humans decorated the walls of our forefathers. When the images alone could no longer explicitly depict what we wanted to communicate, writing developed. Abstract phenomena, such as power and justice, or complicated messages where one wants to state or declare something require a more elaborate system of symbols. (Säljö, 2008:163,167).

Thus, writing evolved and today it is not only a means of communication but also a tool of power. It is a central part of our culture and is an essential requirement for being able to participate in today’s society. Writing is also a means to creativity and a way to achieve new perspectives on thinking and reasoning (Säljö, 2008:157). It can change the way we look upon the world.

As teachers, do we want to enhance creativity and let students find these new ways of thinking and reasoning, or is it all about “trimming the hedges” when we assess a text? Are we just looking for surface errors such as misspelled words, wrong word order or misplaced commas to make everything neat and tidy, or do we concentrate on content such as variation, context and genre? Should we let the students take risks, explore new perspectives and freely express what they want to say or should we make sure that their language is accurate?

When I read through the three hundred pages of Yule’s The Study of Language (2012) - or any other textbook on language - and all the linguistic topics that are covered I get overwhelmed. Is it possible to pay attention to all these key elements of language such as morphology, grammar, syntax, semantics and pragmatics, as well as the content when correcting a written piece of work? Then I start thinking: “how am I going to approach writing as a teacher? What am I supposed to correct when I have to assess a student’s written work?” I ask all of you out there that are in teacher training, “How should we as teachers think when it comes to evaluating students writing: What are we assessing? Why? and How?”

Well that is what I want to find out in this study.
1.1 Aim and purpose

Through two in-depth interviews with practicing teachers of English at upper secondary level the purpose of this exploration is to:

- gain a deeper understanding of what teachers are looking for when they assess a written text.
- to raise the level of awareness of what teachers actually do when they correct writing; it is a venture into the mind of the teacher.
- improve my own knowledge of assessment practices.

Using a case study approach, the aim of the investigation is to:

- explore the line of thought of two teachers of ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) during their correction of a piece of learner writing.
- learn about their views on, and their practical approach to why, what and how they correct and assess writing.
- gain background understanding as to how they feel about assessing writing, what they support their assessment on and how they came to acquire their “correcting-skills”.

I have chosen to use a more informal tone in this essay addressing myself directly to the reader.

1.2 Definition of terms

There are many terms used in connection with the pedagogical world and they may be interpreted differently. Here we will briefly touch upon some terms that are used in this essay.

1.2.1 FL, L2 and ESOL

This essay focuses on writing associated with foreign-language (FL) learning. Traditionally the term FL is used when the target language is taught in a first language environment, such as English in Swedish schools. In the case of immigrants learning the language of the new country, the term used would be second language (L2). However, L2 is sometimes used in a more general way and then includes all other languages learned besides the first language (L1) (Wray, 2012:46).
In many cases the term ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) is now used instead of the terms EFL (English as a Foreign Language) and ESL (English as a Second Language). Globalization has made the distinction between EFL and ESL less clear and the situations and settings where students learn English today are not always typical of either FL or L2.

1.2.2 Assessment and correction

In this essay the term “assessment” – if not otherwise indicated- is to be understood as a way of documenting a student’s language ability in relation to predetermined goals (Lundahl 2012:484) or to specific criteria. On the other hand, “correction” is used in a broader sense and includes the teacher’s rectification of errors in a student’s written text and the comments made by the teacher.

All the concepts related to assessment and correction, which are treated below, are put in italics throughout chapter 4. Results and Discussion. This to make the analysis more transparent for the layman.

1.2 Literature review

The aim of this study is to explore the line of thoughts of teachers during their correction of a written piece of work. It is an attempt to enter the teacher’s mind and try to reveal what teachers actually do when correcting. It is also an investigation of their views on why, what and how they correct and assess writing and how they feel about it.

The review of the literature reveals that previous research on assessment and correction tends to be mainly concerned with giving teachers advice on how to assess. For example, in a Lithuanian study that addresses learners’ perceptions of correction they claim that teachers should not grade written assignments as it discourages students from taking risks (Kavaliauskiene, 2003). Another study though, besides giving recommendations on how to give feedback, tries to explain why grammar correction is not effective and gives some practical advice concerning what to look for, but it is still just advice (Gray, 2004).

Additionally there are a number of reports concerned with teachers’ views on error gravity and error definition which partly deals with what teachers look at. However, they are mainly concerned with identification of surface errors. Two examples of this are studies made by Vann, Meyer & Lorenz (1984) and McCretton & Rider (1993) where they elaborate on ranking orders of errors. McCretton & Rider (1993) conclude that there is no universal
hierarchy; that it depends on “the subjects’ own educational training” but they still give an “absolute hierarchy”: concord, verb forms, prepositions, word order, negation, spelling and lexis. Vann, Meyer & Lorenz (1984) reach a similar conclusion but also makes a list, although with another ranking order: word order, It-deletion, tense, relative clauses, word choice, subject-verb, pronoun agreement, prepositions, spelling-2 (serious misspelling), comma splice, articles, and spelling-1. Salem (2007) also tries to produce a hierarchy of errors but on a lexical-grammatical continuum and with the conclusion that “errors possess various degrees of ‘word sensitivity’” (2007:218).

Eirlys Davies (1983) concentrates on how teachers’ viewpoints colour the evaluation of errors and concludes that both the teacher’s competence and familiarity with the learner may affect how an error is valued. Icy Lee (2008) collected texts from secondary teachers for a feedback analysis, executed a survey on error feedback and performed follow-up interviews and found mismatches between teachers’ beliefs and practices concerning written feedback.

While Davies’s (1983) study of teachers’ viewpoints and Icy Lee’s (2008) investigation on teachers’ written feedback in relation to their beliefs are briefly concerned with the theme of this particular study, there is no naturalistic observation on what teachers actually do when they correct and/or assess writing. An extensive investigation in America, almost a decade long, deals with classroom assessment from the teacher’s viewpoint but it concerns assessment in general, and focuses on assessment tools -mostly tests- and the purpose of the assessment (Stiggins, Faires, 1992). Even if it enters the teacher’s world and describes its reality, it does not really enter the teacher’s mind. It seems that there is a gap that we need to fill.

2. Background

This section is divided into four parts: firstly the aspects of what writing is will be explored and then the reason for assessment and types of assessment will be studied. After this, the Swedish syllabus for English and the requirements for the Swedish National test will be investigated to find out what teachers should look at when correcting writing, and finally light will be shed upon the practical ways of correcting.
2.1 What is writing?

As mentioned in the Introduction, writing is not just about producing “graphic symbols” (Byrne, 1991:1). There is much more involved in the process. It is also important to mention that writing is not something that can be acquired without effort. It has to be consciously learnt (Yule, 2012:212). In the Swedish school system, writing is regarded as one of the four language skills, the others being listening, reading and speaking.

2.1.1 Process or product

Writing can be seen as a product or a process. When regarded only a product, there is no room for a student’s writing to “grow”. Students are given a topic to write about and their work is marked and graded. Writing as a process is more of a constant discussion and reflection on one’s writing with the support of the teacher and/or peers (Harmer, 2012:325-326). No matter what, there will always be a finished product that has to work as a coherent and comprehensible text. Lundahl (2012:284) mentions aspects that mark a comprehensible text: the content should be relevant and hold the attention of the reader, it should be well structured, coherent and cohesive, and linguistically correct.

2.1.2 Social and cultural aspects

Writing is also a social and a cultural phenomenon. As a social phenomenon, the context, purpose and audience (or recipient) have to be taken into consideration when writing. The choice of genre is a social aspect (Cushing, 2011:19, 20, 38). The cultural viewpoint includes variations in the “rhetorical patterns” (ibid: 2); these can be literary devices, such as alliteration. Culture also plays a part when looking at coherence. Cushing (2011:36) states that a second-language learner might encounter some difficulties in writing because of cultural and social factors. This includes aspects such as the appropriate way to express something and the readers’ expectations.

Byrne (1991:1) argues that writing “involves the encoding of a message”, that our thoughts are translated into the text and that the reader has to “decode” this message. As the reader might not be known to us, the writing we produce has to be understood without any further explanations.

This brings us to a specific concept: Communicative competence, which has been integrated in the Swedish curriculum as well as in the majority of European countries through the CEFR
The Common European Framework of References for languages: Learning, Teaching, Assessment is the full name of a complete guide created by the Council of Europe that “provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe” (Council of Europe, 2001:1).

2.1.3 Communicative competence

Hymes (1970 cited in Lundahl, 2012:139) considered language to be a social phenomenon and coined the expression “communicative competence” in the seventies. Yule (2012:194) defines communicative competence as an “ability to use language accurately, appropriately, and flexibly”.

In the field of investigation today, many scholars believe that communicative language ability consists of two aspects: Language knowledge and Strategic competence. What each of these aspects involves is formulated differently by different researchers. Bachman and Palmer, and later on Douglas, (1996, 2000 cited in Cushing, 2011:42) divide “Language knowledge” into grammatical (vocabulary, morphology, syntax, phonology), textual (cohesion, rhetorical organization), functional (ideas, manipulation, imagination) and sociolinguistic (dialects, register, idiomatic expressions, cultural references) knowledge. On the other hand “Strategic competence” should be thought of as metacognitive strategies which are not language specific. Strategic competence is more about the appropriate way of using our language so we are able to communicate what we want. It functions as “the link between one’s language and the external situation” (Cushing, 2011:42).

Canale and Swain (1980 cited in Lundahl, 2012:139) divide the concept of communicative competence into three components: Grammatical competence (vocabulary, word formation, morphology, syntax, and phonology), Strategic competence (reformulation, questions, body language) and Sociolinguistic competence. Sociolinguistic competence is further divided into Sociocultural competence (what language to use in a specific context) and Discourse competence (coherence, cohesion, implicatures).

The CEFR makes references to another model:

Linguistic competences include lexical, phonological, syntactical knowledge and skills […] relates not only to the range and quality of knowledge (e.g. in terms of phonetic distinctions made or the extent and precision of vocabulary) but also to cognitive organisation and the way this knowledge is stored (e.g. the various associative networks in which the speaker places a lexical item) and to its accessibility (activation, recall and availability) […]
**Sociolinguistic competences** refer to the sociocultural conditions of language use. Through its sensitivity to social conventions (rules of politeness, norms governing relations between generations, sexes, classes and social groups, linguistic codification of certain fundamental rituals in the functioning of a community) the sociolinguistic component strictly affects all language communication between representatives of different cultures. […] **Pragmatic competences** are concerned with the functional use of linguistic resources (production of language functions, speech acts), drawing on scenarios or scripts of interactional exchanges. It also concerns the mastery of discourse, cohesion and coherence, the identification of text types and forms, irony, and parody. For this component even more than the linguistic component, it is hardly necessary to stress the major impact of interactions and cultural environments in which such abilities are constructed (Council of Europe, 2001:13)

The Swedish assessment system does not specifically state any model for *communicative competence* although the syllabus for English states that the students should develop all-round *communicative skills* (Skolverket, 2011b:53).

### 2.2 Why do we assess?

As stated earlier, assessment is all about ways to document a specific student’s language ability in relation to predetermined goals (Lundahl, 2012: 484). We now need to consider this aspect in more detail.

#### 2.2.1 For what reason?

Assessment can be used for a number of purposes. Harmer (2012:379) discusses three reasons why evaluation and assessment take place: as a measurement of students’ abilities (for selection motives), as a means to see how well they are getting on or as “a qualification” requested by the students themselves.

Cushing (2011:140-148) says a *proficiency check* can be one motive; another could be to gain *data for admission decisions*. Pettersson (2009:31) elaborates on these two views further by comparing the former to a driving licence test which evaluates someone’s aptitude to drive, and the latter to the Swedish Högskoleprovet which evaluates someone for selection purposes. These views are connected to *norm- and criterion-referencing* which are mentioned in section 2.2.2.

Jönsson (2011:5) states that the purpose of assessment should be to facilitate a student’s learning. However, assessment as a method of selection, the purpose of which is to categorise students is still very much present in schools today. These aspects are connected to *formative* and *summative assessment* which also will be treated below.
2.2.2 Assessment types

There is a great diversity of assessment types and to better understand the complexity of evaluation some of them are outlined below. The CEFR has summarized the major assessment types but only the ones that we find relevant to why we assess will be discussed below (printed in bold type in the table).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Type</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Achievement assessment</td>
<td>Proficiency assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Norm-referencing (NR)</td>
<td>Criterion-referencing (CR)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mastery learning CR</td>
<td>Continuum CR</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Continuous assessment</td>
<td>Fixed assessment points</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Formative assessment</td>
<td>Summative assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Direct assessment</td>
<td>Indirect assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Performance assessment</td>
<td>Knowledge assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Subjective assessment</td>
<td>Objective assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Checklist rating</td>
<td>Performance rating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Impression</td>
<td>Guided judgment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Holistic assessment</td>
<td>Analytic assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Series assessment</td>
<td>Category assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Assessment by others</td>
<td>Self-assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Achievement assessment evaluates what has been taught. It relates to the syllabus and the content of a course. It often measures progress. Teachers can also use it to get feedback for their teaching. Proficiency assessment measures a person’s general knowledge. It shows someone’s “real world ability” (Council of Europe, 2001:184). The Writing part of the Swedish National test is a proficiency test (see 2.3.2). Continuous assessment and Fixed point assessment can be explained in more or less the same terms but have more connection to HOW we correct. Continuous assessment is when all the work during a period is taken in to consideration for evaluation purposes. Fixed point assessment is when an examination takes place at an appointed time and stresses a “here and now knowledge” (Council of Europe, 2001:185).

Norm-referencing means that a learner’s ability is compared to his/her peers. The learners are put in a “rank order”. This can be in relation to the class or to a demographic feature. Criterion-referencing means that a learner “is assessed purely in terms of his/her [individual]
ability in the subject” (Council of Europe, 2001:183-184). The Swedish system of assessment and grading is criterion-referenced. Formative assessment enhances the process of learning using feedback and feedforward. Summative assessment sums up achieved criteria and focuses on grading. It is norm-referenced, fixed point, achievement assessment (Council of Europe, 2001:186). These two aspects are also called assessment for learning and assessment of learning (Lundahl, 2012:485). Summative and formative assessment might not differ in the way they look, the difference lies in the way the information in the assessment is used: to promote students’ learning or not (Jönsson, 2011:137). In the supportive material produced by Skolverket it is indicated that summative and formative assessment can and should be used together (2011:17).

Holistic assessment is an overall evaluation of a piece of work while analytic assessment “is looking at different aspects separately” (Council of Europe, 2001:190). When using a holistic approach, general qualities of writing proficiency are emphasized as: if the text addresses the topic, if there is syntactic variety or if it is adequately organized for the specific level. It focuses on the strengths of the writings. In the analytic approach features of e.g. organization, vocabulary and grammar are reflected on in more detail. This provides diagnostic information about a student’s abilities (Cushing Weigle, 2011:112-114). Both approaches are possible to use with a scoring rubric (Lundahl, 2012:509).

2.2.3 Validity and reliability

When talking about assessment, principles of reliability and validity enter the scene. They are not only involved with why but also with what and how we assess. As we will continue with the other two themes below, it seems appropriate to bring up these aspects here.

We talk about validity when we want to know that what is meant to be assessed really is assessed, i.e. that the form in which something is assessed is related to the purpose of the assessment and to the ability, competence or knowledge that is to be measured (Lundahl, 2012:497). It is about interpretation of scores (Stecher et al. 1997:39). Jönsson (2011:60-64) mentions three aspects of validity to have in mind: firstly, assessment should be based on the syllabus and the knowledge requirements, secondly, only what is relevant in relation to the knowledge requirement should be assessed and ultimately, the knowledge should be assessed with a variety of methods. Reliability means that the assessment is consistent, reliable and just (Lundahl, 2012:501). It is about measurement. Stecher et al (1997:37) considers facts such as:
if a test was given again would the results be the same? Would different teachers correct the same way and give the same scores? Is it fair to all students? Feasibility is another principle and concerns practical approaches to the assessment such as time and amount of work.

2.3 What do we assess?

As teachers we have to base our assessment on the knowledge requirements stated in the syllabus for our subject, as we will see below. When it comes to the correction of writing, however, what are we supposed to lay emphasis on, what are we actually looking at?

2.3.1 Errors

Julian Edge (1989 cited in Harmer, 2012: 137) divides mistakes in to three categories: “slips” - mistakes possible for students to correct themselves, “errors”- mistakes not possible to correct without explanation, and “attempts”- when a student attempts to say something but they are not able to use the correct form (Harmer, 2012:137). He argues that errors are the main concern for teachers but also that attempts works as indicators of a student’s knowledge.

In the CEFR, an error is when “the performance accords with his competence” and a mistake “does not bring his competence properly into action” (Council of Europe, 2001:150). This is the same explanation given by Byrne (1991:124) saying that errors are made when students try to do something they are not able to do and mistakes are “slips of some kind” due to a physical or psychological reason. Here he stresses that errors can never be corrected by the students themselves but that there is no reason for them not to try to correct their mistakes on their own.

A number of studies discuss and debate error gravity and different hierarchies in combination with teachers’ view points. They are all mostly research on sentence-level and point at many distinct results (see 1.3). The views on errors also vary from teacher to teacher. One conclusion to be drawn from this is that there is no use in searching for a hierarchy of errors; as Albrechtsen, Henriksen and Faerch say: “all errors are equally irritating […] irritation is directly predictable from the number of errors regardless of the error type or other linguistic aspects” ( 1980 cited in Vann, Meyer & Lorenz 1984:428).

This subjective approach to errors seems to be formally accepted by the CEFR, and as the CEFR is the central point of reference for the Swedish school system, it should be taken into consideration.
Users of the Framework may wish to consider and where appropriate state their attitude to and action in response to learner errors and mistakes and whether the same or different criteria apply to:

- phonetic errors and mistakes;
- orthographic errors and mistakes;
- vocabulary errors and mistakes;
- morphological errors and mistakes;
- syntactic errors and mistakes;
- sociolinguistic and sociocultural errors and mistakes;
- pragmatic errors and mistakes. (Council of Europe. 2001:156)

2.3.2 Syllabus, the National test and Skolverket

The Swedish assessment system is criterion-referenced (see 2.2.2) and it is expressed through knowledge requirements in the syllabi (Lundahl, 2012:490).

The course syllabus for English contains five long-term goals of abilities that the students should have the opportunity to develop. Four of these are connected to writing:

2) The ability to express oneself and communicate in English in speech and writing.
3) The ability to use different language strategies in different contexts.
4) The ability to adapt language to different purposes, recipients and situations.
5) The ability to discuss and reflect on living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used (Skolverket, 2011b)

The knowledge requirements for written production and interaction for English 5, 6 and 7 are based on the same pattern throughout the scale of grades:

English 5. Grade E

In oral and written communications of various genres, students can express themselves in relatively varied ways, relatively clearly and relatively coherently. Students can express themselves with some fluency and to some extent adapted to purpose, recipient and situation. Students work on and make improvements to their own communications.

In oral and written interaction in various, and more formal contexts, students can express themselves clearly and with some fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. In addition, students can choose and use essentially functional strategies which to some extent solve problems and improve their interaction

English 6. Grade A

In oral and written communications of various genres, students can express themselves in ways that are varied, clear, coherent and structured. Students can also express themselves with fluency and some adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. Students work on and make well grounded and balanced improvements to their own communications.

In oral and written interaction in various, and more formal contexts, students express themselves clearly, relative freely and with fluency, and also with adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation. In addition, students can choose and use well functioning strategies to solve problems and improve their interaction, and take it forward in a constructive way (Skolverket, 2011b)
The focus lies on: communication of various genres and interaction in various contexts; express oneself in varied, clear, coherent and structured ways; freely and with fluency; with adaptation to purpose, recipient and situation; and ultimately, solve problems make improvements and use strategies.

The steering documents lay stress upon assessment of communicative competence which is a broad and indefinable concept that has to be divided into smaller constituents in order to be assessed (Lundahl, 2012:492). The definition of communicative competence in the syllabus for English is that it consists of reception, production and interaction; i.e. to understand spoken and written language, to express oneself in speech and writing and to adapt the language to different situations, purposes and recipients (Skolverket, 2011b:53-63).

The definition of communicative competence is further explained on Skolverket’s website where knowledge about cultural codes and expressions in formal and informal situations is part of the concept as well as vocabulary, phraseology, pronunciation, prosody, spelling and grammar. The text also explicitly refers to a broader definition of the concept to be found in the CEFR (Skolverket, 2011c).

Strategies as a part of the communicative competence are also mentioned and defined through the CEFR as “A strategy is any organised, purposeful and regulated line of action chosen by an individual to carry out a task which he or she sets for himself or herself or with which he or she is confronted” (Skolverket, 2011c).

Spada (2007:271) mentions that CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) is commonly looked upon as a meaning-based approach and that: “fluency is given priority over accuracy and the emphasis is on the comprehension and production of messages, not to the teaching or correction of language form”. On the other hand, there are teachers who use a meaning-based approach paying attention to both fluency and accuracy thus making a distinction between CLT with attention to language form and CLT without attention to form i.e. a “weak” version of CLT (attention to language form) and a “strong” version (Howat, 1984, quoted by Spada, 2007). There is no mention of accuracy in the Swedish steering documents, but an emphasis on fluency which points at a “strong” communicative syllabus.
To get closer to the different components of *communicative competence* and to comprehend which they are according to the Swedish school system, it is possible to look at the assessment instructions for *the National test of English*. The National test is a *proficiency test* (see 2.2.2) that evaluates a student’s general language knowledge independently of where, when and how the knowledge was acquired. Its purpose is to support teachers in their assessment and grading (Lundahl, 2012:490).

The tests are not made to be used in admission decisions nor are they a final examination that determines a student’s final grade. They are supposed to be a means to support “an equal and just assessment and grading” and to “provide a basis for an analysis of the extent to which knowledge requirements are met at school level, at authority level and at national level” (author’s translation) (Skolverket 2011d). The teacher has the ultimate authority when giving the final grade, which makes their assessment of vital importance.

The National tests at upper secondary level, English 5 and 6, consist of four parts. Part C is called “Focus: writing” and besides references to the syllabus for English, the guidelines for assessment of the test state certain elements that come with a *communicative competence*. These elements can differ from year to year but on the test constructors’ website (Demaret, Marianne, 2011) you can find a general example of them. They have been divided and placed under two sub-headings and are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content</th>
<th>Language and ability to express oneself</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clarity</td>
<td>fluency and ability to express oneself freely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fullness and variation</td>
<td>communicative strategies, e.g. reformulations, explanations and clarification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- different examples and perspectives</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>context and structure</td>
<td>range, variation, (complexity, only Eng.6), clarity and security</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- vocabulary, phraseology and idiomaticity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- syntax, cohesion and structure,</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- grammatical structures</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>- spelling and punctuation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>adaptation to purpose, recipient, situation</td>
<td>adaptation to purpose, recipient, situation and genre.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and genre</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Demaret, 2011)

Once again *fluency* is given priority and not *accuracy*, thus pointing towards a strong communicative approach.
This gives a deeper understanding of what teachers are supposed to assess, but that is as far as it gets. There are no more specific features for teachers to use as resources when it comes to assessing *communicative competence*; they would have to use a theoretical model and themselves break up the language proficiency into smaller pieces (Lundahl, 2012:497). Lundahl (ibid:497) states that the CEFR is a natural reference point for the Swedish system, as it is for the rest of Europe and teachers should consequently use the definition of *communicative competence* made by it.

### 2.3.3 The CEFR

As Skolverket is influenced by the CEFR it is relevant to use it as a reference in this study, as we have done so far, and to bring up the areas of language competences mentioned in the CEFR document (as was done in section 2.1.3). The document goes on to divide the *communicative competence* into even more detailed components. However, the explanation given in section 2.1.3 is sufficient for this investigation.

The CEFR further comments that regardless of the method used when assessing, in order to make the process feasible, the number of categories have to be limited to a maximum of four or five. The choice has to be made by the teacher. The CEFR states some categories that can be useful when it comes to assessing writing:

- Fluency
- Flexibility
- Coherence
- Thematic development
- Precision
- Sociolinguistic competence
- General range
- Vocabulary range
- Grammatical accuracy
- Vocabulary control

In any practical approach […] such a list of categories would be approached selectively. Features need to be combined, renamed and reduced into a smaller set of assessment criteria appropriate to the needs of the learners concerned, to the requirements of the assessment task concerned and to the style of the pedagogic culture concerned (Council of Europe, 2001:193)
2.4 How do we assess?

There are a variety of ways to correct linguistic errors in a student’s written work and I believe they reflect a teacher’s attitude towards the errors. Rod Ellis has put together a table of typology of written corrective feedback types and I will try to outline some of them here together with Harmer’s views on correcting and marking. In addition, scoring rubrics, checklists and other possible “tools” are investigated.

2.4.1. Corrective feedback (c.f.) types

Direct corrective feedback means that the teacher gives the correct form to the student, and if it is indirect c.f. the teacher indicates an error but does not correct it. There are two ways of marking within indirect feedback: you indicate and locate the error by underlining it, or you indicate in the margin that there is an error in the line of text but do not point it out. When using a metalinguistic c.f. the teacher gives a clue related to the nature of the error. There are two different approaches: the use of codes written in the margin or a “grammatical description” where each error is numbered and later described at the bottom of the text. Another important area is the focus of the feedback which is to do with if the teacher corrects all errors or just some specific errors, this view can be used in all the types of c.f. above mentioned. The point is that either you use an unfocused c.f. i.e. correction of all the errors, or a focused c.f. i.e. selected errors. One interesting way of correcting is the use of electronic feedback: a teacher indicates an error and adds a hyperlink to a file with correct examples (Ellis, 2008:98).

2.4.2 Comments and codes

Harmer (2012:147-148) talks about the two different approaches to writing, process or product (see 2.1.1), and that we either respond or correct depending on which view we choose. When responding we comment on the positive things and suggest improvements where needed, we can also write reformulations as a way to let students discover more about language. The comments can be written in the margin or on a separate piece of paper.

When correcting, a code or a symbol can be used and is usually a letter that refers to a specific error e.g. S, meaning there is a spelling error. A symbol can also be a question mark or brackets. In order to make use of symbols, the students have to be trained. Harmer says that correction codes or symbols are less threatening than comments; when using comments
Harmer suggests a “praise-recommendation procedure” i.e giving praise before suggesting improvements (2012, 139,147).

Harmer (2012:151) also mentions that the use of different error codes and tailoring them to the task and level is possible, e.g. making shorter lists of possible errors. He further says that “we do not need to correct everything all the time” and that choosing areas of correction, such as spelling or layout, can be more effective.

2.4.3 Measurement tools

Scoring rubrics are frequently mentioned when discussing assessment. They are a simple way to evaluate a student’s progress but they can also be useful for analysis and improvement of teaching (Jönsson, 2012:121). As stated earlier, rubrics can be holistic (all-embracing categories) or analytic (divided into single criteria) (see 2.2.2). Rubrics can be designed for a certain task and are then specific. They can also be general, discussing specific competences, and can be used over a longer period of time (Jönsson, 2011:68).

A scoring rubric needs to contain scale descriptors. In Sweden they should be based on the knowledge requirements of the syllabus (Skolverket, 2011a:41). Descriptive rating scales are mentioned by the CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001:180) and are to be used as a reference to a proficiency level.

Skolverket (2011a:42) mentions that working with student examples together with the criteria is an alternative way of evaluation. Lundahl (2012:508) also talks about an example text as a support for the student. He further says that checklists can be used in combination with a rubric to make it easier for the students.

The CEFR (Council of Europe, 2001: 189) refers to checklists when discussing assessment and says that when performing a Checklist rating a list of points, or areas, are used to see how many of them the learner has been able to manage.

Ultimately the use of Impression must be mentioned; impression is a subjective estimation, without any criteria or guideline, based on reflections on performances made in the classroom. Guided judgement is the same as Impression but together with an activity of assessment or with the use of criteria/points to support the impressions (Council of Europe, 2001: 189).
3. Research Methodology

As the aim of this study was to try to understand how upper secondary teachers think, a qualitative approach was used. A qualitative approach focuses on reality as something subjective and individual; the interest lies in looking into how people interpret their reality (Backman, 2011:53).

In a case study, the everyday experience within a certain area is in focus (Backman, 2011:55). In general, a small number of individuals are taken into consideration as the individual behaviour is the focal point in this kind of study. A case study is appropriate if “the phenomenon being observed is so complex that a variety of different kinds of data is needed to gain a full picture” (Wray and Bloomer, 2012:181). The collection of data may include different techniques. In this investigation interviews and observations have been used.

To collect the necessary data, an explicit approach was used which means that the purpose of the investigation was made very clear and explained directly to the participants. The advantage of such an approach is that it helps the respondent to trust us. On the other hand, the respondents might give an answer that they think would be the “right” answer just to please us (Wray and Bloomer, 2012:167).

3.1 Participants

The target of this investigation was upper secondary teachers of ESOL. Two teachers from two separate schools participated and were selected on the basis of accessibility rather than on specific criteria. Thus, neither age nor nationality, or experience was considered in the selection of teachers. The respondents are labelled Sven and Andy to preserve their anonymity.

Sven is male and was born in 1961 and was 51 years old when participating in the interview. He completed his teacher training in 1988 and has been working as an upper secondary teacher since then. He teaches English and Swedish. He has worked at four separate schools and has been at his present post since 1997. Together with some colleagues, he started a Natural Science Programme in 2004 where they use an interdisciplinary approach to teaching. He has also been teaching students in teacher training at a university and received “Natur och Kulturs stora lärarpris” some years ago.
Andy is male and was born in 1972 and was 40 years old when participating. He is originally from England and has lived in Sweden since 2006. Andy graduated in January 2013 from a teacher training program and has been working as an upper secondary teacher for the past two years. He teaches English and Psychology.

### 3.2 Interview

A qualitative interview gives the respondent the opportunity to respond with his/her own words. The aim of this type of interview is to discover characteristics and learn more about the respondent’s everyday perceptions. It gives a wider view of the respondent’s world (Patel and Davidson, 2011:81-83). In a qualitative interview there are no “right answers”, therefore, open questions are used; open questions give the respondent “a chance to talk [...] at length” (Wray and Bloomer, 2012:167).

The questions in an interview can be more or less structured and more or less standardized. A highly standardized and structured interview means that the questions are fixed in both structure and order and there is no room for extensive answers (Patel Davidson, 75-76). The approach in this study is less structured and standardized, thus, the use of open questions.

#### 3.2.1 Questions

The idea of using interviews was to try to get inside the teachers’ minds so the use of fixed or direct questions were not of main concern, although some guiding questions were outlined to be used as a means to control the conversation. The questions followed the conversation and could therefore be altered, exchanged or rearranged.

**Introductory question**

- How do you feel about assessing writing?

**What/why**

- What do you look for (incorrect verb tenses, spelling, content, etc)?
- What errors are most serious, is there a hierarchy?
- What do you mark? Can some errors be overlooked?

**How/why**

- What do you support your assessment on, criteria, checklist, intuition?
- How do you mark when correcting?
- How do you think you acquired your “correcting-skills”? Did you get any training?

**N.T.**

- How do you work with the National tests?
3.3 Observation

The study of behaviour in a natural setting and in the moment when it occurs is best done through an observation (Patel and Davidson, 2011:91). The appropriate way to study a teacher’s line of thought correcting a piece of written work would be in a natural situation; during a routine activity. Thus Friedman (2012:182) states that the researcher shouldn’t design tasks for the participant to perform as it might “manipulate variables”. Unfortunately, due to the difficulty of finding participants, there were no convenient moments to observe correction of writing in a naturalistic way. Instead it had to be carried out as a part of the interview process thus making it a non-naturalistic observation.

3.3.1 Think aloud protocol

Thinking aloud is a method where a participant articulates what he or she is thinking out loud while performing a task. The subject is not supposed to give any explanation or interpretation of the spoken thoughts. They should just express whatever comes into mind. It is a way to capture the thought process and interruptions should be avoided (van Someren, Barnard and Sandberg, 1994:26). In this study, the thinking aloud process was recorded and later analysed by the interviewer.

3.4 Procedure and analysis of data

As stated earlier, an explicit approach was used, which means that the participants were informed of what the content of the interview/observation would be and of the aim of the study. They were contacted by e-mail and a date was agreed for the interviews. Both teachers were interviewed at their workplace, i.e. at two upper secondary schools in a Swedish town, but on two separate occasions.

Sven arranged for our meeting to be set in the teachers’ common room where the coffee machine was placed. Andy arranged for his interview to take place in a pre-booked conference room. In that way, the meetings took place in a secure environment where the participants could feel confident.

Each one of the interviews began with a cup of coffee offered by the teacher so we could comfortably address the topic. The recorder was then placed on the table between the interviewer and the interviewee. Both teachers had previously given their approval to be recorded. The first interview lasted for approximately one and a half hours and the second one
for one hour. Almost the whole first hour of the first interview (Sven) was transcribed and the second (Andy) in most of its entirety. The transcription was carried out according to Wray and Bloomers’ (2012:193-204) guide on transcription and was completed in one week.

As a direct connection to the interview, the teachers were asked to read a student’s essay and try to articulate their line of thought out loud as they corrected the text. The initial intention was to provide the interviewees with a newly composed piece of student writing, but, unfortunately, shortage of time made this impossible. Thus, a copy of a student’s already corrected essay from a National test for English 6 from 2012 was used for this part of the study (appendix 1). The original comments were deleted together with the grade, but sixteen underlines were still visible in the text.

Swedish schools are advised to file all the completed National tests for five years. The tests are public documents. This made a student’s essay from the National test the second best choice for the observations as it is composed by a real student and the instructions given are connected to the Swedish syllabus.

As the correction of the essay did not take place in a natural situation, and no physical marking took place, the participants were asked to send me copies of their “real” marking and grading of students’ texts. In this way, the correction made during the interview could be compared with a correction made in a real life situation. Three example texts were provided by Sven and two by Andy.

All data was later submitted to analysis through a phenomenographic approach. A phenomenographic approach means that the researcher reads through and classifies the material until patterns are discovered. The purpose is to find out how a phenomenon is perceived by an individual, not to uncover a certain “truth”. Thus, I first got “acquainted” with the data, and secondly, I tried to identify similarities and differences. Next, I categorised the participants’ conceptions of assessment and correction and I tried to establish an internal structure of these categories (Patel and Davidson, 2011:32, 33). Accordingly, the categories were put in relation to each other, and the results of this study are the categories of description mainly related to the how, what and why concepts.
4. Results and Discussion

In this chapter, I will present my findings and the analysis of the material. It will be a combination of the two interviews and my interpretation of them together with the two observations and again my interpretation. Quotes by the respondents will be used to concretize the result. Statements that have been made in Swedish have been kept in their original form but a direct translation or summary of the quotes have also been included and are put between brackets. The reason for leaving the statements in their original form is that the hesitations, pauses and repetitions are of value as they depict the difficulty the participant sometimes had when expressing his thoughts. Therefore the quotes might be perceived as less fluent than the rest of the text. A discussion of the findings will be held continuously throughout the pages of this section.

4.1 What did they say?

Both participants mentioned that they had not received any training “at all” or “very little” in how to correct or assess writing. They have gathered information as to how to do it in three various ways: they have used whatever knowledge they got from their teacher training, they have been inspired by other people, be it colleagues or researchers, and they have taught themselves. This was expressed very clearly by one of the participants:

I use, what I’ve, what I’ve learned at university, as well as what I’ve learned from my colleagues, as well as what I’ve, eh, read myself if I need to eh, look at literature to gai, eh, gaining extra knowledge (Andy)

They also acknowledge the fact that they are continually learning.

This seems to point at teachers as autodidact in the area of correcting writing. It means that they have constructed their own knowledge about correcting which makes it unquestionably subjective. It also shows that they need to have a willingness to learn and to improve themselves as well as to be open to suggestions from others,

This could be the reason for why they find it difficult, as stated very openly by Sven:

jag tycker det är rätt svårt, jag, jag har liksom, jag har ju nånstans… jag tycker aldrig att jag egentligen har fått till det här bra. (Sven has a difficulty finding the right words, repeating and reformulating himself “I think, I have, it is difficult,” saying in the end that he has not really got a hang of it)
4.1.1 It is in the head, sort of (How)

"Would that be some kind of intuition [...]" (interviewer)

"nej, nej det tycker jag inte, men jag är ju, tror inte att vi med, alltså jag tror att vi har varit dåliga på att medvetandegöra vad vi tittar på" (Sven) (Sven shows hesitation, trying to find the accurate way to explain to what it is, than says without hesitation that we have been bad at raising the awareness of what we look at)

So how do they do it then? Well, both the participants say they often give the correct answer, but also that students should try to reflect on the errors on some occasions. This means that both direct corrective feedback and indirect corrective feedback is used (see 2.4.1). They tend to underline the error but also comment on it in the margin.

If we then enter the marking process, Andy goes into detail and describes it:

I’ve got a system that I use [...] if it’s boxed a rectangular around it or whatever or underlined then that means that there is something that we need to look at. If it’s circled then that means it’s good, I mean it’s positive[...] I’ll write, eh, in either of the margins, wh, which is nearest the word or the phrase that I’ve underlined or I’ve boxed or whatever [...] a question for example: eh, do you really think this[...] or I write in a synonym {?}, to expand, ehm, eh the students’ vocabulary

Here we can see that Andy uses comments, reformulations and also a system of codes (see 2.4.2) even though he denies the use of them on one specific occasion. During the interview he mentions more codes:

I write N.P for new paragraph if need be [...] I use arrows for where words need to be moved, eh, where phrases need to be moved and I, I mention to the students so they understand this

It seems as if he uses codes subconsciously. Sven, however, does not go into detail but states that he uses comments and gives me an overview of his ways of commenting:

Eh och ibland så skriver jag färre kommentarer inne i texten och det mesta på slutet och ibland så blir det rätt mycket inne i texten och så lite mindre på slutet. (Sometimes Sven writes fewer comments in the text and more at the end and sometimes it is the other way around)

Both participants comment not only in the margin but at the end and, as we will see, the end-comments consist of both praise and recommendations, thus following Harmers advice on praise-recommendation procedure (see 2.4.2):

och så ska jag ju samtidigt försöka ge honom någon slags både liksom praise, beröm[ja] och ok finns det, vad, vad finns det att utveckla här då va, sedan ska jag också få ihop allt detta till ett betyg då va”(Sven) (Sven says that at the same time as he has to give a student praise he has to mention things the student should develop and then put it all together to a grade)

when I’m marking I write things all the way through and give them, give them feedback all the way through you could say and then at the end, eh, I give them the grade and round it off, you know give them the things they need to look at [...] I’ll use hyphens, I write a list of, I’d say: areas to improve, colon and then next line there with hyphen, let’s say, adjectives, and the hyphen: word formation [...] And if they need any exercises, then I can give, I can find exercises and give them extra, extra work
that way, or I direct them to a, ehm, to a particular website that they can look at in their own time (Andy)

These examples not only show that formative assessment (see 2.2.2) is used but that Andy uses something similar to electronic feedback (see 2.4.1).

When it comes to what to use to support the assessment on, both participants are vague. None of the teachers use scoring rubrics (see 2.4.3) very often; one does not use them at all:

I can state that: no I do not use a matrix (Andy).

Andy thinks that at the higher level of English education there is no need for rubrics. Sven “is on his way” to using them but says he is still too tied to the knowledge requirements in the syllabus to be able to vary the content, and if he should use a rubric in the classroom it would be for students’ use only.

Even though both teachers deny the use of any specific rubric or checklist (see 2.4.3) there are times when they subconsciously mention the use of them especially when talking about formal language (see 2.1.3, 2.3.2), and terms as “tick off matrix” and “model answer” is used:

där kan man ju liksom göra såna där nästan tick off eh, ehh, s, eh, eh matriser, som kan hjälpa eleverna jättemycket då va, ja, så där är det ju (Sven) (Sven says that one can sort of do tick off rubrics that helps the students a lot)

if there is a model answer for example for an opinion column then there is a particular layout, there is a particular register, there is a particular…there are particular elements that you need to include, and if these elements are missing, then of course the grade has to get reduced (Andy)

Andy mentions here the use of example texts (see 2.4.3) and he states on another occasion that he provides his students with scripts so that there is “no real reason for them not to write correctly”.

As the participants themselves express that they cannot say specifically what they support their assessment on, the question is repeated and this time there is a revelation:

e, jag försö, jag har ju det här i skallen liksom, men (Sven) (I try, why I have this in the head sort of)

it is in a way, it is, it is in a, my, yeah it’s most definitely intuition but intuition based on. It’s a paradox you see; intuition based on knowledge (Andy)

As we have seen them talk about both checklists and symbols (see 2.4.2, 2.4.3) while denying the use of them, it might very well be that correction of writing is an intuition based on knowledge. It is something in between Impression and Guided judgement (see 2.4.3) as the criteria used to support the assessment is in the head. It could also be explained as tacit knowledge. Tacit knowledge is a concept introduced by Michael Polanyi (1891-1976) that
refers to a personal hidden knowledge. It is an “unwritten, unspoken and hidden vast storehouse of knowledge held by practically every normal human being, based on his or hers emotions, experiences, insights, intuition, observations and internalized information” (Luthra, 2007).

The overall conclusion of this section is that comments are commonly used and that there is a use of codes and checklists (see 2.4.2, 2.4.3) but to some extent they are used without knowing it. It seems as it “is all in the head”. It is difficult for the participants to state what they support their assessment on, but they are sure that their correcting skills are based on knowledge, intangible knowledge. So, why don’t we take a closer look at “What they mark” then, and see if we can raise the level of awareness somehow.

4.1.2 It depends on the task (What)

"it all really depends on the task” (Andy)

The statement above is a recurrent answer given by both the respondents during the interviews. Andy explains that:

You can’t really generalize when it comes to eh, a written piece of work an essay is c, is marked differently from a, eh, from an opinion column

However, he never states what these differences are only that: “there are different instructions”.

Here Sven differs from Andy; he explains that the reason for the significance of the task, when it comes to correcting, is that sometimes you have to overlook some errors when it is a complex and demanding task:

nu är det kanske en sån där svår uppgift som gör att de kanske glömmer det språkliga lite för de är så ivriga i det de vill uttrycka, eller att... ja, så, då kanske jag, då kanske jag får, får ha lite mer överseende med vissa, formfel (Sven) (Sven says that with a difficult task where a student is eager to express him/her self the language might suffer. Then he as a teacher has to overlook certain errors)

He further mentions that he has to vary the ways he looks at a text by using different "glasses” and that “felspråks-glasögonen” (the linguistic error glasses) are not his favourites nor the first ones he puts on. He says that:

jag tycker det är viktigt att hitta textens kvaliteter först ( I think it is important to find the qualities of the text first)

He also says that the way he varies the glasses when correcting turns the evaluation into a kind of process.
Andy doesn’t make any distinction between *errors* and *mistakes* (see 2.3.1) he calls them *issues*. Sven see a distinction between error and mistake but doesn’t give any importance to it.

When asked if he overlooks some errors Andy says:

No […] I correct everything

and thus makes a contradictory statement related to his former utterance “you can’t generalize” when we talked about marking a text (see above):

I look at everything from layout, as stated, so eh, the, how they form, erm, paragraphs, how they form sentences, how they vary the language, if they use linking words correctly, eh, if they use commas correctly

And then he brings up his idea of a *model answer* (see p.28) again which points to a concern with *form, structure* and *layout* in his assessment. This includes *syntax, variation, cohesion* and *punctuation* (as he mentions above) (see 2.3):

we could say it’s a script sheet or as a structure to go from, so there’s really, if they’ve studied and if they’ve understood then there is no really, no, no real reason for them not to, write correctly as in when it comes down to layout

This deviates from how Sven looks at it:

då ska jag ju dels titta på, ja hur, hur han har behandlat det här ämnet, alla tankar som finns där då va, sedan ska jag ju också titta på ok hur är uppsatsen strukturerad, eh, jag ska titta på det språkliga […]så jag får ju liksom se, ja hur har de tillgodogjort sig, alltså, kan de omsätta det som vi har pratat om och diskuterat då (Sven mentions that he has to look at how the theme is treated, all the thoughts around it and then he has to look at the structure, the language, and if the student has assimilated and implemented what has been discussed)

As we have seen, the teachers differ in some particular issues such as to overlooking errors and what to look at firstly. Sven looks at *thematic development* and the *quality* of the text while Andy concentrates on *layout*.

There are a number of aspects that they are in agreement with, aspects that they would take into consideration when correcting such as, *structure, idiomatic expressions/phraseology, cohesion* and *variation*. Here Sven expresses clearly that using *cohesive ties* in a neat way gives a student a more advanced *vocabulary* and raises the text to another level which could mean an emphasis on *cohesion* from his part.

The aspect of *spelling* is not willingly mentioned, but when it comes to communication suddenly it becomes of importance because of the *morphology* aspect. Both teachers have an almost identical description of the weight of spelling:

fördet mestaså kan man ju förstå ett felstavat ord även om du kan, where och were, men man förstår ändå vad, vad ,men jag menar om du, om du skulle, om det blir fel ordklass så blir det ju ganska ss, då
blir det ju lite annorlunda eh, det ändrar ju, det ändrar ju betydelsen (Sven) (Normally a misspelled word can be understood, but if the wordclass is changed then the meaning changes)

they include a word, for example, I want to meet you, as in m,e,e,t but they write meat, as in a piece of meat, as in the noun m, e, a, t, then, that could in a way. Phonetically it’s the same, so they could get marks for that, but, it really changes the context in a way, because it, it spells a different word (Andy)

A last and vital factor is the communicative competence (see 2.1.3) and here there is unanimous agreement:

man får ju titta på den kommunikativa situationen, va alltså… ja, men förstår en, jag brukar säga så, men förstår en engelsman det här, liksom rätt upp och ner: javisst, då är det ju godkänt så att säga va (Sven) (one has to look at the communicative situation, if an Englishman can read it without problems then it is approved)

something that I consider to be of the outmost importance eh, is… the ability to communicate.. I think that if, the student communicates effectively what they want to, without destroying the, you know, the context or the meaning of what they are trying to communicate, then, eh, then that is a positive (Andy)

Sven makes a final point regarding what to take into consideration:

Vad är det i språket som inte fungerar också tittar vi på vad är det i språket som fungerar, åh, eh vilket ska jag ta fast?[…] jag tycker det är viktigt att titta på vad är det som fungerar (One can look at what is it in the language that works and what doesn’t, Sven thinks it is important to look at what works)

Andy makes his point when asked if there was any hierarchy of errors:

there is no hierarchy. The only, the only, the, the top of the hierarchy is communication. They need to be able to communicate, eh, to try and get across what they want to

The conclusion is that teachers might have distinct starting points in their first encounter with a text such as looking at text quality or layout but that aspects as, structure, idiomaticity, phraseology, cohesion, morphology, spelling and variation (vocabulary) as well as adaptation to purpose/cultural codes (formal/informal, see 4.1.1) are all taken into consideration even if they are treated subjectively. What happens is that Sven makes the assessment into a process and lets the various aspects weigh against each other, whilst Andy corrects everything which further stresses the subjective approach to errors and assessment.

The ability to communicate seems to be of importance above everything else and that might well be because of what the syllabus and other documents from Skolverket say (see 2.3.1). As all the other aspects – morphology, cohesion etc- are traceable to any view on communicative competence (see 2.1.3) it is only natural to put communication on top. It is more complicated to further divide it and decide what comes next. What cannot be deduced from the interviews with the teachers is if they just use the term communication because it is what they are supposed to use, as a contemporary suitable word, or if they really do have a clear idea of what that includes.

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4.1.3 The teacher variable

"jag kan lägga ner oerhört mycket tid på att rätta jag skulle kunna göra det mycket mer tid än vad jag gör, eh, [...] men då skulle jag ju liksom vara helt slut, jag skulle vara en ganska dålig lärare för då skulle jag inte orka med att entusiasmera dem med lektionerna, få dem att läsa mer, prata mer, eh, utvecklas på ett annat sätt, alltså att, man får välja!" (Sven) (I can spend a huge amount of time on assessing and I could spend much more time then I do but then I would be sort of exhausted, I would be a pretty bad teacher because then I wouldn’t have energy to fill them (students) with enthusiasm during the lessons, get them to read more, talk more, develop in another way, in other words one has to choose!)

Time is one part that has to be considered when talking about assessment. The interesting thing here is that only Sven mentions it and sees it as a problem. Andy is not troubled by the time issue.

Andy does not find any difficulties in the assessment process:

Because I’ve previously thought how I would like to mark that task, then when it comes to marking it, there really aren’t any issues

which is the direct opposite of Sven who does not consider the assessment perspective until the task is done:

jag bara känner att: uj då… jag har ju mer tänkt att det är ju en spännande uppsats och de ska liksom tänka till kring det hela då (Sven feels that Ups…he had only been thinking about how exiting and mindtwisting an essay could be to write)

The reason for these contrasting views might be of a personal character such as what values the teachers have and/or the experiences they have had, which can be deciphered in a statement made by Andy:

I have not all my life been interested in literature, I have been more interested in science, but science has a method eh, and teaching in a way, is quite eh methodological, there is a method to it, I think, when you write an essay there is a method to it

Andy talks about methods and Sven talks about improvisation and processes:

ja efter de har skrivit så kommer krisen, jag menar ( skratt) så att det, det är, så, så jag har liksom kört såhär, de skriver och sen så får de respons av mig i bästa fall, och så utvecklar de där, också hoppas man att det liksom, ja, de lär sig av att rätta, att skriva om att utveckla det är väl ungefär så som jag har hållt på (Sven says that after the students have written the crisis enters ( he laughs) His students have been writing and he has been giving respons, in most cases, and then they have been able to develop the writing. He just hopes that they learn by rewriting and correcting)

Once again we stumble upon the issue of subjectivity.

I have chosen not to investigate the personality of a teacher in this study as it involves a psychological approach but it is very clear that it is of great importance. The fact that there is a considerable divergence between the participants when it comes to planning the marking
had to be mentioned and what will be considered is the reliability and validity (see 2.2.3) of their assessment process. This will be discussed below in 4.1.4.

4.1.4 Trimmed hedges or blooming students? (Why)

“As det kanske handlar om[,] vad vill jag fostra för elever? Ja, jag vill faktiskt fostra elever som vågar ta risker som vågar skriva men som också är språkligt medvetna” (Sven) (Maybe it is all about ...what kind of students I would like to foster? Well, I want to foster students that dare to take risks that dare to write but at the same time have language awareness)

As seen before, Sven treats the assessing and correcting as a process (see 2.1.1) and when it comes to his students, he feels the same way:

De är ju hela tiden i en process och det är ju den man vill liksom vill,vill,vill stödja (why they are constantly in a process and that is what one wants to support sort of)

He says that correction is done so that the students can learn. Sven sees a contradiction still existing between the idea of “trimming the hedges”- take the errors away and all will be well- and the “free writing ideal” where one has to consider how much or how little one should interfere in the writing. He wants his students to take risks.

The individualising aspect is taken into consideration by both participants; they give feedback for personal improvement. For example, Sven doesn’t see the use of correcting the work of a student with dyslexia the same way as a student without, as the corrections are supposed to help the students in their learning not just pointing at what is wrong.

Andy likes to give “pointers”; as assessment is done because the students “need to know where they are” according to the grading system. He tells the students what they need to include in their work to gain the highest mark. He states that that is what the students want. It is a kind of qualification requested by the students themselves (see 2.2.1).

The assessment for learning (formative) (see 2.2.2) is transparent in Sven’s approach to assessment and he seems to lean towards a holistic view in his evaluations if we sum up what we have seen so far. What might be questioned here is the validity and reliability of the assessment (see 2.2.3). Validity as to not knowing what to assess when giving the task; is his form of assessment related to the purpose of the assessment? Could Sven defend his choices if he should need to? Reliability: would the results be the same if someone else corrected?

Andy seems to be somewhere in between, taking a formative and summative (see 2.2.2) approach to assessment. He gives feedback for learning but he also focuses on grading and a
sort of categorisation when pointing at criteria for the students to “know where they are”. He is definitely analytic (see 2.2.2) which he has given proof of: “I correct everything” (see 4.1.2). The validity (see 2.2.3) of his assessment seems to be higher as he says he knows from the beginning what is to be assessed. The reliability is also higher if he does use, as he states, a model answer (see 4.1.2). This would allow another teacher to make the same evaluation based on that model text.

Here the significance of the level of English repeated by Andy must be discussed. He explains that when studying at an advanced level of English, as it is more formal and competitive, no rubrics or checklists (see 2.4.3) are used, just grades. The criteria are explained to the students so that they know what to do to gain the highest mark, because that’s what the students “want”. Why would they want to “know where they are” and compared to what? Is the only reason to be at school, at this level, to get a grade for selection purposes only? When does this idea enter a student’s world? And more importantly should we as teachers go along with this because it is the truth, that the grades are there just for selection purposes, or should we continue to assess for learning (see 2.2.2) till the end?

What happens here is that if it all ends as a competition, students will never take risks. And without risk there is a low probability of enhancement.

4.2 What did they do?

Before the observation took place, the teachers were able to express their thoughts on the National test (see 2.3.2) and the Writing part which is reflected later in the way they corrected the text.

4.2.1 Thoughts on the National test

"det finns en vacklande bland de som bedömer på nationella proven ungefär som vi har, ibland koncentrerar man sig, mer på språket ibland mer på innehållet, jag tror att som Engelsk lärare så är det nog så att vi, vi tenderar att koncentrera oss mer på språket och lite mindre på innehållet" (Sven) (there is a vacillation among those who assess the national tests just as we have, sometimes they concentrate more on language sometimes more on content. I think that as English teachers we tend to concentrate more on language and less on content)

Sven uses the National tests as a diagnostic tool and has asked permission from Skolverket to do them earlier in the year just for this purpose. He continues by saying that he can include the results of Writing in his assessment but then it is just another essay among maybe nine in total. The students practice very little for the test.
He finds the writing part “boring” as there is no room for process; it has nothing to do with learning, he says. As a result of this, he does not comment on the texts as much as he would do if the task was given by him:

nej alltså det, vad ska jag göra det för? Eh, på ett nationellt prov, de ser det, de får ett betyg, och sedan så får de inte ens behålla det, de får inte rätta det, de får inte utveckla, de får inte göra någonting. (no why should I ? On a national test, they see it, they get a grade and then they can’t even keep it, they can’t correct it, they can’t develop, they can’ do anything)

; it seems as if questioning the use of things also comes with experience.

Sven does not think it is wrong to do the tests though, but declares the relativity of it all. The criteria are too vague and they can be treated subjectively. Nothing prevents a teacher from deciding what aspects they consider to be the most important. He further says that the assessment can never be objective as when Skolverket themselves tested the process, the re-evaluators differed just as much between themselves as the teachers do.

One positive aspect of the test he states is that the use of spell check during the writing process is not possible, so he can find things otherwise not visible in a student’s text. This is where Sven and Andy more or less concur as Andy says:

it’s a check

but that is the only time.

Andy seems to have a positive attitude towards the writing part as he would like to have more open questions in the test and he thinks the writing exam is an open question (no further explanation given). Andy practices a lot with his students but he does not take the results into consideration in his assessment. He would like there to be a “governing board” with experts correcting the tests to make the assessment less biased:

so that somebody neutral, a neutral expert marks my students’ work and so it’s fair, and it’s right and it’s just

What we can ask here is: who is the expert? Can a person be neutral, or is it as Sven says, that the objective assessor does not exist?

4.2.2 The intuition (How)

“nu bara läser jag det här först för mig själv” (Sven)(now firstly I’ll just reed this to myself)

What was most interesting was that neither of the participants physically marked the text. They did not pick up a pen even just for the sake of it. The reason for it might have been
because the interviewer asked for their line of thoughts but it could also be because the situation was non-naturalistic. Another reason could be the fact that the text was already corrected.

Sven appeared to be reluctant to the task. After reading the text, which took four minutes, he directly went to grading. He skipped the feedback part and returned to it much later. The resistance shown by Sven could be interpreted as him not taking the task seriously and the fact that neither of the teachers marked anything could also be evidence of this. Additionally, the idea of process or product (see 2.1.1) might be of consequence here, and the fact that Sven sees no reason to correct a product, and less so when it is an artificial situation. But what he did do was to search in his head for the criteria from the syllabus:

då tänker jag väl lite på, eh … på, eh, betygskriterierna då faktiskt eh […] ja, de finns ju där (well I guess I am thinking on the criteria actually, well they are there)

Andy was meticulous and explicit with what he corrected, and summarised what he had looked at before giving the grade and justified it that way. Andy also used the knowledge he had within, although he did not directly make reference to the criteria from the syllabus.

Once again: The knowledge is “in the head”.

As the participants did not mark the text during the observation their “real” markings of student’s work was taken into consideration. We will see if there is any concordance with what they have said and done previously. Appendices 4 and 5 together with chapter 2.4 support the following conclusions.

Andy uses the circles, squares, arrows and underlines (codes) he mentioned (see 4.1.1) and there is evidence of giving synonyms and reformulations. There are very few comments though, which differs from what he stated in the interview. Mostly the comments consist of one or two words as “subjective thinking” or “good language”. There is an inclination towards praise-recommendation but it is mostly recommendations and corrections. There is more evidence of direct c.f. then indirect c.f. but both are used. Sometimes questions are asked but as one word, e.g.: “italics?”. This could be a sign of metalinguistic c.f. The marking is short, concise and impersonal. The marking is made by hand with a pencil. There is no end comment with hyphens as would be expected; Andy mentions in chapter 4.1.1 that he writes a list with “areas to improve” using hyphens at the end of the text together with the grade. There is no proof of formative assessment (see 2.2.2).
Sven highlights words and sentences in the text and comments on them on the computer. Sometimes he gives the answer, sometimes he points to an aspect as “voc/spelling” and sometimes he does not comment at all letting the student deduce where the error lies; Evidence of both direct and indirect c.f. He uses a symbol: the letter F which seems to be a code for Form (grammatical). He also uses questions on occasions: “Who or How?”-metalinguisic c.f. Comments are made throughout the text and they vary between one, and four or five sentences. They are polite and sometimes very personal e.g.: “Another very interesting part. I am impressed by your powers of analysis”. Sven gives friendly advice, sometimes he is direct but he often uses words like “you might”, “try to” and “please”. He writes very extensive end-comments and asks every student to correct what has been highlighted and to return the text to him. There is an obvious praise-recommendation procedure and formative approach to the assessment (see 2.2).

Here we find that there is no sign that Andy uses electronic feedback when correcting, although he mentioned the occasional use of websites (see 4.1.1). Both teachers seem to use an unfocused c.f. i.e. correcting all the errors.

The fascinating part is that Sven comments on students’ skills and on their abilities and he uses a very pleasant and friendly approach. He is personal when commenting and one can detect the individualising aspect in his assessing; the students’ texts are not commented on in the same way. This is something that could not be detected in the observation, and even if he tried to explain his approach during the interview, it was not as clear as when looking at a practical example.

But how personal should one get and how important is it for students to hear that they are “smart, creative and nice” (Sven)? Is it relevant to the assessment? And how much should we get involved with students’ self awareness? Maybe the reason for Sven’s “crisis” when it comes to assessing and his seemingly confused approach to it has to do with personal involvement and the difficulty in just being a teacher. That is a factor worth investigating in further studies: The student-teacher relationship and the importance of not just being assessed but of being seen.

Additionally, a contradiction is found in Harmer’s statement that codes or symbols are less threatening then comments. Comparing the two teachers’ ways of correcting in this study the opposite is perceived: the comments are friendly and the symbols threatening. That may be
because the author of this essay is not trained, as Harmer (2012, 139,147) mentions one should be, and might not understand the symbols.

4.2.3. Spelling or linguistic error? (What)

“So now, towards the end of the eh, this essay, this piece of work, there are more spelling mistakes creeping in” (Andy)

It seems that what the participants said they usually looked at correspond to what they did look at, but only to a certain degree- as we will see later. That means that there is an awareness of how they do things even if there were contradictions, doubt and hesitation during the interviews. The sudden need to explain their abilities in simple words for the first time might be the cause of the exhaustive interviews with reformulations etc.

If we make a classification of areas to look at when assessing writing, and then enter the aspects treated by the teachers during the correction task (observation) we will get an easy overview:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Content (how well the task is fulfilled)</th>
<th>Communicative Achievement</th>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sven</td>
<td>Thematic treatment (Overall) Content</td>
<td>Reader awareness</td>
<td>Cohesive ties</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The language doesn’t “elevate” or “lift”</td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>Variation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Language should be more compressed, less “chatty”</td>
<td></td>
<td>Linguistic errors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andy</td>
<td>Thematic treatment - (subjectivity of the author)</td>
<td>“The communication is there”</td>
<td>Cohesive ties</td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Structure</td>
<td></td>
<td>Variation</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Spelling</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar</td>
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<td>Syntax</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Morphology</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Phraseology</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If we look at the table we can see that the teachers look at similar things except when it comes to language. Andy corrects everything but Sven is less interested in the basic elements or “the building parts” of the language. It seems we have one holistic and one analytic approach (see 2.2.2).

But can we trust the results? A table similar to the one made for the results of the observations is made from the examples of students’ texts corrected by the teachers in a real life situation. As a result, we can look upon the aspects treated in the participants’ real -life marking and see if they concur with the correction during the observations. Appendices 4 and 5 can be used to support the facts in table 2.
Now we have an overall view and we can see that, in this case, the participants look at very similar things and that their “real life work” differs in some parts from their statements and the observations. Sven does look at many more aspects than he mentions and Andy uses comments (see 2.4.2) more seldom than he said he did. This could mean that when they talk about how they work they also include ideas of how they would like to work. Sven wants to develop a holistic, formative, process minded (see 2.2.2) approach but is not able to escape from correcting the “small parts” and actually “trims the hedges”. Andy values formative comments but does not really use them. He also mentioned communication (see 2.1.3) as the top of the hierarchy. However, here we can see that the communication skills are touched upon very briefly when correcting in real life. It might be that it is too time consuming to do both. We have seen that Sven is concerned about time, whereas Andy seems more relaxed about it. It could be a matter of choice; how much time should we spend on correcting? And what do we choose to correct firstly? It seems that the language part is the primary target and if you have the time or the disposition you continue to assess other aspects.

Another conclusion drawn from the tables above is that even if Sven pays attention to the “small parts” he has extended his assessment further and one can see that the content and communication parts are more extensive than the ones of Andy. Has he then deliberately chosen to spend more time on assessment and has Andy decided to spend less?

Let’s look through the observations again in another way: Let us count the number of times the word spell is used (inflections considered). Sven never uses the word but he once says
wrong word and once linguistic error in connection with spelling. Andy uses the word twenty four times. It shows a difference in values, in what is important. It also shows that Andy is extremely picky.

This seems to indicate that Andy is a teacher with an inclination towards accuracy rather than fluency, showing evidence of a “weak” version of CLT (communicative language teaching, see p.17); he values the communication aspect but also the accurate use of language.

The contrast between the participants may also be due to a non-native/native aspect. When Andy is asked if he corrects things unintentionally, he answers:

I do because I am a native speaker and I have baggage, so when I read something and it’s wrong and I look at the context, it’s not wrong but it needs to be improved, I look at the context and I then mark it accordingly,

It is highly likely that a native speaker is more inclined to focus on language errors but a teacher with twenty five years of experience would probably have developed a good eye for language and would consequently have developed an analytic approach (see 2.2.2). So, the experience constituent seems to be of significance in this case.

On the other hand, it may just be easier to be picky and to look for surface errors as they are more visible, more tangible. Content is not as concrete, it is more elusive and might be more difficult to treat and also more time consuming. As we have seen, Sven worries about time. Then the holistic vs. analytic approach could be a matter of choice. This is again a subjective angle.

All these aspects are variables possible to consider when it comes to distinct views on assessing but experience and subjectivity are the ones that appear to be essential in this study.

4.2.4. Pickiness and reluctance (Why)

Sven begins to chatter away before performing the correction task which seems to further stress his reluctance to it. He starts talking about aspects as adaptation to recipient, purpose and situation (see 2.3.2) and then explains the artificial situation of a National test and the difficulty of creating a “meaningful context” (author’s translation). In all likelihood it is
because he finds the situation he is in awkward. He continues to mumble and hesitate during the reading of the text. He stated earlier that he had no clear idea of how he assessed students’ work and maybe that is the reason for his vacillation. If it weren’t for the interview I had with Sven I would find that a very reasonable cause, but as I now have a deeper insight to his line of thoughts the most probable reason is that he has left the analytic and summative approach (see 2.2.2) to assessment behind and has developed a process/learning mentality that makes him feel not at all comfortable with a text outside context and without possibilities for process learning (see 2.1.1). When finalizing the task of correction, he is totally aware of how he should give feedback, on what and why, thus showing that the reluctance was not because of insecurity but of dislike. He no longer sees writing as a product (see 2.1.1). So the resistance to the National tests (see 2.3.2) and to the focus on language – not content- that he expressed earlier is evident here.

One can detect Sven’s knowledge concerning analytic details of the language as spelling and morphology when he incidentally mentions the amount of linguistic errors in the text but it is more of an obscure distant awareness. He knows they are there but tries to see beyond them and look further ahead e.g. to the process of learning and thus showing preference to the “strong” version of CLT (see p.17).

Andy is not as reluctant and set about the task without problems. He is leaning towards the same approach as Sven but has not yet expanded his field of vision; he corrects everything but does mention aspects such as risk taking and communication. Writing is more of a product (see 2.1.1) and he supports his assessment on methods and levels, as he stated in the interview. He is hesitant to let the students “sail away” and see what happens, thus being closer to the “weak” version of CLT.

When it comes to the texts given to me, it is evident that Sven is formative and process minded. Andy focuses on product (see 2.1.1, 2.2.2 and appendices 4, 5). Sven is concerned with qualities of writing proficiency and Andy with the details. But then again Sven “trims the hedges” as well; when we look at his own students’ texts he corrects surface errors (see Introduction). Then why can we not see this during the observation? Maybe he is avoiding the language errors as he knows he is being observed. Is he trying to be the teacher he wants to be? Is Andy being more sincere?

However, there is further evidence for regarding Sven as holistic and Andy as analytic (see 2.2.2) and that is the time spent on the task; while Sven spent less than ten minutes looking at
the text, Andy spent almost twenty minutes. The transcription of the interview with Sven filled one and a half pages, and Andy three pages. An analytic approach is more time consuming as many elements have to be considered. On the other hand, this could be evidence of Sven not taking the correcting task seriously, just browsing through the text quickly. It could also be proof of insecurity but as mentioned before it is most likely dislike.

Age could be another factor that explains the variation between the participants but it is more likely to be experience, as Sven has shown evidence of treating the aspects that goes with an analytic way of assessing but not giving importance to them when talking about them. As this study is too limited to draw any larger conclusions, it is difficult to say that it is a common fact that a teacher progresses from analytic to holistic with acquired experience but it could be possible.

This means that the National tests (see 2.3.2) could be less suitable for teachers with many years of experience, nor of importance. They have developed and expanded their teaching, be it by “research” -empirical or theoretical-, in-service training or plain experience, and they can no longer find a reason to be “picky” -even if they are.

Anyhow, an analytic base to start off from is probably needed, a base on which one can build confidence and qualifications and gradually slide away from. It becomes part of the “intuition based on knowledge” i.e. the tacit knowledge (see p.29). We can see that Andy is more confident and secure as he has full control of what he is correcting while Sven is experimenting and exploring beyond the analytic base.

As we have seen, there seems to be a concordance of aspects that are treated when assessing writing, what varies is the emphasis laid upon them. To one teacher, the vocabulary used might be important; to another, the analytic skills may be the first on the list. What can be deciphered from the study are the subjectivity and the experience which consequently are of major importance. Another aspect is the need to raise the awareness of correcting and assessing. Could that be gained through reflection?

Our participants may have a “knowledge in the head” and a more or less clear idea of how they work but they still don’t know everything about themselves. They mix ideas of what they would like to assess with what they really do. It is always difficult to be self critical, but even more so when you do not have the occasion to discuss your work.
Ultimately the gender aspect should be touched on and the idea that there might be
distinctions between male and female assessment is of importance. Would a female teacher
correct and mark differently? Is the holistic/analytic (see 2.2.2) development traceable when
comparing years of experience between females too? and more importantly: is the
development similar between males and females?

5. Weakness of design

There are some main weaknesses in the design of this investigation that have to be mentioned.

Firstly, the example text used for the observation (appendix 1) was already corrected which
may have affected the outcome of the data. The participants may have been biased or put off
by the corrections and they could also have felt uncomfortable correcting something already
marked and graded. A certain sense of awkwardness or lack of seriousness could have altered
the act of correcting.

As mentioned, in section 3.4, there were sixteen visible underlines in the example text that I
gave the participants to evaluate, but the grade and the original comments were excluded (see
appendix 1). However, the text most certainly would have felt more “fresh” without the
underlines. Because of this, the teachers’ eagerness to work with a newly written text was
most likely lost. I believe that the participants’ reactions would have been slightly different,
Sven’s in particular. I suspect that it was not only the fact that the words were underlined, but
the fact that it was a text from the National test, which was clearly visible, which may have
made Sven antagonistic towards the whole idea of evaluating the text. In most likelihood, he
would have opened up his mind to a greater extent with a different text and would not have
been provoked by the underlined misspelled words, which he conceivably was. As he stated,
he wants to find the “strength” in a text first of all, and that is difficult if you are discouraged
by someone else’s approach or resistant to an “unstimulating” test. If I had used a newly
written piece, or removed the underlines, it might have been possible to enter deeper into
Sven’s mind, and that possibility was lamentably lost. Therefore, the texts sent in by the
teachers were an important complement to the observation task.

Secondly, much could have been gained by videotaping the interviews and the observations as
many important gestures and pauses have been lost, many of which could have been of value
to the investigation.
Ultimately, an inevitable variable that always has to be considered is: the author. My own background and experience may have influenced the interpretation of the data.

6. Conclusions

As this was a pilot study, the conclusions reached act as references for further studies.

The action of correcting a piece of written work turned out to be more complex than expected. There are no straight and simple answers as to what teachers look at. Teaching and assessing involves so much more than just “trimming the hedges”. Students are individuals in a process and they need support, not only correction.

Teachers also have a need to talk about what and how they correct to be able to be self critical and to raise the awareness of their actions. They are not totally aware of how they work and tend to blend ideas of what they would like to do together with what they do.

We have seen that a teacher’s correcting skills are based on knowledge that is difficult to depict. This intuition has been constructed and formed by themselves and they are constantly learning which makes it even harder to put the finger on this skill. It is tacit knowledge, embedded within. The teachers may have an idea of what they want to correct when they are in front of a specific task, but they have never reflected on what this “correction skill” is, all those little bits and pieces of knowledge behind it because it is a complex chunk to unwind. The lack of training is a reason to why they have had to build up their own understanding of assessing; a need that, of course, depends on the ability and willingness to learn. The self tuition makes every teacher’s correcting skills unique. Consequently, subjectivity and choice seem to have significant influence on the procedure of assessing.

The teachers in this study look at the linguistic topics such as morphology, grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling, variation and idiomaticity and also thematic treatment and coherence when assessing which means that they look at similar things. One teacher reaches a bit further and considers things such as analytic skills and understanding of concepts. It seems that surface errors are always corrected, consciously or not, which would make them the most important.

Even though the aspects that teachers look at are similar, there is always going to be a divergence of opinion: on what an error is and how important it is; what communication is; if writing is a process or a product; why assessment is made, and so on. This divergence will
give room for many distinct choices which will form the individuality of a teacher and consequently affect the assessment. Apart from opinions and linguistic issues, variables such as time and personal engagement can bifurcate the approaches even more depending on the decisions teachers make. It is here where the individual differences lie: subjectivity and choice colour the teachers rather than the linguistic topics and this can be perceived in this investigation.

How correction is made is also very personal and sometimes teachers are not totally aware of how they mark a text, although they have consciously thought about how they go about it. Comments and codes are used, sometimes mixed, and are adjusted to the goal of the task. We have seen that comments are in fact less threatening than codes, but that might be because of the commenting participant’s personality and because of the author’s lack of training in understanding codes.

Furthermore, experience seems to have an influence on openness and seeing possibilities. It seems as if the “picky” teacher progresses from analytic to holistic with time. Experience similarly seems to foster a relaxed attitude towards institutional tests, or at least questioning the reason for them.

We have seen two teachers with distinct approaches although not direct opposites. One seems to be a bit muddled when talking about “glasses” and processes; he lets students take risks and gives them the opportunity to improve. He thinks little of what the assessment is going to consist of but knows that what he is doing is assessment for learning. He says that correction is done so that the students can learn. The other is very “picky”, analytical and methodical. He knows what he is going to assess beforehand and corrects everything. He assesses so that his students will know “where they are”, that they care about grades. Neither is wrong and both are trying to give support and security to their students and that is what it is all about, isn’t it?

6.1 Future

The teacher variable was discussed in section 4.1.3 and is a relevant part of teachers’ assessment. To further investigate the time issue and how it affects teachers’ work would be of value. Another aspect concerning the teacher variable is what it is that causes the variations of grading on a day by day basis: why does an essay that has been given a B one day deserve a C another day?
An interesting factor that was mentioned in section 4.2.2 is the teacher-student relationship. It is of importance and could be worth investigating together with assessment: How do teachers’ comments and corrections influence and mould a student’s self image, for example.

The native versus non-native teacher as an alternative viewpoint to experienced/inexperienced teacher could be of great value, as would the gender perspective which should definitely be further explored as the outcome would give a fascinating angle and maybe give reason to investigate deeper into the theme.

Personally, a study on teachers as explorers; their willingness to learn and to try new approaches would be intriguing; and how it affects their teaching and assessing.

One specific aspect that has not been treated in depth here in this study and which should be considered, if this study were repeated, is the individual interpretations of communicative competence.

To fill this obvious gap in research that was mentioned in the beginning it would be a good idea to continue this investigation in any direction as long as it broadens the comprehension and raises the awareness of the thinking “behind the scenes”. There is so much hidden knowledge in the minds of all the teachers out there. It is a valuable treasure that would be beneficial to us all if it were revealed.

And above all, watch with glittering eyes the whole world around you because the greatest secrets are always hidden in the most unlikely places.

Roald Dahl
References


Eng.6: [http://www.nafs.gu.se/prov_engelska/exempel_provuppgifter/](http://www.nafs.gu.se/prov_engelska/exempel_provuppgifter/)


Making Decisions

In the today's society you, I and everyone else make different decisions. Some of them are small and some of them are big and affect our lives. In most cases the first decision teenagers have to face is the decision—

which school do I have to choose?

Many teenagers do not know what they want to become when they are between the age 14 and 16. When I chose my school and program, I was very lucky because the science program I chose is a very wide education. Some people people goes to or have to choose a school or program where the education only has three subjects. There are also people that feel that they do not need school because they want to work with something that does not require education. Some people unfortunately quit the school they find it very hard etc.

In about two years I will have to face new decisions. One of them regards my education, again. However will it be more specific in what I will work with.

I know that a lot of teenagers will start working or travel after highschool and
Before college, I think that is a great idea for some people because there is no meaning to start a hard education if you are going to quit because you need a break. Travel, work, and have fun for a year or two before you start an education that takes a lot of time and energy. Beside decisions regarding my education, I will have to face questions like: "What apartment should I move into?" "What do I want to work with?". At the same time, I and many other college students will want to find a partner that you want to spend your life with.

Compared to others, I find my life very normal. I make decisions like the most teenagers today. Some teenagers come from a bad family and have to make decisions I do not have to make. Some people can also be born with no decisions. It can be a boy that lives with his poor family that he loves, but can not afford with a high education. It can also be this rich kid that wants to be a singer but has to choose the science program.
Because his or her parents forces her to become a doctor. I find it very interesting that the most different people still do not have more opportunities than the other.

The choices we make can effect our lives so much. I think that people forget about it very often and make decisions based on their impulses and feelings. Sometimes it can be good but sometimes it can be irresponsible. That impulses can make you unemployed or it can destroy your marriage and split your family. What I am trying to say is that you always should think about the consequences because the decisions we make makes us to who we are today and who we will be in the feature.
Appendix 2. Extract from transcription Sven (observation)
Appendix 3. Extract from transcription Andy (observation)

3.30 AM. Andy (observation)

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FROM A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The word Stigma, what does it actually mean? If you search for it you get the definition “disapproval of people on the grounds of characteristics that distinguish them from other members of a society”. It basically means that if you are abnormal in some kind of way from the “norm”, people will judge you and leave you alone as an outsider.

Most of the people want to be “normal” because then you will not be in the risk zone of getting stigmatized. If you are obese we think you have no self-control, if you are an immigrant we will think that you are a terrorist or a dangerous person, if you are gay we will think you will jump on anyone and have sex with them and if you have some sort of sickness we will think that you are unable to do anything by yourself.

It is terrible that we can label you anytime we want and make others believe in it. It is also terrible that you get called all those things when maybe it is not true.

But I think that we have talked too much about the stigmatized group of people, I want to look at it in a different view and not write about the obvious. Because what I have realized is that when we are labeling people we are actually putting a label on ourselves. I am normal and therefore I am boring. Everyone is stigmatized.

The first thing I want to make you aware of is that stigmatization has existed for as long as I know and has probably always been an ongoing thing among humans.

We think that it is only we humans that have come up with this thing but it is actually used a lot more then from just us humans.

You can find stigmatization by almost all of the animals on this planet.

Among the lions it is the big strong handsome male who gets the females, not the weak second male.

We believe that dogs are the kindest animals on the planet. But if one puppy is small and weaker than the others it will probably be left to die. It is cruel but it is true.

Every species on earth are stigmatizing, it is in our genes. As Christian always says; “the best fitted survives.”

It is not just us humans.

The second thing is that is it possible that all of us are stigmatized?

All of the movies and stories that we read were about the “obvious” stigmatized people. But can “normal” people also be stigmatized?

I am not gay.

I am not black.

I have no special religion.

I am not Asian.

I am not an immigrant.

I don’t have any health conditions.

I am neither skinny nor overweight.

I am not ugly and I am not hot.

I am not poor or rich.

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We are living in a society which we have created. How to look, what to love and even how to react in all kinds of different situations are unwritten rules that we have created and must follow to be accepted. Many people work most of their whole life to be so “normal” as possible to be accepted. Then again, there will always exist people who cannot be “normal” no matter how hard they try, because they have something the society cannot accept. Give this the “normal people” reasons to crap down on them. Stigmatisation has become a much more common term nowadays, but are we really working against it?

A well-known story that probably the majority of the children in Sweden have heard of is “The Ugly Duckling”, written by the famous author H.C. Andersen. This story tells us about a different duckling that became ostracized by the little “society” they lived in. From the beginning his mother accepts him for being bigger and different from the other small ducklings, but when she finds out what the other ducks think about him she begins to change her mind. Suddenly she begins to hate him and cannot accept him as her son. The little duckling cannot stand everybody including his mum hating him, so one day he decides to leave the farm to see the rest of the world and perhaps find someone like himself and then feel accepted and loved.

This story is according to me a very good reflection of the society which we live in today. Of course the fact that the mother of the ugly duckling hated him just because of his different look is maybe the most common reason we can find today, but the different looks can instead be a different sexual orientation or a disease that makes the person in question abnormal in some situations. For some people a person who is homosexual is very odd and in some ways even scary because this person’s sexual orientation differs from the more common one which is between a man and a woman. Of course the question about how homosexuality depends on what the people in your environment think about it because a normal action of a person is to fit in and be accepted.

The movie “Boys don’t cry” is a story about a girl who things that she is born with the wrong gender and then try to fit in as the boy she says and thinks she is. This movie is based on a true story and is a very good example of stigmatisation we are used to see in these days. While seeing this movie many thoughts come up in my head. When the male friends of Brandon find out that he biologically is a woman they raped him and at killed him. How on earth can people act that way and go so far that they decide to end his life because of their hate against different sexual orientations than their own? I cannot in my whole imagination understand how much hurt a person must feel to be able to kill someone because of it. For the boys who killed Brandon, the whole situation that a man suddenly turns out to be a woman must have been so scary and uncommon situation that they did not know how to react on it. Of course that case was something special and probably not so renowned in a little town like Falls City where the story is told and maybe that is the reason why they reacted so strong about it?
Introduction:

Take a good look around. You will, no doubt, mark out some attributes and accessories in people that you do not think is normal. You will, unconsciously, label them as different according to the unwritten norm, which applies to our society. The norm is in constant change. Still, most people are aware of what is considered normal and what is not. Why do we have this urge to divide people into two groups, normal and abnormal? Can we not just consider everybody normal? These are questions, which are really on the topic these days, especially in Sweden with the “hen-debate”, for example. We do not want children to feel bound by typical gender roles. No one should feel forced to act or dress in one way because the society wants it that way, it is called. Well, that sounds all nice, but maybe there is something good with stigmatization? Why else would we stigmatize, if it was not for the benefit of someone? Basically everything we do, we do for a purpose, so there has to be something good about stigmatization.

Dividing people into groups

As asked for in the introduction, I took a look around me in the room I sat in. Although I just looked around for a few seconds, it was enough to get an idea of whether the way people dressed were to be considered normal or not. I do not know the literal definition of dressing normal, yet I know how a person who dresses normally looks like. Everybody seemed to have dressed normally. When I later left the room and looked at the people I walked by in the corridor, I noticed that some people wore clothes that differed from the norm. It could be just a shirt in a contrasting color or a unique haircut as well as pretty much every piece of clothing and every accessory being considered different.

This kind of superficial dividing is something we all unconsciously do. We have an urge to place new faces into a group and that is based on our first impression. Dividing people into groups can at times in fact be quite good. We all have an idea of what kind of people we would like to spend time with and can easily rule away those we do not want to spend time with. However, this has its back sides as well. The back sides outnumber the front sides by far. Some people with particularly abnormal ways of dressing and acting might feel that they do not belong anywhere; that they are not accepted by anyone. These are the modern-day ugly ducklings. Just like the fairy tale, these individuals are not accepted by their surrounding and are at times target of harassment. Fairy tales with a clear message tend to be exaggerated, but in this case the reality is sometimes much worse than the fairy tale, because in “The Ugly Duckling”, the duckling is not really ugly, but a swan and it is therefore all natural that he does not fit in among the ducks. He found his place among his own kind, the swans. In the reality, it is not like the stigmatized people are non-humans and just have to find their place among others of their own kind, although the mother in Doris Lessing’s novel “The Fifth Child” suspected that her son’s weird behavior was caused by his alien genes. In the real world, they are all considered humans and should be able to find their place in the human society, though they are stopped by stigmatization from fellow human beings.
exclude almost everything that does not meet the norm. If I am to take a piece of candy from a bag, I sure will not take a deformed one. Who knows what kind of life-threatening diseases it may contain? I better take one that looks healthy and normal. I made it easy for myself by taking a piece of candy that looked normal instead of analyzing the content of it to find out whether it is just as normal as the other properly formed ones. Now I would like to take another and I know that I do not like licorice very much. Licorice pieces are usually black so I can easily avoid getting one by not taking a black piece. I made it easy for myself by taking a piece of candy that did not look like licorice. I have stigmatized some groups in this bag of candy, the blacks and the deformed, because I do not want to have anything to do with them. Very easy! I love making things easy, therefore I stigmatize. However, I cannot make all things this easy. In fact, I cannot even make this thing this easy without missing out on things. My illusion of the black candy tasting terrible, that I have lived with for years, was shattered when I found out that the taste of it is not actually licorice but blueberry. Now I do eat the black pieces of candy in the bag and cannot believe that they never tasted them before.

While making things easy for ourselves while picking sweets is not really a big issue, there are other situations in life where we want to make way more complicated things easy for ourselves. It does not necessarily have to be something bad, but in many cases it is. We look for someone or something to blame for our problems. “It is the government’s fault”, “it is the blacks’ fault”, “it is the whites’ fault”, “it is the Jews fault” and “it is the neighbour’s fault” it has been and is being called. It is so easy to put all the blame on a single person or a single group of people. Adolf Hitler was convinced that the Jews were the ones that had driven Germany into ruins. They were the ones who prevented the German people from building up their prosperous nation and we were therefore obligated to pay with their lives. Indeed quite different from my stigmatization of the different pieces of candy.

Conclusion

It is necessary for us to do some kind of dividing of people. Every everything would be way too complicated. We unconsciously divide people into groups based on very superficial knowledge. The first time we see a person, we can tell whether he or she meets the norm or not. This is not good for the modern-day ugly ducklings, as they may feel like they are not accepted by anyone in the society. They do not meet anyone’s norm. They are deemed to live a life of exclusion and they only have themselves to blame as they did not decide to be normal. However, today most people say that they want to be themselves, no matter what people think. Maybe that will lead to future norm, where being different is normal. Who knows? This is possible, since the norm is always related to a time and a place and is therefore in constant change. I believe the changing of the norm is a natural process, though some people believe changes of the norm can be forced by teaching children about the non-existence of norm from early age. However, these ideas are probably a little bit too optimistic. Getting rid of stigmatization totally is never going to happen, but we can ease the consequences of it.
And nor am I stupid or intelligent.
I am normal. I am boring.
Am I not right?

It goes about 1300 in our school. I only recognize 15-20% of all the students. The ones I do recognize are my friends, maybe some overweight people, the people who have some kind of sickness, the really attractive people, a few of the more nerdy ones, the rich students with expensive clothes and maybe the seriously skinny people.

Who are the rest? Who is the other 80-85% of the students? Well most of them it is the people who are "normal". The ones who I do not notice.

It is not fun to be labeled but it is not fun either to be one in the crowd, someone who people don't remember or bother to get to know.

Everyone is labeled and everyone is upset about this, I know I am but no one cares about it because I am "normal".

The normal is boring. There are not any movies about people being normal. There is no "the normal Hulk", "Harry potter, the boy who was normal", there is no heartbreaking story about a normal couple where nothing abnormal happens or a documentary about someone being normal.

Because what would that be? Boring? Yes.

Don't you think that boring is a stigmatizing word? Is it not as word as fatty, fat or snob? Or have we come to the point where we label the labels? When we decide which words hurts? Of course not!

Boring is a stigmatizing word as well. I know I am hurt when someone calls me boring. I don't want to stand out and have all the attention at me but I want to be noticed and remembered.

We all have the question on our mind why do we HAVE to label people? And why do we have to treat them differently? Christopher's father in the book "the curious happening of the dog in the night-time" treats Christopher like a child. He thinks that just because he has Asperger syndrome he is unable to take care of himself, even though his father haven't even given him a chance to prove what he is capable of. And Brandon in the movie "Boys don't cry" never got the chance to explain how he was.

We just call others when they are abnormal. I do not think anyone have the answer of why we do this. Is the lazy and unfortunately uncaring person I am, which is slightly embarrassed of, blame it on the genes. That it is the nature's fault that we have the need. But the fact that we embrace these feelings and hurt people on the other hand something I do blame on us. It is terrible.

It is our decision to act out our needs and feelings. Unfortunately that has resulted in a stigmatized community.

I think that we are all "stigmatized" in some kind of way. We do not fit in every social group. The difference is that some people get hurt by their stigmas and others do not care. But I think that all labels that place one person into one type of group are stigmas. You can't decide which words that hurts.

Thank you for an excellent essay,

I had written many comments full of appraisal when fronton all of a sudden just got down and everything disappeared. I will try to summarise my impressions here first.

Your essay is both very clever and interesting and you manage to do something really difficult; you redefine the word normal, showing very clearly how we stigmatize each other also by labelling each other as normal. You therefore give the title of the project a new meaning, which very fittingly also is

the title of your essay, namely that looking from the perspective of the so called "normal" also is the same as looking from a different perspective. And you shouldn't call yourself neither stupid nor intelligent, a little bit boring etc. That is definitely not true. Every time I read something you have written you always surprise me with a different twist, with a good analysis or having found a different perspective. And to me that is being very clever and bright! So please believe in yourself, you have so many excellent qualities, among one of which is being very smart, creative and nice, and you are definitely unique.

Please, correct where I have indicated and add a list of references with the website you visited and the book and film you refer to. Then send the text to me once again.

Your English 7 grade: B
Appendix 5. Andy, correction type, example texts

Literary Parallels And Greek Mythology In Anthem

It may be said that Ayn Rand named her characters after gods from Greek mythology because the similarities of their personalities are significant. The characters and the gods are bound to have comparable dilemma.

Equality 7-2521 is a man who wants to change the society he lives in and desires to better the existence of humans. This man is brave enough to do what he thinks is right and dares to be different from the people in his environment. He is hiding in the darkness below ground, where he feels safe to do his experiments instead of being a street sweeper, which isn't a suitable job for a man with ambitions to be a successful scholar.

"Yet our brothers are not like us" (47)

Equality 7-2521 is aware of that he is different from the others, and he feels that he is got to spread his knowledge to the rest of the world. He cannot live satisfying his brothers while he is not happy about it. He named himself Prometheus and the reason for this was that he had read of a man who lived many thousand of years ago who had a desire to inspire others and he wished to bear his name.

Prometheus was a titan of Greek mythology, and his name means forethought. This titan wasn't caring about what the huge powers wanted, he showed that he was not frightened by the power of the great god, Zeus. Prometheus was the titan who helped Zeus defeat Cronos and Zeus became king of the gods on Olympus. Even though Prometheus had helped Zeus, he did not get much respect from him, and it can possibly be that Zeus sees Prometheus as a rival and he is afraid of losing his power. However, Zeus didn't want the gods, including Prometheus to help or interfere with mortals, because he wanted mankind to die off and it could only happen if they didn't get
is going to be the mother of a new society because she was carrying the child of Equality 7-2751 and they were planning to spread a new "breed" of people to form a new society. They're both representing reproduction and the continuation of life, without Liberty 5-3000, Equality 7-2521 would not be able to create this society.

Equality 7-2521 is showing that he has decided to really make a change in the world to show others that you should live for your own sake. You can find evidence of this, "And the day will come when I shall break all the chains of the earth, and raze the cities of the enslaved, and my home will become the capital of a world where each man will be free to exist for his own sake"

(104).

You can never build a society where you live just to work for your leaders without getting something back. Mankind was enslaved by the gods but after breaking those chains, he was enslaved by kings, birth and race. But here we are today, we've declared that a man has rights that nobody can take away from him. People are still struggling today for their freedom on earth because there still are leaders of countries who treat the people in their country awfully and they don't let the citizens to have the right of freedom and civil rights.

Collectivism destroys nations and there will always be an individual who endangers his life to change society where there's no taking, only giving. You can't make a community function if humans lose who they truly are and their way of living. It's impossible to exist as an individual in such society because every being works for the state and you can't think on your own or do what you're passionate with, then you will end up as a mindless person.
The importance of light and darkness in Anthem.

I am going to write about the importance of light and darkness in the novel called "Anthem" written by Ayn Rand. The novel was first published in England in 1938 and it was published in the United States in 1946. The story is post-apocalyptic in nature and the story takes place in the future, the place or time is not mentioned. The society that the people live in is held by dictatorship and their philosophy is that everyone is equal, which it should be. But the problem is that all the individual rights have been taken away. The destiny of man's life is held by someone else. The individuals can't decide for themselves because that is considered being selfish.

Light and darkness play a significant role in Rand's novel. Not just light as in daytime and darkness as in night-time. I also relate the light and darkness to good and evil. But I relate daytime to darkness and night-time to light. I think that both of these mentioned ways to see light and darkness are simple to discover when reading the novel.

I see darkness as in the society that Equality 7-2521 lives in has so many laws and rules that no living individual has the right to do anything he or she wishes and as in night-time. But during night is when the light comes for Equality 7-2521. Equality 7-2521 made a lot of new discoveries during night. He entered the uncharted forest (page 84), he looked touched and talked to Liberty 5-3000 which was strictly not allowed (page 72). He went against the laws and rules of the society and it seems like he found himself and also love. "We cannot understand this new life which we have found, yet it seems so clear and simple" (page 85). This is the quotation that I relate to Equality 7-2521 and Liberty 5-3000 to having a happier life that they now had found.

I see the light as in daytime. But during daytime it is almost as if darkness rises because of the society they lived in before they ran away to the uncharted forest. All the strict rules and laws is what I see as darkness. During daytime, when the society is active, and Equality 7-2521 could never have got to know Liberty 5-3000 since talking to other individuals was not allowed. Not being able to say, think and do what you feel is darkness or evil. When Equality 7-2521 had found the glass box with light he thought that if he was to show the Home of the scholars his invention of light the future would be different, lighter and probably better (page 80). He thought that the judges could make him a scholar by giving them the great gift (page 71).

I think that both light and darkness are important elements in this novel, because Equality 7-2521 grows as an individual and so does Liberty 5-3000. They get the chance to think about themselves at night and not follow the rules and laws, they get the chance to find out about love (page 98).
During the day when light outside, Equality 7-2621 tried to show the rest of the society his new invention and he wanted the society to use his invention of light instead of candles (page 71). So it seems to me like he is trying to show the rest of the society his new ideas to change the way of living. The two contrasts of light and darkness makes the novel interesting to read. It's like there's a war between good and evil which is a common basic theme that can be seen in books and movies.

In the end of the story, Equality 7-2521 does no longer says "we" he says "I" instead (page 94) and he also says "my" instead of "our". Equally 7-2521 stopped calling his beloved one Liberty 5-3000 and calls her Gaea instead. Even though he now says "I", "me" and "my", he is no way being egoistic. He says that he wants to go back and help to free his friends (page 101). This change is probably from running away into the Uncharted forest and freeing himself and finding his own ways to live. He does no longer need to obey anyone no longer (page 95). Equality 7-2521 says "I am done with the monster of "we", the word of servitude, of plunder, of misery, falsehood and shame" (page 97). So, an important point in the story depending on light and darkness could be when he runs away and manages to make his life into the way he wants it to be.

http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/anthem.html
http://www.noblesoul.com/ore/books/rand/anthem/index.html

Marie Fritzell began the teacher training course at Högskolan i Halmstad in 2008.