

# The National Test in English: Why it is important and why it is not enough\*

*A study of how school leaders and teachers use the results from the National test in English*

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# Abstract

The main objective of this study has been to investigate to what extent school leaders and teachers use the results from the National Tests in English, and the focus is on whether these results are used in the students' formative reading assessment to improve English teaching.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a semi-structured interview guide as method. The informant sample comprises of eleven informants: four school leaders and seven teachers from four schools in four municipalities. The school leaders were interviewed before the test was completed, and the objective of these interviews was to uncover how the school leaders prepared for the test, and what their plans were for the results this current year. The teachers were interviewed after the test was completed and the results published. The objective of these interviews was to get insight into how the teachers relate to, and use the results in their teaching as part of their students' formative assessment.

The results proved that neither the teachers nor the school leaders use the National test in English to its full extent. Indeed, there are several aspects of the National test in English's intention that are not fulfilled by the teachers or the school leaders. Through the results, three distinct dilemmas that affect the work with the results emerged. First, the school leaders and the teachers do not get fully acquainted with the guidance material or PAS, and therefore they cannot work with the results as intended. Second, there are apparent disagreements between the teachers and the school leaders, based on communication issues related to who has which responsibilities concerning the test and the results. It became clear that the school leaders believe that the teachers work more with the results than the teachers actually do. Third, the school leaders and the teachers do not fulfil the intention of the National test in English with regard to the four principles of assessment for learning provided by the Directorate for Education and Training.

The external validity of the findings is limited, as only four schools contributed in the study. Nevertheless, the transferability of the findings seem evident, due to the fact that the informants offered almost the same opinions and gave the same answers. The study suggests that work must be done in order to ensure the work with the results from the National test in English to make certain that the students benefit from taking the test.



# Sammendrag

Målet med denne studien har vært å undersøke i hvilken grad skoleledere og lærere bruker resultatene fra nasjonal prøve i engelsk, og fokuset har vært på å undersøke om disse resultatene brukes som en del av elevenes formative lesevurdering og til å forbedre engelskundervisningen.

For å gjennomføre denne studien har jeg brukt en kvalitativ tilnærming med en semi-strukturert intervjuguide som metode. Informantutvalget består av elleve informanter: fire skoleledere og syv lærere fra fire skoler i fire kommuner. Skolelederne ble intervjuet før den nasjonale prøven i engelsk, og målet for disse intervjuene var å finne ut hvordan skolelederne gjorde forberedelser før prøven, og hva deres planer var for bruken av resultatene dette inneværende år. Lærerne ble intervjuet etter den nasjonale prøven i engelsk og resultatene var publisert. Målet med disse intervjuene var å få innsikt i hvordan lærerne forholder seg til, og bruker resultatene i sin undervisning i forbindelse med elevenes formative vurdering.

Resultatene viste at hverken lærerne eller skolelederne bruker den nasjonale prøven i engelsk i sitt fulle omfang. Det er flere aspekter av den nasjonale prøvens intensjon som hverken lærerne eller skolelederne oppfyller. Gjennom resultatene viste det seg tre tydelige dilemmaer som påvirker arbeidet med resultatene fra den nasjonale prøven i engelsk. For det første, hverken lærerne eller skolelederne har fullstendig kjennskap til veiledningsdokumentene eller PAS. Dette fører til at de ikke har mulighet til å arbeide med resultatene fra prøven på en skikkelig måte. For det andre er det en tydelig uenighet mellom lærerne og skolelederne, det er store kommunikasjonsutfordringer i forbindelse med hvem som har ansvar for arbeidet med prøven, og om hvilket arbeid som blir gjort og av hvem. Det viste seg at skolelederne har inntrykk av at lærerne gjør mer arbeid med resultatene enn det lærerne sier de faktisk gjør. For det tredje, skolelederne og lærerne oppfyller ikke intensjonen til den nasjonale prøven i engelsk med hensyn til de fire prinsippene for vurdering for læring som er presentert av utdanningsdirektoratet.

Den ytre validiteten av funnene er noe begrenset, ettersom kun fire skoler var med i studien. Likevel er funnenes overførbarhet tydelig, med tanke på at informantene viste like oppfatninger og ga like svar. Studien viser klart at noe må gjøres i forbindelse med å sikre arbeidet med resultatene fra den nasjonale prøven i engelsk, først og fremst for å sørge for at elevene får utbytte av å gjennomføre prøven.





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As I write these final words  
Both thanks and praise are in order  
As my head has been obscured  
People have helped to control the disorder

To my loving boyfriend, who has suffered through my insanity  
Has been an immense support  
By being the ultimate example of praiseworthy humanity  
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# 1 INTRODUCTION

In my opinion, all tests we require of students should in one way or another benefit them. The title for my study, “The National Test in English: Why it is important and why it is not enough”, signals that the National test in English (hereafter NTE) might not be used to its full potential.

Each year the Norwegian National Tests receive a great deal of attention in the media, due to the publication of the scores. The media highlights the “best” schools, and perhaps to a more extensive degree, reveal the “worst” schools. The scores are used in the real-estate market, in political debates and in the schools’ own marketing, but how are these results of use to the students? Are they merely used as statistical scores, with either a “job well done” – or “we’ll do better next year”, or are they used to benefit the students, as a tool for formative assessment?

In this introduction, I will present the background for this master’s thesis, with a brief presentation of the NTE and a presentation of other related studies. Next, I will give a presentation of my pilot study concerning the same topic, and further a presentation and elaboration of the study’s purpose and the research question. Finally, I present an overview of the structure of my master’s thesis.

## 1.1 Background

When I first began working as a teacher, I had an eighth grade in English, and experienced their taking of the NTE. This was before my pedagogical training at the University of Oslo (hereafter UiO), so the only information I had of the NTE was what I had read in the newspapers, since the National tests were introduced after I had finished lower secondary school. I experienced there were no guidelines for the conducting of the NTE, or at least, the school administration did not give me any, and I had to figure out how to work with the NTE myself. Therefore, all I did was inform the students of the scores and their levels of mastery on the NTE.

When I began my pedagogical training at UiO, and learned more about the NTE, I often thought back to my own experiences with these tests. As a result, I wrote my first paper on this topic in one of my didactic courses, where I discussed how the NTE could serve as a tool

for adapted teaching. When writing this paper, I discovered almost no research had been done on this field, and therefore I decided this would be the topic for my master's thesis. Later, when working with the pilot study, which will be explained further in this chapter, I revised my research question when I gained more knowledge and insight in the area. This has served as the basis for this master's thesis.

I wanted to conduct a research study to find out if my experience was the exception, or if it was the rule, but I imagined the results would come up somewhere in between. However, in the initial phase, when I had decided on the topic for my master's thesis, but prior to the work with this thesis, and my pilot study, I had discussions with teachers from different schools. I understood there were many emotions connected to the NTE, both negative and positive, but for the most part involving frustration. This served as a great motivation for the writing of this thesis.

## **1.2 The National Test in English (NTE)**

The purpose of the NTE is to map whether the students' achievements are in accordance with the curriculum's goal for the basic skill of reading, in addition to the competence aims tested in the NTE. The test will provide information to the students, parents, teachers, school leaders, school owners, the regional authorities and the national authorities, and can serve as a basis for further work and development. (Udir, 2010b). In addition, the results from the NTE are supposed to be used as part of the students' formative assessment in English.

The NTE (and the other National tests) was first introduced in the spring of 2004, and this form of the test was also completed in 2005, however, after an evaluation of the test it was determined there was a need for improvement. As a result, the government on March 27, 2006, passed new requirements for the tests (Udir, 2010b). The Ministry of Education and Research gave the Directorate for Education and Training (hereafter called the Directorate) the responsibility for development of new tests, new requirements for the time of the conduction of the test, and specified after which grade levels the tests were to be taken (Udir, 2010b).

As a result, the new tests were introduced in the fall of 2007. A reason for the change in grades taking the tests was according to the Directorate that the original plan of completing the tests at the fourth and seventh grades made the teachers react negatively towards the NTE.



They felt it entailed a too strict monitoring of their work, and therefore it was changed to the fifth and eighth grade. This has led to a more positive attitude towards the test among the teachers in primary school, but equally important, the competence aims from the seventh grade (primary school) are now being assessed on the eighth grade (lower secondary school), which facilitates formative assessment from primary – to lower secondary school.

The work with NTE involves a number of different participants. The Ministry of Education and Research is responsible for determining the framework of the tests, in addition to deciding when the tests will be held, and the purpose of the tests (Udir, 2010b). The Directorate is responsible for suggesting the framework that is to be determined by the Ministry of Education and Research. In addition, the Directorate has the overall responsibility for providing information concerning the tests, and for overseeing the operationalization of the tests. The Directorate makes arrangements for the construction and operationalization through contracts with different institutions, for example, the University of Bergen is responsible for constructing the NTE. (Udir, 2010b). In addition, an external quality assurer is acquired to assess the main features of the tests, as well as special treatment of certain areas. The Institute for Teacher Education and School Development (ILS) at UiO is currently the external quality assurer for the Directorate (Udir, 2010b).

The NTE tests the students in reading, vocabulary and grammar, based on some of the competence aims from the seventh grade, and as mentioned, the intention of the NTE is that the students' results should be used as part of their formative assessment. There will be a more thorough presentation of the NTE in chapter 3.

## **1.3 Related Studies**

Studies on reading and assessment are not unknown territory in the field of research. However, combining these fields with the NTE *is* a rather unknown territory. In fact, no research has been completed on this combination, at least in Norway. Therefore, in the search for related studies, I had to broaden my search. As reading and assessment have large fields of research, I could probably find thousands of related studies. However, as a more limited field related to this study, I chose to focus on studies related to the National tests. I will present four related studies. One concerns how the National tests might be used for school development, one with regard to how the National tests might change practices in Norwegian

schools, one that examines the National test in reading, and how fifth graders' reading competence could be supported by the results from this test, and finally one study that has evaluated the National tests as a system.

In Chavannes, Engesveen and Strands' (2011) study, they researched how principals describe their work with the results from the National tests. However, this study is mostly focused on the principals' work with these results in relation to political and administrative levels, and focuses on steering documents concerning the work with the results and school quality. Yet, their findings are that the principals to a small extent use the results from the National tests related to school development. Instead, the principals are more focused on reporting these results and introducing easily measurable instigating actions. Therefore, this study is related to my study, concerning how the school leaders relate to, and follows up the results from the NTE and whether this work will enhance the students' progression and serve as part of the students' formative assessment.

Eriksen (2011) studied in his master's thesis how the National tests could lead to a change in practice in Norwegian schools. He found his informants were positive to the National tests, that the schools consciously worked with improvement related to the follow up of the results from the National tests, that the informants focused on the preparations before the tests, that they focused on teaching related to the results, and that it was important for schools to compare their results with other schools. This study is related to my study as it concentrates on how the schools follow up the results in order to enhance their students' improvement, and also that it focuses on the schools' attitudes to the National tests.

Ljønes (2012) studied in her master's thesis students' answers from the 2011 National test in reading at the fifth grade level, focusing on reading comprehension. The National test in reading concerns Norwegian as a first language, as opposed to NTE, which concerns reading in English as a second language. She wanted to examine whether the test could be a tool for further assessment and progression with regard to the students' reading comprehension and training in reading. She also found the results from the National test in reading had little influence on the teachers' teaching of reading. Even if this study is concerned with the National test in reading in the fifth grade, the research is related to my study of the NTE in the eighth grade, as the purpose of the study is comparable to mine. This is because it investigates whether the NTE (and the National test in reading) is used by the teachers in their training of

the students' reading as well as whether the use of the results is related to the students' formative reading assessment.

In a report presented by NIFU (Nordic Institute for studies of Innovation, Research and Education) in April 2013, a presentation of the project "Evaluering av nasjonale prøver som system" presents findings both related to, and relevant for my study. In this study, NIFU has researched the National tests as a whole, and as informants they have included school owners, school leaders, teachers, students and parents. This study covers some of the topics I have included in my study, such as preparations before the test, and how the informant groups relate to the results and the guidance material provided by the Directorate. Their results concerning the teachers and school leaders are mostly relevant for my study, as some of their findings both confirm and contradict my findings. This will be exemplified in the discussion in chapter 6.

In other words, I found studies that could be related to my study with regard to the National tests as a whole, and the National test in reading. However, I could not find studies related to the NTE, and how the results from the NTE could be used as part of the students' formative assessment. It is therefore my hope that this study will provide new insight and contribute to filling the gap concerning this topic.

## **1.4 Pilot Study**

Prior to this master's thesis, I conducted a pilot study with a similar research question. This was during the course EDID4010 – Fundamental Concepts of Teaching English as a Foreign Language, at UiO. This pilot study proved to give more grounds for a master's thesis with this topic. In my pilot study, I used the same method as with this thesis; a qualitative research approach with a semi-structured interview guide. I conducted my project at a single school, interviewing one school leader and three teachers. The main topics for my interviews were:

- How do the teachers and the school leader relate to the results from the National test in English?
- How are the results followed up?
- How do the teachers and the school leader wish that these results ideally were followed up?
- How are the results treated on a teaching level, a school level, and a political level?

First, the findings from the interviews showed that not much was done with the results from the NTE and that there was a gap between the school leader's understanding of what was being done, and what the teachers said they actually did. Second, the findings also showed that both the school leader and the teachers had many thoughts and ideas concerning improvements for the NTE. Most prominent among these, presented by all the informants, was that they wanted the NTE to be taken in the ninth grade as well, similar to the other two National tests, in reading and arithmetic. Third, the findings revealed that the teachers were not satisfied with the design of NTE; they wanted it to be on paper, not digital, and argued they would relate more to the results if they assessed the tests themselves. Fourth, the findings showed the informants were displeased with PAS, the digital platform where the results from the NTE are presented and where the tools for analysing the results can be found. Finally, the findings from the interviews in the pilot revealed that most of the teachers had a very limited understanding of reading strategies and also a limited understanding of different forms of reading, including that NTE assesses the students' abilities to perform different forms of reading.

These findings inspired me to investigate these topics in my master's thesis. I wanted to gain more knowledge about how the teachers work with the results. Whether the results were, or could be used to improve the English teaching, whether the situation I discovered at the school in the pilot study, of not working with the results could also be found at other schools, and if possible, discover why not more is done to use these results as part of the teaching of English in lower secondary school.

## **1.5 Research Question**

This research is aimed at teachers and school leaders in the lower secondary school, and their work with the results from the NTE. The basis for this research is the findings from my pilot study, which developed an impression that not much is being done by the teachers to analyse the results from the NTE and use them as part of the students' progression in the English subject. The purpose of this study is to investigate how, or if, these results are being used, and to analyse whether the use of these results could improve the English teaching in the lower secondary school.

Therefore, my research question for this study is:

*The English National Test as Formative Assessment: To what extent do school leaders and teachers use the results to improve English teaching?*

Based on the research question I developed two subsidiary questions to help answer the research question:

- To what extent do the teachers use the results from the National test in English as part of the students' formative reading assessment?
- To what extent do the school leaders follow up the results from the National test in English?

The findings from the interviews and the answers to these questions are interpreted and presented in chapter 5, and a discussion concerning the findings can be found in chapter 6.

## **1.6 Choice of Literature**

For the reading chapter, I have chosen to use Grabe (2009), Alderson (2000) and Bernhardt (2011) as my main theorists. These theorists were referred to in more of the articles I read, and more importantly, both Grabe and Bernhardt focus on reading in English a second language, which is highly relevant for my study. Alderson's main focus is on assessing first and second language reading, and was therefore relevant for the reading chapter as well as the assessment chapter.

For the assessment chapter, I first and foremost used Black and Wiliam (1998; 2002; 2003), as I had used them in my pilot study and therefore knew their theories were suitable for my topic. It was relevant to use different sources from the Directorate, concerning the NTE and the English Subject Curriculum as the assessment chapter was focused on the NTE and the national curriculum, the Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education, LK06. Further, I was recommended to read and use Bachman and Palmer (2010), and their definitions of constructs and operationalization, in relation to the NTE.

## **1.7 Brief Overview of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of seven main chapters. The second and third chapters provide the theoretical background for this study. In chapter 2, theories on reading are presented, with a main focus on reading processes, reading strategies, reading in a second language (L2) and reading in LK06. In chapter 3, assessment is the main topic, with a particular focus on formative assessment, and how formative assessment can be linked to the work with the NTE. Also included in this chapter is a presentation of the NTE, which includes tasks, scoring and the intention from the Directorate on how to work with the results from NTE.

The method for this thesis is presented in chapter 4. Chapter 5 presents the findings, and these findings are discussed in relation to theory in chapter 6. A critical evaluation of the study's validity, along with implications for the findings and the study's limitations and suggestions for further research, can be found in chapter 6. In chapter 7, a brief mention of the study's most important findings, suggestions for further research and the thesis' concluding words are presented. At the very end, a reference list and the appendixes are included.

## 2 READING

This chapter begins with a presentation and discussion of different aspects of reading. This is followed by a more thorough presentation and discussion of the interactive reading process. Third, there is an introduction to reading strategies. Fourth, I present theories on reading in a second language (L2), in which the differences between reading in a first language (L1) and L2 will be compared and discussed. Finally, there will be a presentation of reading in The Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education (LK06), with emphasis on reading as a basic skill, and the relevant competence aims from the lower secondary school.

### 2.1 What is Reading?

According to the Oxford Dictionary, the definition of “read” is to “look at and comprehend the meaning of (written or printed matter) by interpreting the characters or symbols of which it is composed” (Read, 2013). However, this definition only explains the decoding process involved in reading, and is an example of *learning to read*. In comparison, the definition presented by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation Development [OECD], focuses on the process of *reading to learn*: “understanding, using, reflecting on and engaging with written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to participate in society” (OECD, 2009, p. 23). Reading to learn is the goal of the NTE in the lower secondary school and is described in the construct of the NTE, as will be described in section 3.4.

“Definitions of reading and reading literacy have changed over time in parallel with changes in society, economy, and culture” (OECD, 2009, p.23). These definitions focus on how to understand the process of reading, and as OECD emphasizes, changes in society and culture affect these definitions. For instance, in the 1940s and 1950s, behaviourists had an influence on the theories of reading processes. In their definitions, they claimed that “language learning comes from outside – from output from others and from interaction and correction – rather than from inside the mind (Cook, 2008, pp. 220-221). Alderson (2000, p. 17) elaborates on this by saying, “In this traditional view, readers are passive decoders of sequential graphic-phonemic-syntactic-semantic systems, in that order”. As mentioned above, these definitions refer to *learning to read*, or decoding, as opposed to the process of *reading to learn*.

In contrast, the psycholinguistic movement that followed was more concerned with reading as a meaning-making process (Strømsø, 2007). This was especially emphasized by Kenneth Goodman in his ‘Psycholinguistic Guessing Game’ from 1982 (Alderson, 2000; Bernhardt, 2011; Grabe, 2009), “in which readers guess or predict the text’s meaning on the basis of minimal textual information, and maximum use of existing, activated, knowledge” (Alderson, 2000, p.17). Goodman first introduced this idea in 1968 as “a psycholinguistic framework: a framework that posits that a comprehender is actively engaged in relating experience (*psycho*) with words (*linguistic*) on the page (Goodman, as cited by Bernhardt, 2011, p.23). As one can see, the trend in reading theories has moved from learning to read, to reading to learn, which is in accordance with the theories on reading that is dominant today.

The social aspects of reading gained importance in the 1980s and 1990s, and according to Strømsø (2007), the culture that the children are a part of affect their reading:

Within sociocultural research, reading comprehension is not considered a question of individual skills, but rather a question of whether the students are from an environment where conversation, values and work methods are in accordance with the practice they meet at school (Strømsø, 2007, p.40, my translation).

In summary, the definitions and theories from the past century have led to modern theories on reading processes and reading comprehension, which will be presented in the following section.

## 2.2 The Interactive Reading Process

The most influential theory on reading today is the interactive process where the reader alternates between the decoding process of “bottom-up”, and the meaning-making process of “top-down”. Bottom-up reading is seen as the basic process of decoding words, where the reader bases his or her reading, and the creation of meaning, on the words they recognize. The reader decodes the text and tries to make meaning, “Bottom-up approaches are serial models, where the reader begins with the printed word, recognises graphic stimuli, decodes them to sound, recognises words and decodes meaning” (Alderson, 2000, p.16). Top-down reading; on the other hand, is the meaning-making process the reader enters when he or she elaborates on the text with own experiences and prior knowledge.



However, today the integrated process where bottom-up and top-down interacts is recognised as the most complete theory on reading. “Neither the bottom-up nor the top-down approach is an adequate characterisation of the reading process, and more adequate models are known as interactive models, in which every component in the reading process can interact with any other component” (Alderson, 2000, p.18). One cannot say that a reader reads either bottom-up or top-down as the two processes are intertwined in the reading process. For example, a difference between how a weak reader and a strong reader approach a text might be that the weaker reader, when facing a difficult word, might use the context to understand the word. As suggested by Grabe (2009, p. 28): “Context information is ... a useful support for word recognition when a reader slows down because of processing difficulties, or a word that is ... not well known”. A stronger reader, on the other hand, will probably use the context to elaborate on the content using prior knowledge.

The interactive process is undoubtedly a respected theory; yet, Grabe (2009) presents a critical view on this process, and calls it a “Metaphorical model”. He claims that “they [top-down and bottom-up] are useful because they make fundamental processing ideas accessible ... However, they obscure important details, ignore critical distinctions, and typically do not accurately reflect more current views on reading” (Grabe, 2009, p.89, my clarification). He also claims that the interactive models are a compromise as the two processes combine to create a large set of processes. Instead, he presents the two processes as lower-level and higher-level processes, in which he includes several aspects. “It should be evident that efficient reading ability combines aspects of higher-level and lower-level processing, often referred to as bottom-up and top-down processing” (Grabe, 2009, p.55). He as well emphasizes that a reader is neither bottom-up nor top-down, but that the interaction between the two is always present.

Nevertheless, whether the processes are called bottom-up/lower-level or top-down/higher-level, there are many components essential to ensure fluent reading, and thereby succeed with the interactive process when reading to learn. The reading process, at the component level, can be described as lower-level processes and higher-level processes.

### ***2.2.1 The Lower-level Processes***

The bottom-up or lower-level processes comprise of multiple components that interact to secure reading comprehension:

Describing certain skills as “lower-level” does not mean that they are simple or undemanding; rather, they form a group of skills that have the potential to become strongly automatized, and this automatizing of lower-level skills is a requirement for fluent reading” (Grabe, 2009, p.21).

Grabe (2009) presents four main components of lower-level processes:

- 1) Word recognition
- 2) Syntactic parsing
- 3) Meaning proposition encoding
- 4) Working memory

The first process is *word recognition*. In order to be a fluent reader, word recognition must be rapid and automatic (Grabe, 2009). According to Alderson (2000 p.75), “speed of word recognition affects speed and efficiency of reading”. To ensure rapid word recognition, other subprocesses are required. Grabe (2009) presents seven such subprocesses: (1) Orthographic processing: the recognition of letters, groups of letters and how these letters form words. (2) Phonological processing: the recognition of the sounds of letters and words, used to identify the meaning of the word. (3) Semantic and syntactic processing: the recognition of groups of words, where the reader constructs meaning and develops comprehension by understanding the relations between words. (4) Lexical access: the comparison of one word to other similar words the reader already knows. (5) Morphological processing includes the recognition of affixes in words. (6) Automaticity in word recognition should be rapid and automatized in order to ensure fluent reading. (7) Context effects are mostly relevant to word recognition in learning situations, where the context can support word recognition, especially for a weak reader (Grabe, 2009).

The second component of lower-level processing, *syntactic parsing*, concerns grammatical information, for example the understanding of the separation between content words and function words, the knowledge of sentence structures and information from determiners, word ordering, tense and modality (Grabe, 2009). The third component, *meaning proposition encoding* is the comprehension of meaning based on word recognition and syntactic parsing. This encoding is how the reader creates meaning based on the input from the text. The fourth component of lower level processing is *working memory*. Comprehension related to difficult

words and passages might have implications for readers, related to the constraints of working memory. Grabe (2009) defines working memory as something that

...includes information that is active for processing operations as well as the processing directions themselves ... Working memory is generally described as a limited capacity system. It has limited storage, limited linkages to long-term memory, and limited abilities to carry out multiple processes simultaneously (Grabe, 2009, p.32).

In the comprehension of fluent reading, lower-level processes play an important role. These processes are often unconsciously integrated in the reading, and they are also directly linked to the working memory. The processes are essential for comprehension (Grabe, 2009). In the following section, the higher-level processes are presented.

### **2.2.2 The Higher-level Processes**

As has been emphasized, reading is an interactive process between the bottom-up/lower-level processes, and the top-down/higher-level processes. Grabe (2009) presents two main components of higher-level processing:

- 1) A text model for reading comprehension
- 2) A situation model of reader interpretation

“Higher-level processes generally assume that the reader can direct attentional resources to these component skills” (Grabe, 2009, p.39). *The text model for comprehension* is the comprehension of a complete text, where the reader needs more than the components of lower-level processes. Inferencing is an important part of text comprehension, for example with anaphoric reference. Also, prior knowledge and genre knowledge are important elements of text comprehension. *The situation model of integration* “represents the mental circumstances generated in response to the text, or the interpretation of the text, but not necessarily the specifics of the text model itself” (Grabe, 2009, p. 43). In the situation model, as with the text model, the genre plays an important role. However, in the situation model, the reader’s relations to similar texts are the important factor, rather than the knowledge of the genre. Grabe lists factors that influence the construction of a situation model, where he includes task expectation, evaluation of the importance of information, its enjoyment value, its interest value, and attitudes (Grabe, 2009, p.44). Therefore, the situation model adds an

emotional aspect to the reader's prior knowledge related to the task expectation and the text comprehension, whereas the text model focuses mainly on the reader's general prior knowledge and text comprehension. Higher-level processing includes goal-setting, reading strategies and coherence. "Goals provide reasons for action and provide casual explanations for what other people are doing or what they want to see done" (Grabe, 2009, p.51). These components of higher-level processing focus on the meaning-making process of reading.

To sum up, the interactive reading process can be considered a set of skills, some of them automatized, and used to develop reading comprehension. Yet, Alderson (2000, p. 10) presents the argument that "there is a considerable degree of controversy in the theory of reading over whether it is possible to identify and label separate skills of reading". Nevertheless, he supports the idea of these skills, but questions the lack of empirical justification. Alderson also addresses the difficulty of testing these separate skills, and therefore emphasizes, just as Grabe, that the separate components of reading skills are overlapping. It is important to note that lower-level processing is not something a reader must master before moving on to the higher-level. It is not a placement of the weak reader in the lower-level and a strong reader in the higher-level. All readers take part in the interaction between the two processes.

## **2.3 Reading in a Second Language**

In Norway, Norwegian is considered the first language (L1) and English the second language (L2). According to the Oxford dictionary, L2 is "a language that a person can speak which is not the first language they learnt naturally as a child" (Second language, 2013). Bernhardt (2011, p.6) claims that "Second-language reading is tantamount to operating in stereo ... a clear channel from the first-language knowledge and a degraded channel from second language knowledge – which operate simultaneously". In other words, when reading in L2, the reader is influenced by their first language, with both linguistic skills and processing skills. The reader is also, to a less extent, influenced by their knowledge of the L2 in their L2-reading. Reading has been presented in the previous section, but how does reading in L2 differ from reading in L1?

Both Bernhardt (2011) and Grabe (2009) argue that readers bring parts of their L1 linguistic resources to reading in L2. Grabe (2009) claims the transfer from L1 to L2 will either assist or interfere with the students' L2 reading. This he further explains: "L2 reading will also be influenced by the linguistic resources and knowledge from the learner's L1 ... These transfer influences will sometimes facilitate L2 reading comprehension, but also sometimes interfere with L2 reading" (Grabe, 2009, p.131). This means that sometimes students will benefit from their L1 linguistic resources when reading in L2, but other times the linguistic resources may interfere with their L2 reading. For example, a student who uses higher-level processes when reading in L1 might not have the necessary vocabulary to practice this form of reading in L2, and thereby their L1 linguistic resource serves as interference for their L2 reading. This is supported by Bernhardt (2011), who claims, "The question is no longer one of *whether* there is influence. The question is one of *how*" (Bernhardt, 2011, p.52). In other words, Grabe (2009) and Bernhardt (2011) agree there is a connection between L1 and L2; however, they have different opinions on the importance of this connection and how and where this connection has a significant meaning for the comprehension of L2 reading.

Bernhardt (2011) argues that there is a great deal of transfer from reading in L1 to reading in L2. She proposes a compensatory model of second-language learning where she argues that 20% of L2 proficiency can be explained by *L1 literacy*. In this, she for example includes alphabets, vocabulary, text structure, and beliefs about word and sentence configuration. She further argues that 30% of L2 literacy can be explained by *L2 language knowledge*, where she for example includes grammatical form, vocabulary knowledge, cognates, and L1/L2 linguistic distance. The last 50% refers to an *unexplained variance*, for example comprehension strategies, engagement, content and domain knowledge, interest, and motivation. Bernhardt suggests that students who struggle with comprehension in L1 probably also will struggle in L2 and that students who know how to use reading strategies in L1 do not need to be re-taught those strategies for reading in L2 (Bernhardt, 2011).

A potential challenge for the L2 reader is to comprehend content while at the same time process new vocabulary. This challenge especially concerns the readers with limited reading abilities, as their lower-level processing will be less developed than readers with higher proficiencies in the L2. The lower-level processing is directly related to working memory, especially *word recognition*, as "automatic word recognition skills are critical for comprehension to occur in second-language text processing" (Bernhardt, 2011, p.53). When a

reader with lower ability in L2 reads a text, the comprehension might be challenged by the lack of word recognition. If the reader often has to stop reading in order to look up words, the working memory will not be sufficient to both remember the content, and the new vocabulary. The abruptness while reading will affect the cohesion of the text, and consequently make it difficult to remember the content.

In other words, a wide vocabulary and fluent word recognition are imperative for effective reading comprehension in both L1 and L2. Hence, fluent L2 reading is dependent on quick word recognition, and other lower-level processes, and working memory is dependent on fluency to assure comprehension.

For a learner to achieve good competence in reading, they must activate relevant strategies. General learning strategies as well as reading strategies are necessary tools for enhanced reading comprehension. “When we are aware of the strategies we use to learn a foreign language, and the strategies that help us to understand and be understood, the acquisition of knowledge and skills will be easier and more meaningful” (Udir, 2010a, p.1). These strategies will be presented and discussed below.

## **2.4 Strategies for Reading**

“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” (Council of Europe, 2001. p.10). Studies have shown that reading skills are related to effective use of reading strategies and that a student who masters reading strategies will be able to adapt reading to situation, and also be left with better comprehension.

Strategies have often been defined on two levels: cognitive and metacognitive. Cognitive strategies have commonly been described as strategies that a reader is trained to use ... Metacognitive strategies have been described as strategies that require an explicit awareness of reading itself and that most strongly support the goals of reading (Grabe, 2009, p.223).

However, it is important to make a distinction between these general learning strategies and the more specific reading strategies. The first can be used to learn different skills, not only

reading. However, in this section I want to focus on strategies that can be used to improve one's reading skills, therefore this section is separated into (1) four main comprehension strategies, (2) specific reading strategies, and (3) how these are intertwined.

### **2.4.1 Four Main Comprehension Strategies**

Cognitive learning strategies can be divided into four main categories: *memorizing*, *elaboration*, *organization* and the metacognitive strategy, *control* (Weinstein & Meyer, 1986).

- 1) *Memorizing*: This strategy “includes activities and dialogues before, during, or after reading where teachers instruct or recommend students to select and rehearse information without transforming or moving beyond what is given in the text” (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2012). This strategy may be useful when the purpose is to repeat content without gaining a deeper understanding, but relating to reading comprehension and explaining underlying information in a text, this strategy is not useful. However, used together with other strategies, it might be a good tool to increase comprehension (Hellekjær & Hopfenbeck, 2012).
- 2) *Elaboration*: This strategy “includes activities and dialogues before, during, or after reading where teachers instruct or recommend students to build connections between information given in the text and background knowledge or information from other sources” (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2012). The strategy of elaboration is a suitable tool for gaining new knowledge while activating prior knowledge (Hellekjær & Hopfenbeck, 2012).
- 3) *Organization*: Students order or arrange text information to get a better overview of relations among concepts and ideas in the text (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2012).
- 4) *Control*: This strategy is useful when a reader wants to find out how much of a text he or she has understood, in order to assess or regulate their own text comprehension (problem detection and problem solving) (Anmarkrud & Bråten, 2012). Control strategies are used to control own learning processes, and also evaluate which strategies are the most suitable to enhance learning (Hellekjær & Hopfenbeck, 2012). Cognitive control strategies resemble metacognitive strategies, which are concerned with whether the students are aware of what they do, and their own competence in the topic area (Strømsø, 2007).

According to Strømsø (2007), one can say that these four main strategies are concerned with the student's working procedures, what they do when they are trying to understand the content of a text. In other words, "The strategies selected by the individual in order to accomplish a given task will depend on the diversity of the various abilities to learn at his or her disposal" (Council of Europe, 2001, p.13). For example, if a student uses a mind map as a specific reading strategy to take notes from a text, it might be to memorize in order to remember facts from the text. It may also be to connect information in the text to prior knowledge, to organize the content, or to control how much he or she has understood.

### **2.4.2 Specific Reading Strategies**

There are hundreds of specific reading strategies, and the focus in this section will be on those presented by Grabe (2009) and Alderson (2000) that are concerned with L2 reading. Grabe (2009) presents eight reading strategies that support comprehension:

- 1) Summarizing
- 2) Forming questions
- 3) Answering questions and Elaborative interrogation
- 4) Activating prior knowledge
- 5) Monitoring comprehension
- 6) Using text-structure awareness
- 7) Using graphic organizers
- 8) Inferencing

These reading strategies are also discussed by Alderson. However, he addresses the definition conflict between strategy, ability and skill "Not only are reading processes mysterious and imperfectly understood; even the terms 'skill', 'strategy', and 'ability' are not well defined in the field, are often interchangeably and one person's usage contradicts another's" (Alderson, 2000, p.355). Therefore, some of the elements Grabe presents as strategies, Alderson presents as skills or abilities, which can become strategies. Both Grabe (2009) and Alderson (2000) have influenced the following presentation of these eight strategies: *Summarizing*, after reading a text, the student makes a summary of what he or she has understood from the text. This strategy can be linked to the main strategies of organization and control. *Forming questions*, the student forms questions after reading a text. To be able to form good and valid questions, the student needs to comprehend the content of the text; therefore this strategy can



be linked to the main strategies of elaboration, organization and control. *Answering questions* can be used as a control strategy, either by the student or the teacher, in order to monitor comprehension of a text. *Elaborative interrogation* can be related to the main strategy elaboration, when the student has to reflect upon questions that might not have explicit answers in the text. *Activating prior knowledge*, can also be linked to elaboration of the students' understanding of the world and others' or own culture, as different background knowledge can create different interpretations of a text, especially if the text is culture specific. *Monitoring comprehension* is a cognitive control strategy and a metacognitive strategy which includes several of the other strategies, which aim to monitor understanding. *Using text-structure awareness* can be linked to the strategy of organization, for instance, knowing the difference between a fairy tale and a news article in order to comprehend the intention and the content of the text. *Using graphic organizers* can be related to all four main strategies; to remember words or text content (memorization), to organize the content of a text (organization), or relate the content and background knowledge (elaboration). In this manner, graphic organizers may enhance the comprehension and give the student a better view of the content of a text. This can also be related to control strategies, for example by being used instead of a summary. *Inferencing* can be a useful strategy to draw conclusions between what a student reads in a text and the prior knowledge of the student. This strategy can therefore be linked to the main strategies of elaboration and control.

As with the main strategies, one can focus on one of the specific reading strategies and link it to other strategies. This shows that many different strategies can work together in the same task, but should ideally be chosen according to the purpose of the task. To illustrate this, the example with the mind map can be useful. The mind map is a graphic organizer and can be the basis for a summary of a text, with the purpose of controlling comprehension and organizing the content. It can be used to form questions, with the same purposes as summarizing. It can be used to answer questions, both those that have explicit answers in the text, and to elaborate, as one can use a mind map with notes to answer questions in addition to adding prior knowledge in the mind map. The mind map can also be used to take notes on the text structure, both with examples from a read text and based on prior knowledge about a genre. As this suggests, the specific strategies overlap and could easily have been reduced to fewer strategies.

There is no doubt that reading strategies are important tools to enhance reading comprehension, and this is also communicated in LK06, where reading is one of five basic skills. This is presented in section 2.5.1. However, Alderson (2000, p.307) mentions that “the interest in strategies stems in part from an interest in characterising the *process* of reading, rather than the *product* of reading. In part, however, it also stems from the literature on learning strategies more generally” (my italics). Nevertheless, one can conclude that the conscious use of strategies while reading will enhance reading comprehension. In the following section, reading in LK06 is presented.

## **2.5 Reading in the Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education**

The Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education (LK06) is a formal national curriculum. The curriculum includes different parts for the different aims of the curriculum: “The quality framework summarises and elaborates on the provisions in the Education Act and its regulations, including the National Curriculum for Knowledge Promotion in Primary and Secondary Education and Training.” (Udir, 2005). The LK06 includes one curriculum for each subject, which details the objectives of the subject, main subject areas, teaching hours, basic skills, competence aims and subject assessment.

The LK06 can be defined as a process-oriented curriculum as the curriculum for each subject presents the outcomes of the ongoing process from the first grade to the completion of the upper secondary school. For the English subject, the curriculum is constructed so that the subject is compulsory from the first grade to the eleventh grade (Vg1) for students in general studies, and to the twelfth grade (Vg2) for students in the vocational studies. The competence aims are set after grades 2, 4, 7, 10 and Vg1/Vg2 (Hellekjær, 2007).

### **2.5.1 Reading as a Basic Skill**

For each subject in LK06, including English as a second language, there are five basic skills: oral skills, reading skills, writing skills, numeracy skills and digital skills. The basic skills are integrated in all subjects: “Each subject curriculum integrates competence aims, basic skills and subject content. The skills are consequently expressed in different manners and to a

varying degree in the different curricula, depending on the relevance of different skills aspects for the subject in question” (Udir, 2012d, p.5).

Four sub-categories of reading are presented in the framework from the Directorate: 1) to understand, 2) to find information, 3) to interpret (drawing conclusions), and, 4) to reflect and assess texts (Udir, 2012d). Along with each sub-category, there follows a short description: 1) “Understand means processing and comprehending texts based on prior knowledge and expectations. This implies using different meaning-making strategies in order to understand increasingly more complex texts.” (Udir, 2012d, p.8). 2) “*Find* means finding information which is explicitly or implicitly expressed” (Udir, 2012d, p.8), 3) “*Interpret* means drawing conclusions based on more than one text” (Udir, 2012d, p.8), and 4) “*Reflect and assess* means relating independently to texts, from commenting on text content to relating critically to a text and substantiate one’s own opinions, analyses or evaluations” (Udir, 2012d, p.8). In other words, in all subjects including English as a second language the teachers are expected to include these sub-categories of reading.

### **2.5.2 Reading in the English Subject Curriculum Competence Aims**

As a result of reading being implemented as one of the five basic skills in every subject in LK06, the English subject curriculum states that,

*Being able to read* in English is part of the practical language competence and means being able to read and understand, to explore and reflect upon increasingly more demanding texts and thus gain insight across cultures and disciplines. Developing reading skills in English also improves general reading skills”.(Udir, 2010a)

In the English subject curriculum for lower secondary school, there are several competence aims that are explicitly or implicitly linked to reading, as illustrated in the following table:

Competence aims in English after tenth grade
<p><b>Language learning:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify important linguistic similarities and differences between English and the native language and use this knowledge in his or her own language learning</li> </ul>
<p><b>Communication:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Master vocabulary that covers a range of topics</li> <li>• Understand spoken and written texts in a variety of topics</li> <li>• Read and understand texts of different lengths and genres</li> <li>• Select listening, speaking, reading and writing strategies adapted to purpose and situation</li> <li>• Use content from various sources independently and critically</li> </ul>
<p><b>Culture, society and literature:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read and discuss a representative selection of literary texts from the genres poetry, short stories, novels and drama from the English-speaking world</li> <li>• Describe theme and composition in texts and visual expressions</li> </ul>

Table 1. The English subject curriculum in LK06

(Udir, 2010a)

As we see in Table 1, the English subject curriculum at the lower secondary level consists of three main areas: (1) Language learning, (2) Communication, and (3) Culture, society and literature (Udir, 2010a). Reading is implemented in the different main areas, and with the imminent revision of the English subject curriculum, it is forecasted that reading as a basic skill will be even more in focus. As shown in this section, the importance of reading and using strategies while reading in L2 is emphasized by the Directorate in the National Curriculum (LK06), in the Framework for Basic Skills and in the English Subject Curriculum's introduction and competence aims (see Table 1).

## 2.6 In this Chapter...

In this chapter reading has been discussed in light of definitions on reading, reading processes, reading strategies, reading in L2, and reading in the LK06. In Norway, all lower secondary students' reading comprehension in English as a second language (L2) are mapped through the NTE. The construction, execution and results from the NTE will be a main topic in the next chapter. Additionally, assessment in general, formative assessment and assessing reading in particular will be presented in the following chapter.

# 3 ASSESSMENT

In this chapter, different aspects of assessment are presented and discussed, along with the NTE, which is presented in an assessment perspective. First, there is a presentation of definitions on assessment, with a focus on summative and formative assessment. Further follows a definition of the assessment construct. Next, reading will be placed in relation to assessment, and different theories on assessing reading will be presented. Finally, there will be a presentation of the NTE, with a focus on the NTE as formative assessment and how to work with the results from the test, in an assessment perspective.

## 3.1 What is Assessment?

“Assessment is the process of collecting information about something that we’re interested in, according to procedures that are systematic and substantively grounded” (Bachman, 2004, cited in Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.20). According to Simensen (2007), there is a separation between what we call *formal* and *informal assessment*. The informal assessment is “the kind of assessment a teacher makes on a daily basis through question-answer sequences, dialogues with students and observations of how students cope in various types of oral and written activities” (p.252). Formal assessment, on the other hand, is assessment in test situations, for example exams, or the NTE.

Bachman and Palmer present two terms related to assessment: *systematicity* and *substantive grounding*. When assessment is systematic, it means that the assessment is “designed and carried out according to clearly defined procedures that are methodical and open to scrutiny by other test developers” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.20). That assessment is substantively grounded means that it is “based on a recognized and verifiable area of content, such as a course syllabus” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.20). In other words, the two main elements of assessment are *what* is being assessed and *how* is it being assessed. Both must be included in a valid test situation. The “what” and “how” of an assessment situation can also be defined as the purpose of the assessment.

Another separation within the term assessment is between *objective* and *subjective* assessment. One always strive to assess a test as objectively as possible, however, “objective rating is impossible, or at least very difficult, in test types such as essays, conversations, or

listening/reading comprehension tests with *open answers*” (Simensen, 2007, p.253). Multiple-choice tests, on the other hand, where rating can be done according to an exact pattern, can be characterized as objective (Simensen, 2007). In this case, the answer is either right or wrong, and the teacher can assess the answers with full objectivity.

Assessment may also be directly linked to motivation, “Motivation can be viewed as a condition that causes activity with the individual, directs the activity in a definite direction, and keeps the activity going” (Manger, 2010, p.280, my translation). *Inner motivation* concerns the interest for the activity, and a wish to complete one’s goal based on this interest, whereas *outer motivation* concerns the instrumental value of the activity, for example praise, grades or awards (Manger, 2010). However, the division between inner and outer motivation is not absolute, often there can be both a desire for good grades, in addition to an interest in the topic and/or subject. Formative assessment can be linked to motivation, where feedback, feed forward and self-assessment give the students ownership of their learning, and thereby motivation to succeed. Formative assessment will be elaborated in section 3.1.2.

The word “assessment” is a multifaceted term that for many years “was used primarily to describe processes of evaluating the effectiveness of sequences of instructional activities when the *sequence was completed*” Wiliam (2011, p. 3, my italics). Today, assessment is referred to in a wider sense, and one distinction is between two main types of assessment: *summative* and *formative*. These assessment forms will be treated in the following two sections.

### **3.1.1 Summative Assessment**

The above definition by Wiliam (2011) echoes a *summative* notion of assessment because of its focus on a *sequence being completed*; i.e. being used to evaluate what a student has learned. This is in line with what Simensen (2007, p.252), describes as summative testing: “When achievement testing is used at the end of a course, it is called summative testing. The purpose then is to provide information about the final outcome of the course”. The most obvious form of summative testing is exams. Exams serve exclusively as a measurement of what a student has learned when finishing a course, or in the case of the lower secondary school, a final test on their achievements before they move on to upper secondary school. Summative assessment then applies to examination marks and marks awarded for classwork in each subject, so-called overall achievement grades, provided at the end of lower secondary

school (tenth grade) and in upper secondary school. This is also referred to as final assessment (Udir 2010c).

*Summative assessment* is also used to describe a student's competence related to the completion of competence aims. These competence aims are stated in the National Curriculum (LK06) for each subject. In primary school, competence aims are completed after the second, fourth and seventh grade. In lower secondary school, competence aims are stated after the tenth grade, and in upper secondary school, after each year (Vg1/Vg2/Vg3).

In Norway, the Education Act (2009) regulates assessment in primary and secondary school. "The Education Act makes a distinction between assessment *for* learning and assessment *of* learning, where assessment for learning shows what a learner can do, while assessment of learning measures what a learner knows" (Brevik, 2012 p. 133). Assessment of learning is often equated with summative assessment, and assessment for learning with formative assessment (Wiliam, 2011). On one hand, there is a clear distinction between formative assessment, which is used as part of the students' progression, and summative assessment, used to measure an end-result. On the other hand, summative and formative assessments are often treated as a dichotomy, suggesting that an assessment situation is either summative or formative. However, "Bennett (2009) ... suggests that assessments designed primarily to serve a summative function may also function formatively, while those designed primarily to serve a formative function may also function summatively" (Wiliam, 2011, p. 10). Maybe this is related to what Black and Wiliam (1998) claim when they say it is difficult for teachers to combine the formative and summative roles. Yet, "from the information that teachers gathers for formative purposes, they should, with selection and re-interpretation, be in a strong position to contribute to a fair summative report on each pupil" (Black and Wiliam, 1998, p.12).

The results from the NTE can serve as both summative and formative assessment. *Summative*, as it measures the students' achievement of the competence aims after the seventh grade at the very end of primary school, and *formative*, as it is conducted at the beginning of lower secondary school, in the eighth grade. If the test was to serve as only summative assessment, the test would probably be placed at the end of the seventh grade. As the time for the NTE is a signal that it is meant to serve as formative assessment, a more thorough introduction of formative assessment is given in the following section.

### 3.1.2 Formative Assessment

*Formative* assessment can be described as all other assessments made in between the summative assessment situations. Formative assessment might be made on an hourly basis, a weekly basis, a monthly basis, etc. In other words, the difference between the two types of assessment is that *summative* assessment is a final assessment, whereas *formative* assessment is an on-going assessment process. Formative assessment can be defined as:

Practice in a classroom is formative to the extent that evidence about student achievement is elicited, interpreted, and used by teachers, learners, or their peers, to make decisions about the next steps in instruction that are likely to be better, or better founded, than the decisions they would have taken in the absence of the evidence that was elicited (Black & Wiliam, 2009, p. 9).

This definition focuses on formative assessment as a tool to give the students the opportunity to progress, and it presents that teachers search for different *evidence* for student achievements through different sources, which means that the teachers continuously assess the students based on different types of evaluations. For example, through *observing* the students in different learning activities, in *dialogs* with the students, and through oral and written tasks or *products* presented by the students (Slemmen, 2009). In LK06, assessment for learning is expected from the teachers' work in the classroom:

In the Norwegian curricula, assessment in subjects is based on a goal-oriented assessment principle. This means that students' achievements are assessed by pre-defined criteria for competence and knowledge. Goal-oriented assessment presumes that teachers and students have a common understanding of the goals or teaching, and what is being weighted in the assessment (Udir, 2009, my translation).

In the Education Act (2009), formative assessment is emphasized in paragraph 3-2, *The Purpose of Assessment*, and also has its own paragraph (§3-11). In the purpose of assessment, it is stated: "Formative assessment shall be used as a tool in the educational process, as a basis for adapted teaching and shall contribute to the student ... enhancing his or her competence within the subject (§3-2, my translation). As a result of the Education Act, the Directorate has presented four principles as aid in the work with assessment for learning. These principles are based on Black and Wiliam's (1998) theories of assessment, among others. The four



principles are: 1) Measurement for Learning, 2) Feedback, 3) Feed Forward, and 4) Self-assessment. These principles are explained in the following.

*Measurement for learning* states that the students understand what to learn and what is expected from them; the aims and criteria should be made known to the students before an assessment situation, and the importance of this is emphasized by the Directorate:

It should be known and available for the student what is being weighted in the assessment of his or her competence. The students will easier see if the goals are reached, and will build a relationship to their development, when they get acquainted with what is expected from them in various situations of learning (Udir, 2009, my translation).

Perhaps the most important element in an assessment situation is creating an overview of what is to be assessed. This implies that when a student is given a task, it should include criteria of what is expected from their answer. For example, if a student is going to write an article, a set of criteria should be included in the task, i.e. that the article must include a correct structure, language adapted to the genre, sources, a suitable headline and other criteria related to the content of the article. The criteria are not there to spoon-feed the students, but to give a concise description of the task in order to help them reach their goals, which in this case is to write an article according to the genre requirements. This is also discussed by Black and Wiliam (2002, p.14), “Students can achieve a learning goal only if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to reach it”.

*Feedback* and *feed forward* are the most highlighted elements of formative assessment. Feedback is when students “receive reasoned information about their competence in each subject” (Brevik, 2012, p. 133), while feed forward is when students “get information about what they need to master in order to improve their skills and competence in each subject» (Brevik, 2012, p. 133). There is a significant difference between giving a student feedback to improve learning and giving him or her grades (marks):

Continuous assessment and feedback communicated in a right way give good results in the shape of enhanced learning outcome. Formative assessment should therefore be given throughout the teaching and give guidance on how the student can improve his or her competence in the individual subjects (Udir, 2009, my translation).

According to Black and Wiliam (1998a), there is too much focus on grading, and too little focus on learning. Black and Wiliam (1998a) also emphasize that the content of the feedback is essential to secure learning. The feedback has to meet the needs of the individual student, “The quality of the feedback provided is a key feature in any procedure for formative assessment” (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p.25). When working with feedback and feed forward, it is also imperative to teach students how to work with the feedback and feed forward they are given. In numerous cases, when students receive an assessed paper with feedback and a grade, many of the students tend to focus only on the grade, and not the feedback.

Research experiments have established that, while student learning can be advanced by feedback through comments, the giving of numerical scores or grades has a negative effect, in that students ignore comments when marks are also given (Black & Wiliam, 2002, p.13).

Consequently, the students might make the same mistakes in the next task or test and will not achieve any progress. Therefore, the teacher must ensure the students work consciously with the feedback and feed forward they receive from the teacher. “Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils” (Black & Wiliam, 1998b, p.6).

In an assessment situation where the teacher gives feedback to support further progress and learning, the assessment serves as formative assessment. When a teacher successfully uses formative assessment, the student will receive feedback that is adapted to their needs, and in this way both the teacher and the student can monitor the learning, by focusing on the feedback to ensure progress. However, the Council of Europe (2001 p.186) stresses that “Feedback only works if the recipient is in a position (a) *to notice* ... (b) *to receive* ... (c) *to interpret* ... and (d) *to integrate*”. The Council of Europe emphasizes that for feedback to work, the students have to be trained in monitoring their own learning: “When formative assessment is used effectively in schools, teachers’ model effective learning behaviour, teach self-assessment skills and help students analyse how well different strategies have worked. Students take increasing responsibility for their own learning and progress” (OECD, 2005, p.4). *Self-assessment* should therefore be an integrated method of working with feedback and feed forward. According to the Directorate, the students should be involved in their own learning by assessing own work and development. Self-assessment is an important principle

in order to achieve the students' feeling of influence, their development of responsibility and reflections related to learning:

The students' active participation in the process of learning might lead to better learning. Therefore, there is a demand in the regulation [from the Directorate] that the students participate in the assessment of own work, own competence and own development (Udir, 2009, my translation and clarification).

In other words, the students benefit from monitoring their own work, understanding own progress, and what they need to do to progress. Therefore, it is evident that self-assessment has an unbreakable link to formative assessment.

The importance of self-assessment is also emphasized by Black and Wiliam (1998b, p.7): "For formative assessment to be productive, pupils should be trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning, and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve". They stress that research has shown that students can be trusted with self-assessment, that most students do not over-evaluate their own work, but rather that they are both strict and kind regarding own assessment. The challenge of self-assessment is that "pupils can only assess themselves when they have a sufficiently clear picture of the targets that their learning is meant to attain" (Black & Wiliam, 1998b, p.7). They claim that many students do not have this knowledge, and therefore self-assessment will not give the intended learning outcomes.

This can be linked to the other three principles of formative assessment; students need to know the aims and criteria in order to make a valid self-assessment, it is not possible to make an assessment without knowing what to assess. In addition, feedback and feed forward from previous assessments will serve as useful tools for a student's self-assessment as these might give clues as to what is important to focus on in the self-assessment situation. Previous assessments will give the student the opportunity to reflect on their own progress from one assessment situation to the next. However, in addition to achieving the necessary knowledge to support self-assessment, the students must learn how to assess themselves. If the students manage to overcome what Black and Wiliam (1998) call the pattern of passive reception, which they define as the students' being too accustomed to "receiving classroom teaching as an arbitrary sequence of exercises with no overarching rationale" (p.7), the students will become more motivated and engaged. As a result, their self-assessment becomes a topic for

discussion, and this will promote reflection on their work, which will lead to better learning. The Directorate promotes self-assessment as an important part of formative assessment.

## 3.2 Defining the Assessment Construct

In an assessment situation such as the NTE, the ability or abilities being tested is defined as the *construct*, “We can consider a construct to be the specific definition of an ability that provides the basis for a given assessment or assessment task and for interpreting scores derived from this task” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.43). Alderson (2000) defines construct as “a psychological concept, which derives from a theory of the ability to be tested” (p.118). For example, in the NTE, the main constructs being tested are reading, vocabulary and grammar. This will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter. Alderson (2000) elaborates that “constructs are not psychologically real entities that exist in our heads. Rather, they are abstractions that we define for a specific assessment purpose” (p.118).

When defining a construct for an assessment situation, the construct must be operationalized, which means creating test tasks in such a way that the construct can be assessed. “Operationalization involves ... developing actual assessment tasks, and then organizing the assessment tasks into an overall assessment” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.144). For example, one of the constructs of the NTE is that the students are assessed on their ability to interpret the content of a text. This is, in one case, operationalized such that the students are presented with an instruction, one large picture and four small pictures. The students answer the task by following the instruction that asks them to drag one of the small pictures into the large picture. In this way, the task of interpreting the content is given with a right/wrong answer possibility.

Alderson (2000) emphasizes that a construct might be operationalized differently, based on the purpose of the assessment, and also that a construct definition might differ from one assessment to another. This is also stated by Bachman and Palmer (2010, p. 313), “In many assessments, different constructs may be assessed in different sections of the assessment or by different assessment task types”. According to Bachman and Palmer (2010), the chosen assessment tasks may sometimes be difficult to justify. “Test developers can, and often do, come up with ideas for assessment tasks either off the top of their heads or based upon experience they have had either as test takers themselves or in developing assessment tasks in

other situations” (2010, p. 306). This might then lead to a lack of justification for the construct. Therefore, Bachman and Palmer (2010) claim it is important that the development of assessment tasks is a part of a systematic process.

The justification or validation of assessment can be considered synonyms in this context. Bachman and Palmer (2010) use the term justification, whereas Alderson (2000) and Simensen (2007) use the term validation, however, all emphasize the importance of validation in an assessment. Alderson (2000, p. 111) states that “Validation is central to testing concerns, and the identification of a suitable construct or constructs is central to such validation”. In other words, to have a clear picture of the abilities that are to be assessed, and more importantly, how to assess them, is the basis for a good validation: “The validity of a test is its ability to measure what it is intended to measure” (Simensen, 2007, p.253). Moreover, that the assessment and the test developers are accountable, is stressed by Bachman and Palmer (2010, p. 92), “Being accountable, or **accountability**, means being able to *demonstrate* to stakeholders that the intended uses of our assessment are justified”.

When developing a test, defining a construct and operationalizing tasks, the test developers create a *Blueprint*, which is “the primary document that guides the test developer or test development team in the process of creating assessment tasks and assessment” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.368). A blueprint consists of several components to ensure a valid operationalization of the construct. Bachman and Palmer (2010) present five such components. First: *assessment specification*, where the structure of the assessment as a whole is prescribed by characteristics. Second: *task specification*, where there is a definition of the construct, instructions for the tasks, characterisation of input and response, recording method and setting. Third: *procedures for setting cut scores*, where the score of the assessment is determined. This score must correspond with the level on the performance standard. Fourth: *Procedures and formats for reporting assessment records*, where the test developers determine how to present the scores to the test takers. For example, give a number of points, a level of mastery, a percentage, etc. Fifth: *Procedures for administering the assessment*, where the test developers determine how to oversee and distribute the results to the test takers. For example by preparing the assessment setting, monitoring the performance of the test taker, maintaining a supportive testing environment, communicating the instructions and dealing with irregularities (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, pp. 371-380). The use of blueprint can be linked to the work with the NTE, where the guidance material for the teachers on how to work

with the results and the overview in PAS (the test administration system for conducting the NTE, and where the teachers can find their tools for the analysis of the results), can function as part of the blueprint.

Assessment is used in many different situations in a classroom; still, one of the most common ways of assessing is through tests. However, many tests are seen as part of a summative assessment, but ideally, a test should also serve as formative assessment (apart from exams). All the four principles of formative assessment from the Directorate can be used in relation to tests; yet, some tests are more suitable than others in relation to formative assessment.

Tests must be designed in the light of models of specific knowledge structures in order to help determine the progress of learners in acquainting those structures, so that the interpretation of the feedback can serve the purpose of making inferences about students' cognitive mechanisms. It is clear that many traditional types of tests are inadequate to this purpose (Black & Wiliam, 1998a, p.27).

In terms of L2, all tests can in some way serve as formative assessment, as they almost always test language knowledge in addition to the content of the test.

### **3.3 Assessing Reading in L2**

In this section, reading in L2 is presented, discussed and linked to formative assessment and the NTE. Alderson (2000) claims the greatest challenge for the L2 reader is what he describes as the *language or linguistic threshold*, “there is likely to be a language threshold beyond which second-language readers have to progress before their first-language abilities can transfer to the second-language situation [...] In second language reading, knowledge of the second language is a more important factor than first-language reading abilities” (Alderson, 2000, p.23). He points out that this language threshold will vary depending on the task and that the linguistic threshold increases with the level of difficulty of the task. Alderson further underlines the importance of the language threshold in relation to assessing and testing:

The implication for the assessment of second-language reading and the interpretation of results is that poor second-language reading performance is likely to be due to insufficient language knowledge, and any attempt at remediation might more

profitably pay attention to the linguistic problem than to any supposed reading deficit (Alderson, 2000, p.24).

This is relevant to consider in relation to the NTE since it is testing reading in English as a second language (L2).

### **3.3.1 Testing Reading**

“Reading assessments are meant to provide feedback on the skills, processes, and knowledge resources that represent reading abilities (Grabe, 2009, p.353). The most common assessment of reading is the testing of comprehension. However, implications for comprehension are also often a part of reading assessment, for example vocabulary and grammar, as Grabe (2009) presents with his lower-level processes that have been discussed in the previous chapter. He further points out, “Different reading tasks should help provide information about many component reading abilities as well as reading comprehension more generally” (Grabe, 2009, p.358). As vocabulary and grammar are important in relation to reading comprehension, these are also tested in the NTE.

Alderson highlights the challenges of creating a test suitable to assessing reading comprehension, and he claims that standardized tests made to assess reading might have more focus on other areas, for example intelligence, grammar and vocabulary. “When designing tests for reading in a second language, the aim is normally to test language-related abilities, not intelligence, and thus any correlation between second-language reading and intelligence is worrying” (Alderson, 2000, p.101). The challenge for creating tests in L2 is to make a test that assesses reading comprehension, or at least making sure that the test is not a test for grammatical- or linguistic competence disguised as a test for reading comprehension (Alderson, 2000).

There are different purposes for assessment that are related to reading. Grabe (2009) presents five purposes; two of these purposes are relevant for the NTE; *Reading-proficiency assessment* and *Assessment for learning*, covered earlier in this chapter. “Assessment of reading proficiency is important as a way to understand students’ overall reading abilities .... Commonly, this type of assessment is referred to as *standardized testing*” (Grabe, 2009, p. 353). A standardized reading test aims to assess reading comprehension through different

tasks related to texts. The results from these tests are often presented as scores (Alderson, 2000; Bernhardt, 2011), where the student is informed about what score they have got, and what was the maximum score achievable. Bernhardt (2011) presents a somewhat critical view of these scores: “Practitioners have generally lamented that the scores ... have little immediate and practical value, because no matter how lengthy and complex a test, the score says little more than “the score” (Bernhardt, 2011, p. 103). Further, she emphasizes that even if a student receives a high score, it does not mean that the student has the full understanding of the texts, merely that the student is able to complete the given task. This issue can be related to the scores in the NTE and will be presented in section 3.4.2.

### **3.3.2 Tests and Scoring**

Scoring is a significant part of test development. Bachman and Palmer (2010) separate scoring into two different approaches. First, “the score is defined as the number of test tasks successfully completed” (p. 323) and second, “to define several levels on one or more rating scales ... and then to rate responses to test tasks in terms of these scales” (p. 323). In both cases, the criteria for correctness must be specified, and the procedures for a score must be determined (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p. 323). The first approach of scoring is most relevant to the NTE as all completed tasks in the test are added up to give a total score.

Bachman and Palmer (2010) present two different ways to score these tests: *Right/wrong scoring*, where the completed task either is right or wrong, or *Partial credit scoring*, where there are multiple criteria for correctness, and the student can receive a full score if he or she has given a response that satisfies all criteria, partial score for satisfying some of the criteria and zero score for not satisfying any of the criteria. This also applies to the NTE. In addition to using scores, Bachman and Palmer (2010) also present the use of *scales*, “The scales are defined according to the way we have defined the specific construct to be measured” (p. 341). In the NTE, the five levels of mastery, which will be presented later in this chapter, have been made into five rating scales, where the constructs are presented in each scale. Along with the construct on each level, there is a description of what abilities the student on that level has. Bachman and Palmer (2010, p.343) present two components that must be included in a rating scale of language abilities:



- 1) The specific features of the language sample to be rated with the scale
- 2) The definition of scale levels in terms of the degree of mastery of these features

An example of level 3 from the NTE can be found in section 3.4.2. Another essential element of developing assessment tasks involves the different specifications the test developers need to take into account, for example the setting, which includes the time given for the conduction of the test, or each task, and also the “input, expected response, and relationship between input and expected response” (Bachman & Palmer, 2010, p.313). Bachman and Palmer (2010) additionally focus on the instructions given to each assessment task, and that these instructions need to have enough detail to give the test taker the opportunity to perform at their best. In the following section, tests and scoring will be discussed in relation to assessing reading.

### ***3.3.3 Assessment Tasks when Testing Reading***

The criticism towards the scoring system and the criticism towards the tasks in the assessment of reading might imply a limitation in reading tests. Alderson (2000) presents several techniques for testing reading, and in this section there will be a presentation of those of the techniques that can be linked to the NTE. “It is important to understand that there is no one ‘best method’ for testing reading. No single test method can fulfil all the varied purposes for which we might test” (Alderson, 2000, p.203).

The multiple-choice method is a popular way of assessing reading. “Multiple choice questions are a common device for testing students’ text comprehension. They allow testers to control the range of possible answers to comprehension questions, and to some extent to control the students’ thought processes when responding” (Alderson, 2000, p.211). As will be seen when presenting the NTE, multiple-choice is the most frequent used question form. In addition, gap-filling tasks are also present in the NTE. Alderson (2000) presents gap-filling as an alternative to the cloze test, where both tests “require the test-taker to restore the word that has been deleted” (p. 207). The difference between the two is that in a cloze test, every 5-6<sup>th</sup> word is removed, whereas in the gap-filling test, the removed words are more carefully chosen, by for example either removing content words or function words (Alderson, 2000). However, gap-filling tasks can also be given in other designs, such as re-writing a sentence, where the original sentence is given in addition to parts of new sentence, and the student is required to

fill in one or more words to create the same meaning. A different technique to assess reading comprehension can be ‘Ordering tasks’, where “candidates are given a scrambled set of words, sentences, paragraphs or texts ... and have to put them in their correct order” (Alderson, 2000, p.219). These tasks assess the students’ abilities to comprehend cohesion, text organization or grammar, and can also be found in the NTE.

### **3.3.4 Implications for Assessing Reading**

The disadvantage of the assessment tasks discussed so far is that they bear little or no relation to the ways people read texts in everyday life (Alderson, 2000). In a test situation, and especially a test that assesses reading comprehension, the test-takers are aware of the purpose of the situation, and this will affect the results and have implications for the test. Alderson (2000) presents different variables that affect the assessment of reading. First, the *Language of questions*, “If the language of questions is harder to understand than the passages themselves, the reader is presented with an additional layer of difficulty” (Alderson, 2000, p.86). This variable implicates the assessment because it is difficult to determine whether a wrong answer is due to lack of comprehension of the text or the question. This is also emphasized by Bachman and Palmer (2010, p.384), who underlines that “If instructions are to accomplish their purposes, then we must do whatever is necessary to assure that they can be understood by the test takers”. This is relevant to the NTE as well.

Second, Alderson (2000) presents *Types of questions*, for example whether the questions are text explicit “where both the question information and the correct answer are found in the same sentence” (p. 87) or the question is text implicit, and “require respondents to combine information across sentences” (Alderson, 2000, p.87). The difference between types of questions might be levels of difficulty and should thus impact the score on the test.

Third, he presents *Testing skills*, “A number of issues related to the testing of skills have been investigated: how many underlying factors or empirically separable skills are there? Is reading simply one unitary skill?” (Alderson, 2000, p. 93). Often these skills overlap, and are difficult to distinguish. Therefore, a test of reading skills must be clear on what skill is being tested, for example finding information, finding the main point of a text, reflecting on content or drawing conclusions. This is important, as “Readers may be able to get the literal meaning of sentences, but be unable to infer unstated assumptions made by the writer” (Alderson, 2000, p.93).

Finally, Alderson (2000) presents factors that affect the difficulty of reading test texts; one of these factors is the implication of *Background Knowledge versus text content*. “Whilst one might claim that background knowledge in the content area of a reading text can enable students to perform to the best of their ability, tests based on texts which are too specialized might test subject matter knowledge rather than reading ability” (Alderson, 2000, pp.102-3). Therefore, tests which are meant to assess students’ reading comprehension should not rely on tasks that need background knowledge, when this might “discriminate against individuals who happen to possess less background knowledge in a specific field” (Alderson, 2000, p.103). For instance, making a task in a standardized reading test that is culture or topic specific, like the idea that everyone knows a fairy-tale, might compromise some students’ performance if they do not have the background knowledge needed to answer the task, even if they have the necessary reading comprehension?

## **3.4 The NTE in a Perspective of Formative Assessment**

As mentioned above, the NTE is a test that both support summative-, and more importantly, formative assessment. In this section, the test will be placed in relation to the principles of assessment for learning from the Directorate. Additionally, how to work with the test is presented, with focus on the intention of the Directorate. First, a presentation of what the NTE is.

### **3.4.1 What is the NTE?**

The NTE is a standardized electronic test that assesses the students’ in some of the competence aims from the National Curricula (LK06). There are two tests in English; the first is completed in the fifth grade, and the second is completed in the eighth grade. The focus in this paper will be on the eighth-grade test. The NTE assesses some of the competence aims from the English curriculum:

The tasks in the test do not assess all sides of knowing English, only reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. It is important to recognise these three aspects not as isolated competence areas, but rather that they say something about the main intention of each task” (Udir, 2012b, p.5, my translation).

The test is completed at the beginning of the eighth grade and is based on some of the competence aims from seventh grade, for example:

- Master a vocabulary that covers day-to-day situations
- Read and understand texts of different length and in different genres
- Use basic rules and patterns for pronunciation, intonation, spelling, grammar and different sentence types (Udir, 2012b, p.5, my translation).

“The test is constructed in such a way that some tasks measure reading comprehension in general while other tasks first and foremost measure comprehension of vocabulary or the ability to use specific grammatical structures” (Udir, 2012b, p.5, my translation). The students are given and divided between three different sets of tasks, and in addition this year, the Directorate has begun to measure development over time, which means that some of the students also answer what the Directorate call anchor tasks. “This means that some of the items in this test are different from the ordinary test and are secret” (Udir, 2012b, p.3, my translation). The anchor tasks will be the same every year, whereas the other tasks change. The results from the anchor tasks will give an indication of whether the students’ results in English develop in a positive or negative direction. Compared to the results that have been presented until now, where the schools only compare their results with the national level the same year, they will be given the opportunity to measure progression by comparing the results to the anchor tasks (Udir, 2012b). However, most of the students will still take the ordinary test. “The students with sets 1-3 have received the same tasks, but the tasks are presented in different order” (Udir, 2012a, my translation).

As mentioned, the test is divided in three topics for assessment, or three main constructs: reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. These topics are defined by the Directorate, and the reading comprehension is divided in three more concrete constructs: *understanding details*, *understanding main points* and *drawing conclusions*:

- *Understanding details* is defined as “being able to find relevant information or details in a text, where the recognition of a single word is not enough” (Udir, 2012b, p.5, my translation).

- *Understanding main points* is defined as “getting a good overview on the content of a text, even if one does not understand all the details” (Udir, 2012b, p.6, my translation).
- *Drawing conclusions* is defined as being able to “understand and reflect on the content that is not explicitly expressed in the text” (Udir, 2012b, p.6, my translation).
- *Vocabulary* is defined as “understanding the meaning of day-to-day words and phrases within a context” (Udir, 2012b, p. 6, my translation). In this context, they put emphasis on lexical (content) words rather than function words, which is more linked to grammar, that they define as an understanding of syntax, for example a subordinate clause, morphology and also the understanding of function words (Udir, 2012b).

It is important to emphasize that these definitions are related to the tasks in the NTE, and they should not be viewed as a general definition of these aspects.

Urquhart and Weir (1998) present a table they call *Matrix of reading types*, in which the different reading types in the NTE can be placed. In the table, the different tasks from set 1 are placed in the four squares.

	<b>Global</b>	<b>Local</b>
<b>Expeditious</b>	<p>A: Skimming quickly to establish discourse topic and main ideas. Search reading to locate quickly and understand information relevant to predetermined needs.</p> <p>Tasks: 16, 17, 18, 20, 24, 25, 26, 51 (Reading – understanding main point of text).</p>	<p>B: Scanning to locate specific information; symbol or group of symbols, names, dates, figures or words.</p> <p>Tasks: 2, 3, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 21, 22 (Reading – finding information in text).</p>
<b>Careful</b>	<p>C: Reading carefully to establish accurate comprehension of the explicitly stated main ideas the author wishes to convey; propositional inferencing.</p> <p>Tasks: 7, 19, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32 (Reading – interpret content in text).</p>	<p>D: Understanding syntactic structure of sentence and clause. Understanding lexical and/or grammatical cohesion. Understanding lexis/deducing meaning of lexical items from morphology and context.</p> <p>Tasks: 1, 4, 5, 6, 13, 14, 15acb, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 43, 44, 45, 46, 47, 48, 49, 50 (Vocabulary and grammar).</p>

Table 2: *Matrix of reading types*

### **3.4.2 Tasks and Scores in the NTE**

There are nine different formats in the NTE that measure reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar. (1) *Click picture*: the student is presented with a short text and four pictures and answers by clicking on the picture he/she think matches the text. This task assesses the reading comprehension of finding information in a text and vocabulary. (2) *Click text*: the student is presented with an instruction, a question and four short texts, and answers by clicking on the text he/she thinks matches the question. This task assesses reading comprehension of finding information in a text. (3) *Click and drag*: the student is presented with an instruction, a large picture and four small pictures. The student answers by following the instruction, and thereby dragging one of the small pictures into the large picture. This task assesses vocabulary, as well as reading comprehension of interpreting and finding information. (4) *Gap-filling*: the student is presented with a short text with one or more gaps, each gap has four alternatives. The student answers by clicking on one of the alternatives. This task assesses grammar. (5) *Multiple choice short/story*: The student is presented with either a short text and a question with four alternatives, or a longer text with several questions, each with four alternatives. The student answers by clicking on one of the alternatives. This task assesses reading comprehension of finding information, interpreting content or finding the main point. (6) *Click word*: the student is presented with a short text and questions such as, “Click on the word that means almost the same as...”. The student answers by clicking on a word in the text. This task assesses vocabulary. (7) *Who could say?*: the student is presented with a text that describes several people. There are more questions to the same text. The student answers questions of the type: “Who could say...?” the student answers by clicking on a name in the text. This task assesses reading comprehension of interpreting content. (8) *Write word*: the student is presented with a sentence with one or more words missing. The student answers by writing the missing word, to make the sentence complete. This task assesses vocabulary. (9) *Move paragraph*: the student is presented with a text where the paragraphs are placed in random order. The student answers by moving the paragraphs in the text to make the correct order. This task assesses reading comprehension of finding the main point (Udir, 2012a). Examples of these tasks are given in Appendix 1.

When the students have completed the NTE, they are given a score and divided into five levels of mastery based on these scores. To each of the levels in the NTE, there is a description of the general student on this level. However, “Level 1 also includes students who

have achieved zero or very few points on the test. This means that some students will get a description that is more positive than what the test results reveal” (Udir, 2012b, p.12, my translation). Additionally, it is important to mention that the students within a level have achieved different scores and that some might only be one point away from a different level. Another implication of these scores, is that they might be misguided, especially related to the descriptions of the general student on each level. As mentioned, the NTE tests the students in reading, vocabulary and grammar, and as is illustrated in Table 2 (Matrix of reading types), reading makes for 50% of the tasks, vocabulary makes for 25% of the tasks, and grammar makes for 25% of the tasks in the NTE. In other words, a student who for example achieves level 3 might in *theory* only have mastered grammar and vocabulary, and not any of the tasks on reading, and as a result, the general descriptions of this student would be wrong. Therefore, it is important to evaluate each student’s test results. The general descriptions are divided in reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar, Along with the descriptions there is a column called “This means in practice” where there is a more concrete explanation of the descriptions, for example in level 3:

<p><b>Level 3</b></p> <p><i>Reading comprehension:</i></p> <p>Understand main points and some details, even in longer texts, when the language is rather simple</p> <p>Understand the content of a short text, even when the language is rather difficult.</p> <p><i>Vocabulary:</i></p> <p>Master a vocabulary that covers day-to-day situations</p> <p>Understand several words related to emotions and the state of mind</p> <p>Understand the meaning of some unknown words and phrases based on their context</p> <p><i>Grammar:</i></p> <p>Use some basic rules and patterns for grammar and different sentence types</p>	<p><b>This means in practice:</b></p> <p>Follow the content in books and stories that native language users on the student’s age would like to read, if she/he can get help, for example by using a dictionary</p> <p>Understand details in texts on known subjects, sport reports, short articles in magazines or interviews with celebrities</p> <p>Understand personal letters or longer e-mails that describe something that has happened, wishes, emotions or plans</p> <p>Find sites on the Internet on different subjects and understand the most important parts of the content</p> <p>Understand and use simple instructions, for example in games, manuals for technical equipment and recipes</p> <p>Understand the most important elements in simple and concrete factual texts when the structure is clear and the subject is somewhat known to the student</p>
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Table 3: Levels of Mastery: Level 3

(Udir, 2012b:13-14, my translation)

The Directorate states that it is important to note that “In the description of a level, the skills already described in a lower level are not repeated. The levels are built up with progression, and a student on level 5 can thus be assumed to have the skills on levels 1-5” (Udir, 2012b, p.12, my translation).

### **3.4.3 The NTE as Summative and Formative Assessment**

As mentioned above, the NTE can be used for summative as well as formative purposes. However, the emphasis in this paper will be on the NTE as formative assessment, where the results can serve as a tool for on-going teaching and learning.

Assessment for learning involves using information on your students to adapt the teaching and give the students advice on their progression. The results from the National tests can be used for this if the results are analysed and used in the teaching by the teacher *and* the students” (Udir, 2012b, p.7, my translation and emphasis).

The four principles of formative assessment are transferable to the NTE. In the information intended for the teachers in the NTE material, the Directorate states that “the National test is formative assessment that shall promote learning” (Udir, 2012e, my translation).

It is important to focus on the first principle of formative assessment, *Measurement for Learning*, before the test is completed. The students should know what is being tested, why it is being tested, what they will gain from the test and what is expected from them: “The purpose of the test is to map where they are so that they can be helped further” (Udir, 2012e, my translation). Also, the students should be acquainted with the design of the NTE before the actual testing: “The test form might be unknown to some students; good preparation might create predictability and safety” (Udir, 2012b, p.7, my translation). To best prepare the students for the test, it is encouraged that they use the example tests available on the Directorate’s homepage. To create a valid test situation where the students’ best can be assessed on their abilities in reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar, the students must have confidence in the test design. This is not, as some have claimed, to drill the students in the test form where the only goal is to achieve higher scores, but rather to ensure the students are able to complete the test without difficulties concerning the design.

The second and third principles, *Feedback* and *Feed forward*, are intertwined. “Assessment can be used to give the students feedback that tells them about the quality of their work or



performance, and advice on how to improve” (Udir, 2012b, p.7, my translation). The score, the level of mastery and the general description that comes with each NTE test result level, can serve as feedback for both the student and the teacher. “The descriptions and information about the tasks in the test can give a picture of what your students can master and what they have to work more on” (Udir, 2012b, p.7, my translation). Nevertheless, this information should also always be seen in relation to the other assessments the teacher has on the students, to give a more correct picture of the actual abilities.

It might happen that a student normally manages tasks that she or he did not manage on the National test, or that the descriptions of the student’s level of mastery do not match what you know about the student’s skills. Therefore, it is essential that you also lean on other information when the results from the National test are used to assess the students (Udir, 2012b, p.12, my translation).

Moreover, it is emphasized by the Directorate that the results should be communicated to the parents or guardians: “The parents must get information on what the student master, and what they need to work more on so that they can be involved in the follow-up of the student (Udir, 2012b, p.7, my translation).

The fourth principle, *Self-Assessment*, might also be used in relation to the NTE. “You should involve the students in the work with the follow up from the test ... After the results have been presented, it might be useful to let the students be a part of reflecting on own results and plan what they need to do to improve” (Udir, 2012e, my translation). By being used this way, self-assessment might contribute to the students getting a more conscious relation to their own competence.

#### **3.4.4 Responsibilities Related to the Work with the NTE**

Using the NTE as formative assessment is the *intention* of the test, both before, and after the test is completed. Yet, in addition, the test also serves a different goal: “The purpose of the test is to give information to students, teachers, school leaders, parents, school owners, the regional authorities and the national level as a basis for quality development for the teaching” (Udir, 2012b, p.4, my translation). Consequently, in addition to being a tool for learning in the classroom, the results serve as a national guideline for English teaching in lower secondary

school. In other words, the NTE is an accountability measure; a way of testing if the teaching is in accordance with the competence aims. As a result, several instances are involved in the work with the NTE. Still, I choose to focus on the two groups relevant for my paper: the teachers and the school leaders, and their responsibilities concerning the NTE.

#### *Responsibilities related to PAS and the guidance material*

In order to ensure the work with the results from the NTE is possible to accomplish, the teachers must have read and understood the guidance material related to the NTE provided by the Directorate. In addition, they must understand the test administration system, PAS. It is the school leaders' responsibility that all the teachers involved with the NTE, and that all the students taking the NTE, are signed up in PAS. It is also the school leaders' responsibility that all teachers know the content of the guidance material, in other words, that they have received it and read it. The school leaders must also be acquainted with the content of the guidance material, and understand PAS as it is also their responsibility to be available for teachers if they need help and guidance when conducting the NTE (Udir, 2012c).

#### *Responsibilities concerning the preparations before the test*

In the preparations before the test, two elements are highlighted by the Directorate as important. First, that the students complete the example test, related to aims and criteria, and second, that the schools are in communication with the parents. It is the school leaders' responsibility that the teachers know of, and use the example tests on the homepage of the Directorate. It is also the school leaders' responsibility to make sure the parents are informed, and have been given the parents' pamphlet.

Further, the school leaders are responsible for any student exemptions from the test. "The quality of the results from the National tests is dependent on all schools following the rules on individual exemption. The main rule is that the tests are obligatory for all students and that access to exemption is limited" (Udir, 2012c, p.9, my translation). There are two categories of students the school leader may exempt. First, there are the students with individual decisions on special needs education, and "where it is obvious the results from the test that the student is exempt from will not be meaningful for the student's education" (Udir, 2012c, p.9, my translation). Second, there are the students who have individual decisions on the right to special language teaching on the basis that they are from a language minority. Also in this case, the results cannot be meaningful for the student's education if they are to be exempt.

Nevertheless, the school does not have the final say on exemptions, “even if the student fulfils the requirements for exemptions, the student or the parents can still decide that the student can complete the test” (Udir, 2012c, p.9, my translation).

#### *Responsibilities related to the work with the results*

In relation to the students’ and class results, the teachers are responsible for the follow-up. Yet, the teacher is not the sole responsible for the work with the results from the NTE. After the test is completed, the school leader is responsible for following up the results on the school level. In the local work with improvement and development, they must make sure that all teachers follow up the results in their classes, and also make sure that the students’ parents are informed on the results and that the results are seen in context with other relevant assessment information that the teacher has (Udir, 2012c). In other words, the teachers are responsible for following up the students, and the school leaders are responsible for the teachers doing this work.

Another important element when working with the results is that the school leaders and the teachers should make sure they have access to material relevant for the different students’ levels:

Have material available in form of a large selection of texts (fact and fiction) and genres ... have material available for all students, which includes students on all levels of mastery – even the weakest readers should discover that they might enjoy comic books and novels on an adapted level (Udir, 2012b, p.22, my translation).

The NTE might serve as a mapping for teachers in order to locate relevant material and create motivational readers.

### **3.5 In this Chapter...**

In this chapter I have placed NTE within an assessment framework. NTE is a tool for formative assessment regarding reading comprehension, vocabulary and grammar at the beginning of lower secondary school, for the student, the parents, the teacher and the school leader. The results from the NTE can be used to assess a class as a whole, with the levels of mastery or the apparent tendencies in the scores, or to each individual student in terms of feedback on achievement and feed forward to work with each student’s progression. “The

tests will examine to what extent the students' skills are in accordance with the curricula's goal for the basic skills ... and in parts of English as a subject. The National tests give information on students on all levels" (Udir, 2012b, p.4, my translation).

In the following chapter, the method for this study is presented.

## 4 METHODOLOGY

Method originates from the Greek word *Methodos*, which means ‘road to follow’ (Gadamer, 2003) and can be defined as “walking a specific road of recognition in such a manner that there always will be a possibility to follow the same road again” (Gadamer, 2003, p. 21, my translation). This is echoed by Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) who define method as, “A systematic procedure (more or less based on rules) for observation and analysis of data” (2010, p.324, my translation). In this chapter I describe how the present study was conducted. My goal is to make the research process for this study as transparent as possible, and thereby enhance the validity, reliability and credibility of my research.

Initially, I present the research design. Next, I present setting, sample and informants, including research ethics. Further, the methods for data collection and data analysis are presented. Finally, there is a discussion of the study’s credibility, reliability and validity, including my role as researcher.

### 4.1 Research Design

The overall research design for the study is exploratory and qualitative, using a hermeneutic approach. To define this study as exploratory means I aim to discover new dimensions within the research subject (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). Being qualitative means the intention is to obtain opinions, thoughts and experiences that cannot be measured by statistics, and the qualitative approach gives an in-depth research design, which aspires to provide context, entirety and present understanding.

The hermeneutic design of my study implies to interpret an utterance by focusing on a deeper level of meaning than what is immediately perceived. The utterance must be seen and understood in light of a context or entirety, and also by the entirety being adapted to each part, or utterance (Gadamer, 2003). This alternation between entirety and part, in order to develop a deeper understanding, is often described as the *hermeneutic circle*; “With basis in an often unclear and intuitive understanding of the text as entirety, its different parts are interpreted, and based on these interpretations the parts are placed in a new relation to the entirety” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010, p.216, my translation). Through reading, re-reading and using

hermeneutic clues, I hope my empirical data has opened up, and contributed to new perspectives and new knowledge.

## 4.2 Setting, Sample and Informants

The setting in this study concerns *where* and *when* the data was collected, the informants concern *who* provided the empirical data, and the sample concerns *how* the data is presented and interpreted. Considerations for research ethics are also presented.

Using my own and my supervisor's contacts, I approached four schools in four different municipalities; one in a large urban municipality, one in a small urban municipality, one in a large rural municipality and one in a small rural municipality. I asked permission to complete my study with informants from the four schools, starting by sending e-mails then contacting the school administration by phone, and finally sending an information letter (Appendix 2). All four schools agreed to participate in my project.

The school leader at each school recruited two teachers each, distributed the information letter, and arranged times and places for the interviews. Some of the informants had read the information letter before the interview, whereas others had received oral information and some had merely been informed that the interview would concern the NTE. I have chosen to call the four informants from the schools' administration the *school leader* as they have different roles in the administration, and this term covers these roles.

In this study, there have been clear conditions and criteria for how to choose the informants. At each school, I wanted to interview one school leader; preferably the person in the administration with the most responsibility and knowledge about the NTE. Second, I wanted to interview two English teachers in the eighth grade at each school. These teachers would have encountered and worked with the NTE the current year, and thus should have updated information on their work with the NTE freshly stored in their memory and would therefore be most suitable for my study. The study was not culture- or gender specific, so I was open to informants with different cultural backgrounds, different ages and different genders. The sample I ended up with comprises 11 informants from these four schools. From each school, I interviewed one school leader and two teachers, with the exception of the large urban municipality, where I only interviewed one teacher. The informants and the four schools are presented below.

*School A:* This is a school from a small rural municipality with approximately 270 students. The school leader is female as are the two English teachers. The school leader has worked as a teacher for 25 years, and for the last eight years she has worked as a principal. She received her teacher training at a teachers' training college and has later received a master's degree in her supplementary training at a university. Her teaching subjects are Norwegian (L1), English (L2), social science, religion and physical education. She also has working experience from the educational and psychological counselling service (PPT). In the following, I will refer to her as school leader A, and the teachers at this school will be referred to as teacher A1 and teacher A2. Teacher A1 has studied English; she has a bachelor's degree in music, and a one-year undergraduate teacher training programme (PPU). This is her fifth year as a teacher. Her teaching subjects are English (L2), music and religion. Teacher A2 has studied social science and religion, she has a master's degree in English, and the PPU. This is her seventh year as a teacher. Her teaching subjects are English (L2), social science and religion.

*School B:* This is a school from a large rural municipality with approximately 380 students. School leader B is male, as are the two English teachers. The school leader worked as a teacher for seven years before he became principal, which he has been for the past six years. He has a master's degree in history and his teaching subjects are religion, social science and Norwegian (L1). In the following, I will refer to him as school leader B, and the teachers at this school will be referred to as teacher B1 and teacher B2. Teacher B1 is educated at a teachers' training college, with studies about developing countries. This is his first year as a teacher, and he teaches English (L2), religion and social science. Teacher B2 has a master's degree in music. He has worked as a teacher for 20 years, and his teaching subjects are English (L2), music and social science.

*School C:* This school is from a small urban municipality with approximately 330 students. The school leader is female. One of the English teachers (C1) is female, whereas the other teacher (C2) is male. School leader C has worked 17 years as a teacher and has experience from both primary and secondary school. She has worked in the school administration for two years. She has a master's degree in management. She mainly teaches Norwegian (L1), but as she has taken her education at a teachers' training college, she also has other teaching subjects. In the following, I will refer to her as school leader C, and the teachers at this school will be referred to as teacher C1 and teacher C2. Teacher C1's education comprises of five years from the music academy, half-year programmes in English, special needs education and

religion, and a quarter-year programme in social science. She has worked eight years as a teacher; three years in primary school and five years in lower secondary school. Her teaching subjects are English (L2), religion, social science, special needs education, and home economics. Teacher C2 has studied mathematics, English (L2) and physics, in addition to PPU. He has worked as a teacher for 35 years in Norway, England and Belgium. He has also worked as a deputy head teacher. His teaching subjects are English (L2), science and mathematics.

*School D:* This is a school from a large urban municipality with approximately 420 students. The school leader is male, as is the teacher. School leader D has worked as a teacher for 17 years and as a deputy head teacher since 2011. He is educated as a teacher with PPU. He teaches the subjects mathematics, science, social science and physical education. In the following, I will refer to him as school leader D, and the teacher at this school will be referred to as teacher D1. Teacher D1 has a full university degree with PPU. He has worked as a teacher for 16 years, and his teaching subjects are English (L2), social science, Spanish and religion. Table 4 summarizes the information about the informants and the schools.

Schools:	Informants:		
<b>School A:</b>  Small rural municipality  270 students	<b>School Leader A:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Female <i>Role in administration:</i> Principal <i>Education:</i> Teacher with full university degree <i>Experience:</i> 25 years as teacher, 8 years as principal Additionally, worked in PPT. <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2), Norwegian (L1), religion, social science, physical education.	<b>Teacher A1:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Female <i>Education:</i> Studied English and music in addition to PPU <i>Experience:</i> Five years as teacher <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2) and music	<b>Teacher A2:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Female <i>Education:</i> Teacher with full university degree <i>Experience:</i> Seven years as teacher <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2), social science religion
<b>School B:</b>  Large rural municipality  381 students	<b>School Leader B:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Male <i>Role in administration:</i> Principal <i>Education:</i> Teacher with full university degree <i>Experience:</i> 7 years as teacher, 6 years as principal <i>Teaching subjects:</i> Religion, social science, Norwegian (L1)	<b>Teacher B1:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Male <i>Education:</i> Educated at teachers' training college, with in-depth studies of developing countries. <i>Experience:</i> First year of working as teacher <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2), religion, social science.	<b>Teacher B2:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Male <i>Education:</i> Teacher with full university degree <i>Experience:</i> 20 years as teacher <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2), social science, music



<b>School C:</b>  Small urban municipality  330 students	<b>School Leader C:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Female <i>Role in administration:</i> Assistant Principal <i>Education:</i> Teacher with full university degree, Master of Management. <i>Experience:</i> 17 years as teacher, last two years as assistant principal <i>Teaching subjects:</i> Norwegian (L1)	<b>Teacher C1:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Female <i>Education:</i> Music, English, Religion, Social Science, Special teaching and PPU <i>Experience:</i> 8 years as teacher <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2), religion, social science, special needs education and home economics	<b>Teacher C2:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Male <i>Education:</i> Mathematics, English, physics and PPU. <i>Experience:</i> 35 years as teacher, also worked as deputy head teacher. <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2), science, mathematics.
<b>School D:</b>  Large urban municipality  420 students	<b>School Leader D:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Male <i>Role in administration:</i> Deputy head teacher for 10 <sup>th</sup> grade <i>Education:</i> Teacher with PPU from university. <i>Experience:</i> Teacher since 1996, section manager since 2011. <i>Teaching subjects:</i> Mathematics, science, social science, physical education	<b>Teacher D1:</b> <i>Gender:</i> Male <i>Education:</i> Teacher with full university degree <i>Experience:</i> 15 years as teacher <i>Teaching subjects:</i> English (L2), social science, Spanish, religion	

Table 4: Table of informants and schools

### 4.2.1 Method for Data Collection

The intention of this study has been to capture the informants' opinions, experiences and thoughts related to the work with the NTE, by using interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010; Thagaard, 2009). I have used an exploratory approach with an open semi- structured interview guide. To define the interview guide as semi-structured means that

The topics the researcher will examine are mainly predetermined, but the order of the topics [and questions] is determined during the interview. In this way, the researcher can follow the informant's story, but still make sure to achieve information on the predetermined topics (Thagaard, 2009, p.89, my translation and clarification).

As my interviews were conducted in two rounds, with two different purposes and samples of informants, I made two interview guides; one for the school leaders (Appendix 3) and one for the teachers (Appendix 4). A reason for why the interview guides are different is because I used the data from the interviews with the school leaders when I made the interview guide for the teachers. The interview guides included the main topics of my research, with suggestions for main questions and follow-up questions that could be asked.

The topics covered in the interviews with the school leaders mainly concerned the NTE, but also adapted learning (see Appendix 3). The school leaders were interviewed before the NTE was taken, in September/October 2012. I asked the school leaders how they had planned to work with the results from the NTE this year. I asked them about their opinions on how the results should be used, how they believed the teachers related to the results, and how they would follow up the teachers' work with the results. The questions related to adapted teaching, concerned whether the school divided their students into differentiated groups and whether the NTE could be used in this context. The third main area was questions concerning wishes for improvement related to their own work with the NTE and the results, and whether they had any suggestions for improvement concerning the NTE. Towards the end of the interview, I included a question about how they had experienced the interview session, and whether they had additional comments or questions.

The teachers were interviewed after the NTE was completed and the results were published, in December/January 2012/2013. I divided the interview guide for the teachers into four main areas: 1) The NTE, 2) Reading and Reading Strategies, 3) Formative Assessment, and 4) Suggestions for Improvement (see Appendix 4). In the first main area, the NTE, I asked the teachers about whether they had used the results, how they experienced the data system PAS and whether the school had guidelines for working with the results. In the second main area, I asked the teachers about reading and reading strategies, both related to the NTE and in general. In the third main area, formative assessment, I asked the teachers' whether they linked the NTE to formative assessment, and/or used the NTE results to adapted education. In the fourth main area, I asked if they had any suggestions for improvement concerning NTE and their own work with the NTE results. Towards the end of the interview, I asked the same questions I had asked the school leaders: how they had experienced the interview session, and whether they had comments or questions.

All the interviews were conducted at the schools, and the school leaders found suitable locations for the interviews. All interviews were conducted during the teachers' and school leaders' working hours. As a result, they wanted an approximate time frame for the interviews beforehand. In the information letter, I informed them the interviews could last up to one hour. However, most of the interviews lasted for 30 minutes; ranging from the shortest being 16 minutes and the longest 35 minutes. Even with the time limitation, I experienced the informants talked freely about their experiences, thoughts and opinions. I felt the time frame

did not create limitations for the interviews and that even though the interviews were conducted during the informants' working hours, they gave me their full attention. As all the interviews were shorter than the given time frame, we had time for both an introductory and concluding conversation, which in my opinion affected the atmosphere and our relation positively. Nevertheless, there is a tendency that the informants in the shortest interviews were more defensive and less knowledgeable concerning the topics than were the informants in the longer interviews.

### **4.2.2 Consideration for Research Ethics**

As the interview research is tied to ethical aspects, respect for the integrity of the informants and the findings must influence the research process. In this section, I present some research ethical considerations and principles related to this study. I have used Kvale and Brinkmann's (2010) four areas of ethical guidelines: *informed consent*, *confidentiality*, *consequences*, and *researcher's role*.

*Informed consent*: The research participants should be fully informed about the main purpose of the research, the main features in the design, as well as potential risks and benefits by participating in the research project. All the informants in my study were given a letter that explained the purpose of the study, which included a summary of the topics that were to be discussed in the interview (Appendix 2). Additionally, all informants signed a letter of consent (Appendix 5) as decided by the law on treatment of personal data (the Personal Data Act, 2000). The consent was signed by the informants after the initial briefing, and after I had asked whether they had any questions. They were also informed that they participate voluntarily and could at any point withdraw from the project.

*Confidentiality*: According to the Personal Data Act, §13(2000), the interviewer, who is responsible for treating the empirical data, must assure satisfying security for the informants, both by making sure their identities are not revealed, and by treating the collected data with integrity and consideration. In other words, the participants must not be recognized through name or other identifiable personal data. To assure this, I have chosen to anonymise the schools, and the informants are registered with letters and numbers, for example, *Teacher A1 from school A*. I have made sure the interview material and the names of participants and names of schools at all times have been kept separate, locked away and unavailable for outsiders.

Another element concerning the confidentiality, also presented in the Personal Data Act, §13 (2000), is the potential conflict between the participants' anonymity and the researcher's role as interpreter. Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) refer to this as an ethical area of uncertainty, as the anonymity on one hand protects the participant and thereby is an ethical demand, but on the other hand can serve as an alibi for the researcher by an opportunity to interpret the participants' utterances and statements without being argued with. Therefore, Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) emphasize that the results should be controlled and validated in order to provide transparency.

*Consequences:* A third ethical consideration is the researcher's responsibility to evaluate whether the project might lead to negative consequences for the informants. This is both relevant in relation to the participation in the study, and in relation to my interpretation of the data material. To avoid misquoting and misunderstanding my informants' answers, I asked follow-up questions such as "Have I understood you correctly when you say...?" In this way, the informants had the opportunity to correct, and also to give additional comments. Also, I asked all my informants to sign a consent form about secondary contact, where they agreed to me contacting them again if I had additional questions or needed clarification (Appendix 6).

*Researcher's Role:* According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010), it is important for the researcher to have expert knowledge of the interview topics in order to ask good follow-up questions. In other words, the quality of the data produced in a qualitative interview depends on the quality of the interviewer's skills and knowledge on the subject. Since I had, prior to this study, completed a pilot study for my master's thesis, I was quite comfortable with the interview guide when I began the interviews. Nevertheless, I experienced that this comfort grew with each interview. This comfort enabled me to focus more on the informants and the informants' utterances, and less on the questions in the interview guide. When I became more experienced as an interviewer, the questions became adapted to the conversation, instead of following the interview guide chronologically. The focus was increasingly on the intention of the study, and the interview guide was, in the end, used to check that all topics were covered.

The pilot study, completed prior to this master's thesis, had the same topic as this study. As a result, I had experienced how to construct the interview guide, in order to ask questions that provided answers relevant to the study. Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) suggest it is important for the interviewer to define the situation for the informant, and I did this by explaining the purpose of the interview, how the recorder would be used, and whether the informant had any

questions before the interview began. Thagaard (2009) states that, “The importance of establishing a good and trustful atmosphere in the interview situation cannot be overrated” (2009, p.103, my translation). This was done through a good briefing before the interview and a debriefing afterwards. I was open to changing the topics and questions, and as mentioned, I edited the interview guide between the interviews with the school leaders and the teachers (Appendixes 3 and 4). Kvale and Brinkmann (2010) and Thagaard (2009) agree the best learning is through own practice and the only way to acquire skills as an interviewer is through interview practice. I made changes and added questions during the interviews, especially if I noticed the informants had little information about NTE, and believed my predetermined follow-up questions would not work. I also experienced that my first, and therefore most open, question to each topic gave the informants the opportunity to choose different angles for their answers. As I gradually became more comfortable as an interviewer, my follow-up questions were more adapted to their answers and not necessarily read aloud directly from my interview guide. In the first interviews, I experienced the follow-up questions created repetition, rather than elaboration. As I became more aware of this, I avoided such questions. Thagaard (2009) also emphasizes the importance of using probes during the interview, so I was conscious of my response to the informants’ answers, by nodding and affirming utterances such as “yes” or “mhm”.

The last question, “How have you experienced this interview situation?” was included to establish how the informants responded to the interview. I made time for a debriefing after the recorder was turned off, and I experienced some of the informants, in this situation, gave additional information that I immediately wrote down after the interview was over. After every interview, I used a couple of minutes to write down my reflections from the interview, and these notes I read before the next interview. “These immediate impressions that are based on the interviewer’s empathic access to the communicated opinions may – in form of notes or recordings – be a valuable context for later analysis” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010, pp. 142-143, my translation).

Another ethical consideration is the power relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee. “The research interview is not a conversation between equal participants, as it is the researcher who defines and controls the conversation” (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010, p.23, my translation). This can again refer to the atmosphere between the interviewer and the informant. The interviewer’s role is to ask questions, and the interviewee’s role is to answer

the questions. However, the findings from the interview are dependent on the relation between the two participants.

The research interview is pervaded of ethical problems. The knowledge that arises from this research depends on the social relation between the interviewer and the interviewee. This relation depends on the interviewer's ability to create space where the interviewee freely and safely can speak. This requires a balance between the interviewer's wish to collect interesting knowledge and his [or her] respect for the interviewee's ethical integrity (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010, p. 35, my translation).

The researcher must remember his or her role of power, as the researcher has the privilege of interpreting and reporting what the interviewee "actually meant" with his or her answer or utterance (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010).

When conducting a research with informants, the project must be approved by the Norwegian Social Science Data Service (NSD). Therefore, I applied to the NSD for approval to conduct the study. The application was approved 29.08.2012.

#### ***4.2.3 Method for Analysis and Interpretation of the Empirical Data***

The analytic process concerning the empirical data has been a continual process since I conducted my first interview. The goal of the analysis has been to give an overview of the empirical data, and gain new insight through the informants' perspectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010).

After conducting the interviews, I made field notes in order to think through what had emerged, using my immediate impressions from the interview (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). I wrote down what the informants had said, how I experienced the situation, how I experienced the mood, and sometimes tips for myself that I could remember for my next interview, like giving more affirmations to the informant, or giving the informant more time to think. These notes and tips improved my skills as an interviewer throughout the interview process.

All the interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. During the transcription, I remembered thoughts concerning the social aspects of the interview situation, useful for my interpretation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). I was attentive to report the informants' utterances as accurately as possible, and I therefore included sounds like laughter, body language and pauses in my transcriptions. Additionally, some days after transcribing the interview, I

listened to the recordings while reading the transcriptions in order to make sure as many nuances as possible were included.

In my first round of interviews, with the school leaders, I did not have time for an extensive analytic process between the interviews as I conducted all the interviews in one week.

However, between the interviews with the school leaders and the teachers, and also between each teacher interview, I had more time for this process. As far as possible, I tried to complete a transcription before moving on to the next interview, to separate the informants and their stories.

After completing all the interviews and transcriptions, I began the actual process of analysis. According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010), it is important in this process to let the content and purpose of the study precede the method. I made a mind map based on the interview guides, my transcriptions and my field notes. This mind map I transformed into a temporary outline for my results chapter. In this first outline, I had nine main topics. I connected a separate colour to each topic, and colour coded all my transcriptions. This is known as the coding process. In the coding, Kvale and Brinkmann (2010, p. 209) emphasize that “The goal is to develop categories that give a complete description of the experiences and actions being researched”. By using this colour coding, I gained new insight into my results. After this coding, I made a separate mind map for each colour topic, where I divided the informants on separate branches in the mind map. This is known as the condensation of meaning, where the researcher shortens the informants' utterances and places them in different categories of meaning (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010). As I had conducted my interviews in Norwegian, I used the opportunity to translate them into English when making these mind maps. By doing this, I felt that my understanding of the results came through.

With a basis in these mind maps, I wrote a first draft for my results chapter. In this writing, I did not consult the transcriptions, but used only the mind maps to write my interpretations of the informants' utterances, to discover structures of meaning that are not immediately portrayed in the transcriptions (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010). When I had completed this first draft, I looked at the transcriptions, and used these continuously to confirm my interpretations and to find quotes and phrases from the interviews to support my interpretation. This is where the hermeneutic interpretation emerges, where the interpreter goes back and forth between entirety and part (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010).

However, I still felt the chapter was too extensive and that the nine different subsections became obstacles, rather than aid for coherence. Therefore, I decided to change the structure of the chapter, and in a discussion with my supervisor, we came up with four main subsections, which were to be included in the section with the school leaders' answers as well as the teachers' answers, and also a section where the school leaders' and the teachers' answers were compared and contrasted. To ensure coherence, coding schemes were designed; one overall coding scheme that includes the subcategories for the three main areas (Appendix 7) and additionally one coding scheme for each of the four main areas, divided in one coding scheme for the teachers, and one for the school leaders. These coding schemes gave me an overview of the informants' answers, and helped me keep the coherence. After a few rounds of editing and re-structuring, this has formed the basis for my presentation of the findings in my study, which can be found in chapter 5.

### **4.3 Method for Assessing the Study's Credibility, Validity and Reliability**

Credibility, validity, and reliability, are three important terms in qualitative research. A study should produce credible findings, have a method suitable for achieving these findings and be conducted so that other researchers can reproduce the findings by using the same method (Ary, Jacobs & Sorensen, 2010).

In this study, I have tried to interpret and present my findings as accurately as possible. I have tried to be transparent, so readers can read and understand my choice of method, and thereby trust my results. However, I am aware that "When dealing with qualitative methods, it is important to emphasize that the researcher to a certain degree "creates" data based on the understanding she or he has of the society" (Thagaard, 2009, p.47, my translation). As I will elaborate further on in the following subsection, my original ideas of what the results would show proved to be wrong, and I have by no means manipulated the data to suit my original ideas. Therefore, I would state the realities have been presented correctly. I have complied with the obligation as a researcher "to represent the realities of the research participants as accurately as possible and must provide assurances in the report that this obligation was met" (Ary et. al, 2010, p.498).



“Validity in the social science is concerned with whether a method is qualified to research what it is supposed to research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2010, p.250, my translation). To secure the validity of my findings, and also the reliability, I have as mentioned, asked questions such as “Have I understood you correctly when you say...?” and in this way made sure I have a common understanding with my informants, and of their utterances. In this process, I hope to have strengthened the validity by critically considering the analytic process (Thagaard, 2009). I have been conscious not to pull quotes without confirming the context in which they were uttered. To ensure the utterances would be presented as accurately as possible, I transcribed the entire interview, including sounds, pauses and hesitations. Additionally, I have consulted these transcriptions continuously when interpreting the utterances and writing and interpreting my findings.

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2010), reliability is often placed in a context with the question of whether another researcher can reproduce the same results. By carefully reading and re-reading my empirical data, and working with the interpretations carefully, I am confident that my results are presented accurately. However, Gadamer (2003) expresses that:

No utterances can be perceived exclusively with focus on its content. Every utterance is motivated. Every utterance has conditions that it does not express itself. Only one, who takes these conditions into consideration, can really assess an utterance’s truth (p. 27, my translation).

As a result, my interpretations may to some degree differ from another researcher’s interpretations, yet, I think that the overall results would come out similar.

#### ***4.3.1 Preconception and Own Role***

Regardless of choice of method, our preconception will always affect our research. Therefore, to consciously and critically evaluate own preconception, is important in relation to securing reliability, credibility and validity. Considering this, I will in the following subsection explain my background and preconception.

For the past three years, I have in addition to studying at the University of Oslo (UiO), worked as a teacher in a lower secondary school. In this study, the lower secondary school is the context, and it is from my experience of working as a teacher that the topic of the NTE came to mind, as discussed in the introduction. My preconception related to the lower

secondary school will of course affect the research process. Before working with the pilot study, and with only my own experiences of working with the NTE, I had a preconception and idea that the reason why I, and probably other teachers in the same position as me, did not work with the NTE was mostly due to a lack of communication from the Directorate. I had also heard rumours and complaints from teachers that the data system PAS was difficult to use and lacked necessary information. However, after the work with the pilot study and this thesis, parts of my ideas proved wrong, and my preliminary negative assumptions towards the Directorate proved to be misguided.

As I had some years of experience from the lower secondary school, I did not see the necessity of doing preliminary studies to get acquainted with the field. I experience that I have an adequate understanding and is familiar with the culture of the lower secondary school. However, I am fully aware that my three years of experience is not sufficient to give me a full understanding of the lower secondary school as a whole, and as I am still young and have attained most of my experience part time, I am humble to the fact that my experiences are somewhat limited. Nevertheless, in this context I am confident that they are sufficient and that the limitations to my experiences have not been a disadvantage, but rather that it has been to my benefit to attain experience in the field at the same time as my education at UiO. The constant combination of theory and practice has given me the opportunity to critically evaluate practices at the lower secondary school, while studying the pedagogical teaching at UiO. Additionally, my preconception might be less biased due to my short time of experience as a teacher, and the fact that I have had two sets of influences: from the lower secondary school, and from UiO. My preconception has also, to a large extent, been a motivational factor for my studies. In my experience, I have been consciously aware of my preconception and have used this to my benefit throughout the work with this study.

## **4.4 In this Chapter...**

In this chapter, the method for this master's thesis has been presented with the exploratory and qualitative research design, along with the study's setting, sample and informants. Also, the method for data collection and the method for the analysis of the empirical data were included in this section. Different aspects of considerations for research ethics were emphasized, and in the following chapter, I will present my findings from the interviews with the school leaders and the teachers.

## **5 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

In this chapter, I present my findings from the interviews with the school leaders and the teachers. It comprises of three main sections: 1) a presentation of the findings from the interviews with the school leaders, 2) a presentation of the findings from the interviews with the teachers, and 3) an analysis of the comparing and contrasting answers from the school leaders and the teachers. All three sections are additionally divided in five subsections: 1) Attitudes towards PAS and the guidance material provided by the Directorate, 2) Preparations before taking the NTE, 3) Using the results from the NTE, 4) Thoughts about improvement, and 5) Summing up. These sub sections are based on my interview guides (Appendix 3 & 4). Hopefully these findings will provide new insight into how school leaders and teachers relate to, and use the results from the NTE. Having provided a brief overview of this chapter, I will now turn to the findings from the interviews with the school leaders.

### **5.1 To what Extent do School Leaders Follow up the Results from the NTE?**

As presented in the assessment chapter, the school leaders have several responsibilities concerning the NTE. First, they are responsible for their school's completion of the test, and are also expected to ensure that all teachers and students have the necessary access to PAS, and ensuring that the teachers know about the example test provided by the Directorate. Second, the school leaders are committed to making sure the teachers prepare the students for the NTE by completing the example test. Third, the school leaders are responsible for informing the parents prior to the test, and providing them with their child's results after the test. In addition, the school leaders are responsible for any student exemptions.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the school leaders are responsible for following up the teachers' work with the students' NTE results. This includes making sure the teachers know the content of the guidance material, that they follow up the results in class with the individual students, and that the teachers see the test results in relation to other assessment situations. The school leader's responsibility also means making sure the teachers have access to differentiated reading material they can use in their instruction when working with the results in class. The interviews were based on the interview guide presented in Appendix 3 and the findings are presented in the following subsections.

### 5.1.1 Attitudes towards PAS and the Guidance Material

As mentioned, the school leaders are responsible for reading the guidance material and following up that the teachers have read and understood the guidance material. Moreover, they are responsible for both the teachers' and students access to PAS. As a result, the school leaders are, or should be, acquainted with both PAS and the guidance material. The school leaders present different opinions concerning PAS and the guidance material, mostly related to difficulties and a potential for improvement, I have summed these opinions up in the following table:

School Leaders	Read material	Not understood material	Confused by PAS
Leader A	X		X
Leader B	X		X
Leader C	X		X
Leader D	X		

Table 5: The School leaders' attitudes to PAS and the guidance material.

Table 5 shows that all the school leaders claim to have read and understood the guidance material provided by the Directorate. By doing so, they uphold their responsibilities concerning the given instructions related to the NTE. However, the table also reveals that three of the four school leaders find PAS confusing. As PAS is one of the most important tools related to the work with the results from the NTE, this is a worrying find, and the school leaders mention difficulties with PAS as a hindrance in the teachers' work with the results. This is exemplified by one of the school leaders. *"PAS is not intuitive. The reports and other documents are not made available enough; it is an obstacle for the teachers, which result in them not using the results from the NTE"* (my translation). The three school leaders who found PAS confusing all agree that PAS either must be simplified, or that the Directorate must offer a course to help both the teachers and the school leaders to understand properly and learn to use PAS.

As mentioned, all the school leaders claimed to have read and understood the guidance material. Yet, when elaborating on their relations to this guidance material, their answers proved that their knowledge of, and relation to it might be more superficial than what was first presented. This is explained and defended by one of the school leaders. *"We have not used the guidance material as English has not been prioritized; therefore I have not read them thoroughly"* (my translation). This implies that when the school leaders say they have

read and understood the guidance material, it does not necessarily mean they are fully acquainted with the content. Further, the school leaders presented opinions concerning the teachers' relation to the guidance material, which can be transferred to their own relations to this material, for example that the guidance material is inaccessible, in the fact that teachers do not seek information on their own initiative. This is exemplified by one of the school leaders.

*To place important material online is not sufficient for the teachers. They either need to be offered a course, which makes them spend time away from work, acquiring new knowledge, or the material must be a topic in our meetings. These are the only ways of ensuring that the teachers comprehend, and neither has been offered at this school (my translation).*

However, as the instructions to the NTE explicitly state, it is the school leaders' responsibility to ensure the teachers have read and understood the guidance material, thereby this can be considered as a disclaimer of liability from the school leaders. Regarding this material, some of the school leaders also defended their lack of use by complaining about the construction of the guidance material. For example that the material is too extensive, which makes it difficult to find specific information and that the language is too complicated, with regard to communication with the students and the parents. One of the school leaders states this as follows. *"When you are describing to the parents or the students what the levels of mastery mean, you have to translate the explanation from the Directorate for Education and Training because the words and terms are too difficult"* (my translation). Therefore, this school leader does not encourage the teachers to use the guidance material in communication with the students or the parents, but instead give information in their own words.

In other words, there is a general agreement among the school leaders that the guidance material and PAS, provided by the Directorate, are not sufficiently user-friendly. As a result, according to the school leaders, the teachers do not spend the necessary time acquainting themselves with the material in order to be able to analyse the results properly and thereby communicate the results to the individual student.

### 5.1.2 Preparations Before Taking the NTE

As mentioned, the school leaders are responsible for making sure the teachers are familiar with, and are able to use the example test provided by the Directorate as preparation for the actual test. In addition, before the test, the school leaders are also responsible for informing the parents, by distributing the parent-pamphlet, granting exemptions to those students who fit the demands, and as mentioned in the previous section, making sure all teachers and students have access to PAS. The school leaders' preparation before the NTE is illustrated in the table below:

School Leaders	Aims and criteria	School-parent communication
Leader A	X	X
Leader B	X	
Leader C	X	X
Leader D	X	

*Table 6: School leaders' preparations before taking the NTE.*

In Table 6, we see that all the school leaders focus on aims and criteria by encouraging or requiring the teachers to complete the example test provided by the Directorate before the actual test was taken. Also, from Table 6, we see that two of the four school leaders focused on providing the parents with information before the NTE was taken. Nevertheless, even if the other two other school leaders did not mention this, it might still have been done as the interview question was a general question of their preparatory work before the conduction of the NTE. Still, more of the school leaders stated that the responsibility of communicating with the parents in most cases were given to the teachers and that the school leaders both expected and required the teachers to do this as exemplified by one of the school leaders.

*“Communication with the parents, both before and after the test is a requirement for the teachers”* (my translation). Yet, as only one of the schools had written requirements concerning the NTE, the other school leaders could not confirm with certainty that this communication was conducted, merely that they had been clear in their expectations and orally presented requirements. The school with the written requirements were more confident that this was completed, but neither this school leader could confirm this as this basically is the teachers' responsibility.

Concerning the example test, the same issue related to confirmation of completion was present as exemplified by one of the school leaders. *“We have not done anything special to*

*prepare for the National test in English so far this year, other than giving the teachers the link to the example test, and encouraging them to use it. Apart from that, we have not done anything to prepare* (my translation). In three of the schools, the preparation was an expectation, whereas in the last school, it was included in the written requirements. Still, all the school leaders emphasized the importance of letting the students complete the example test, and as they said, this is not to drill the students in the task types in order for the school to achieve as high a score as possible, but to ensure the students are prepared. One of the school leaders expressed the importance of completing this example test. *“As a teacher, I would never give my students a test for which they were not prepared. For me, this is no different. This is not about achieving high scores; this is about not placing the students in a situation where they are not prepared”* (my translation). In addition to the example test and the communication with the parents, the school leaders also mentioned other preparatory work, for example having the NTE as a topic on grade meetings, making sure everything concerning the practical organisation such as access to PAS and available computers were in order, and making sure the teachers had received the guidance material. Exemptions were also mentioned but were not focused upon in the interviews.

All in all, the school leaders do preparatory work before the test, by encouraging, expecting or requiring the teachers to complete the example test, in addition to preparing the practical organizing of the test, for example with access to PAS and available computers for the test. Communication with parents is also in focus before the test, as voiced by two school leaders directly, but implied by all, especially concerning exemptions.

### **5.1.3 Using the Results from the NTE**

The use of the results is perhaps the most interesting element concerning the NTE as all the school leaders voiced they considered the NTE to be an important and useful mapping test. As the school leaders are responsible for following up the teachers’ work with the students’ results, and as the NTE’s intention is to serve as a part of the students’ formative assessment, how the school leaders fulfil this responsibility will prove interesting. What the school leaders do related to the results from the NTE is summed up in the following table:

School Leaders	School-parent communication	Feedback on results	Further mapping of students	Results on reading	Feed forward	Self-assessment
Leader A	X	X	X			
Leader B	X	X	X	X		
Leader C	X	X	X	X		
Leader D	X	X	X			

Table 7: School leaders' use of the results from the NTE .

In Table 7, we see that all the school leaders agree that they communicate the students' results to their parents. Similarly, they all agree that feedback is given to the students in form of communication of their results, with the scores and the levels of mastery. However, the focus on this feedback might differ between the schools as exemplified by one of the school leaders. *"We do not spend a lot of time on feedback to the individual student, in that relation, the ordinary teaching is much more useful"* (my translation). Further, all the school leaders communicated that they found the further mapping of the students who achieved levels 1 and 2 important, yet, this is not presented as a confirmation of something they followed up, but of something they believed the teachers did. Furthermore, it is important to note that the NTE is meant to benefit all students, and is not only a tool for identifying the weaker students.

Equally interesting as what the school leaders claim they do with the results is what they apparently do not do with regard to the results. Table 7 illustrates that the school leaders do not have a focus on feed forward based on the results from the NTE. In other words, the focus on progression concerning what is tested in the NTE is apparently not portrayed as important by the school leaders. We can also see that the school leaders do not focus on self-assessment, which means they do not value the students' reflections and assessment concerning the results from the NTE as important. In relation to the results on reading, just two of the school leaders believed the teachers related to these results and used them in their teaching. The other two school leaders were not equally confident, but still thought these results to some extent were known to the teachers. This implies that the school leaders do not follow up the teachers' work with the results on reading. The four school leaders *believe* or *think* this work is being done, but neither can confirm, and neither can explain how.



Returning to feedback, which all the school leaders presented as something they focused upon, with the students as well as the parents, Also in this case, the school leaders admitted that this responsibility is given to the teachers. Still, the school leaders are certain this is done. All the school leaders said they expected the teachers to work actively with the results, yet, they give evidence of uncertainties concerning how this work is completed, especially with to the follow up of the individual students' results. *"I wish the results would be a good indicator for the teachers related to the work with the individual student, and I wish the results would create motivation with the teachers to enhance both their and their students' competence"* (my translation). This implies that the school leaders might not use a lot of time following up the teachers with regard to the work with the results from the NTE. Still, the school leaders thought the results to a certain extent resulted in individually adapted teaching schemes, but neither could confirm this.

Concerning the test results, all the school leaders said reading was a priority area in their schools. Yet, the NTE, which mostly concerns reading, was not mentioned in their focus on and work with reading. In this context, they mainly focused on reading in Norwegian (L1), and therefore, the results from the NTE were not interesting with regard to reading as a basic skill. Still, the school leaders thought the teachers used the results on reading in their teaching but again, they could not confirm this. This is yet another signal that there might be a lack of follow-up from the school leaders.

With the exceptions of giving feedback and the preparatory work, neither of the school leaders directly linked the NTE to formative assessment. Yet, they focused on the test being a valuable mapping tool, where the students on levels 1 and 2 were identified and given extra attention, as exemplified by one of the school leaders: *"The results are useful for the teachers and the school, in relation to mapping the students and thereby adapting the teaching"* (my translation). As a result, one can say the school leaders indirectly link the NTE to formative assessment but that they are not conscious of this link.

To sum up, all the school leaders focus on the work with the results. However, only one school has direct routines and requirements, but from all the school leaders there is an expectation that the teachers work with the results, in addition to communicating the results to the parents. Furthermore, all the school leaders expect that their teachers consciously work with and use the results, but they are unsure of to what extent this is being done.

### 5.1.4 Thoughts About Improvement

As the empirical data has shown the results from the NTE is not used to its full extent, thoughts about improvement might give insight into how the work with the results can progress. In addition, the school leaders' attitudes to the NTE is relevant for the work with the results as positive attitudes from the administration might be transferred to the teachers, and thereby affect the work with the results positively, whereas negative attitudes might have the opposite effect. This section concentrates on how the school leaders reflect on improvement concerning the NTE, and their attitudes to the NTE. This is illustrated in the table below:

School leaders	Thoughts on own improvement	Thoughts on improvement concerning the NTE	Positive attitudes to the NTE	Negative attitudes to the NTE
Leader A	X	X	X	
Leader B	X	X	X	
Leader C	X	X	X	
Leader D	X	X	X	

*Table 8: School leaders' attitudes and thoughts about improvement*

Table 8 shows that all the school leaders agree concerning the topics of improvement and attitudes: all four school leaders had thoughts on their own, or their school's improvement, and all four school leaders presented ideas and opinions for improvement concerning the NTE, including the guidance material, and the assessment of the results. Finally, all the four school leaders presented positive attitudes to the NTE.

Concerning their own, and their schools' improvement, the school leaders presented different ideas, but a recurrent issue was their follow up and making sure the teachers worked with the results. Through this, however, mere comments were provided as to the school leaders' own improvement, and more elaborated opinions were provided concerning the teachers' improvement. Still, it was implied by all the four school leaders that they acknowledged their follow up might not have been sufficient, as exemplified by a quote from one of the school leaders: "*We have areas where we can improve. The teachers need to focus more on the results, we need to **make** the teachers focus more on the results, and the students should be more involved with their results*" (my translation). The school leaders presented an understanding that there is a need for concise requirements in order to make sure the teachers work with the results, but they had no current plans for making these requirements. Another area of improvement, communicated by more of the school leaders, was their focus on the

students who achieved levels 1 and 2. A special focus was given to analysing these students' results in order to get an overview of their struggles, to decide whether further mapping was needed and whether the students should be referred to the educational and psychological counselling service (PPT), but the school leaders said they had no routines for these students based on their NTE results.

Concerning potential improvements of the NTE, all the school leaders expressed a wish for the test to also be taken in the ninth grade. The students are retested in the National test in reading in L1 in the ninth grade, and the school leaders saw no valid reason why the students should not also be retested in the NTE. The school leaders emphasized this would be a valuable tool for monitoring the students' progression, and in addition, would be a good indicator of their own work. The school leaders presented other ideas for improvement as well, but these ideas varied more among the school leaders. For example, one of the school leaders wanted the levels of mastery changed from five to six levels, in order for the results to be easily compared to the grade system which ranges from 1-6. This, however, another school leader did not recognise as a good idea; he considered this a guarantee that the teachers would not work with the results as they would appear more summative when portraying a grade scale. This school leader felt the levels of mastery from 1-5 had to be understood by the teacher and explained to the students, whereas levels from 1-6 would be viewed in the same manner as grades.

When considering the school leaders' attitudes towards the NTE, as illustrated in Table 8, all four school leaders were positive to the test. They emphasized that it was a valuable mapping tool, and a useful tool for adapted education. In addition, the school leaders focused on the NTE being useful for identifying the weaker students. Nevertheless, as presented earlier in this subsection, they have no routines for following up the students who achieve levels 1 and 2. Further, two of the school leaders put a lot of emphasis on the publication of the results. One of them said that he thought the publication increased the teachers' motivation and that the teachers would strive to work better with the NTE when they knew the results of their effort was published. The other school leader who focused on the publication was more concerned with the NTE being an indication of the school's quality, when comparing the results both internally and externally.

In other words, the school leaders agree with regard to their attitudes to the NTE, and also their thoughts about improvement. They all find the test useful, both related to mapping the

students at their arrival to the lower secondary school, and related to adapted teaching within the classroom. However, they do admit that there is room for improvement, both related to their own work, and related to the NTE in general.

### **5.1.5 Summing up: School Leaders' Interviews**

This subsection will serve to answer the overall question of this section: To what extent do the school leaders follow up the results from the National test in English?

The results have shown that all the school leaders are focused on the work with the results from the NTE, but the communication with the teachers concerning this work differs between the schools. One school has written requirements, whereas the other three schools orally communicate requirements and expectations. In addition, all the school leaders said that reading was not in focus in relation to English. Moreover, all the school leaders focus on formative assessment, but neither made a direct link between formative assessment and the NTE. As a result, we can conclude that the school leaders merely partly follow up the teachers' work with the NTE. They do provide the teachers with requirements or expectations for their work with the NTE, but they do not, however, follow up these requirements.

In the following section, the teachers' answer will be presented and interpreted.

## **5.2 To what Extent do Teachers Use the NTE Results as Formative Assessment?**

In this section, the results from the interviews with the teachers are presented. These interviews are based on the interview guide in Appendix 4.

As presented in the section with the school leaders, the school leaders have the overall responsibility for following up the teachers' work with the NTE. However, this implies that the responsibility for following up each student's results lies with the teachers. In other words, the school leaders communicate to the teachers the requirements and expectations for the work with the NTE, and the teachers are responsible for fulfilling these requirements and expectations. An example would be completing the example test and communicating the results to the parents. In addition, the teachers are expected to read the guidance material,

know the content of these documents, know how to analyse the results in PAS, and then actually do the analysis and work with the results.

If the teachers fulfil these requirements, the results from the test can serve as a part of the students' formative reading assessment, as well as formative assessment on grammar and vocabulary. The test can function by portraying the students' basis for achievement in these three areas when arriving to lower secondary school, and thus serve as a basis for the teachers' feedback and feed forward to secure the students' progression. However, this is only possible if the teachers follow the requirements, which I tried to investigate in my interviews with the teachers.

### **5.2.1 Attitudes towards PAS and the Guidance Material**

As also was presented in the section with this topic in the school leaders' answers, there seemed to be some difficulties concerning PAS and the guidance material provided by the Directorate. Indeed, these difficulties are presented more in detail by the teachers, and the difficulties and relations to PAS and the guidance material are more varied among the teachers than among the school leaders. The teachers' relations to PAS and the guidance material are illustrated in the following table:

Teachers	Read Material	Not Understood Material	Confused by PAS
Teacher A1			X
Teacher A2	X	X	X
Teacher B1	X		
Teacher B2			
Teacher C1			X
Teacher C2			X
Teacher D1			

*Table 9: Teachers' attitudes to PAS and the guidance material.*

In Table 9, we see that the teachers differ in their relations to the guidance material and PAS. Only two of the seven teachers claim to have read the guidance material, of which one expressed not to understand it. Further, four of the seven teachers directly stated that they were confused by PAS. As the reading and understanding of the guidance material and the understanding of PAS are imperative in order to work with the results, these findings are worrying with regard to the teachers' relations to the results from the NTE.

First, concerning the guidance material, there is a discrepancy between some of the teachers' statements. The discrepancy is related to all the teachers claiming to have knowledge of the descriptions of the general student on each level, but these descriptions are included in the guidance material, which they claimed not to have read. This raises the question of whether they have read the material, but does not remember it, or whether they have not read it and misunderstood what I meant when I asked about the general descriptions. It can also imply that they have only briefly read the document, and only focused on the parts they felt were relevant, for example these descriptions. When their answers concerning this topic were followed up, they seemed uncertain, and admitted that they perhaps had read it, but only remembered the relevant part. It was, however, interesting to note that one of the teachers kept saying that she wished for instructions that are actually included in the guidance material, and thereby it might be safe to say she had not read it.

Second, concerning PAS, four of the seven teachers found the system confusing. Of these four, three had outright negative attitudes to PAS, they struggle to find information and feel it is not user-friendly. One of these teachers complained, *"I do not like PAS. I wish the structure was better, it is quite disordered. I cannot find the information I need"* (my translation). The teachers who do not like PAS claim the difficulty with PAS is one of the reasons they do not work with the results from the NTE. The three teachers who expressed that they understood PAS also emphasized they needed some time to get to know the system in order to find the necessary information. This is exemplified by one of the teachers. *"I think PAS is OK. You need to spend some time learning the system, but when you have learned, I think PAS is easy to navigate in"* (my translation). This might imply that PAS is not sufficiently intuitive, and thereby is more difficult for some to understand than others.

All in all, the teachers in general do not fully acquaint themselves with the guidance material provided by the Directorate. As a result, they seem confused when given questions related to this material. Additionally, more than half of the teachers are not satisfied with PAS, they do not find it user-friendly, and claim that this is one of the reasons why they do not work with the results from the NTE.

### **5.2.2 Preparations Before Taking the NTE**

As presented in the section concerning the topic of preparation before the NTE with the school leaders, the teachers have received the responsibility of preparing the students for the

NTE, by completing the example test, communicating with the parents, and in general making sure the students feel prepared for the NTE. How the teachers' prepare before the NTE is presented in the table below:

Teachers	Aims and criteria	School-parent communication
Teacher A1	X	
Teacher A2		
Teacher B1	X	X
Teacher B2		X
Teacher C1	X	
Teacher C2	X	
Teacher D1	X	

*Table 10: Teachers' preparations before taking the NTE.*

In Table 10, these preparations are illustrated. We see that five of the seven teachers say they complete the example test with the students, and that only two of the teachers claim to communicate with the parents before the NTE. Regarding this communication, the other five teachers said the communication with the parents before the NTE was managed by the school leader.

In relation to the example test, the five teachers who completed this test said this was done in class, by letting the students individually complete the test, and by going through the different task types, explaining instructions and answering the students' questions about the test. In this way, they made sure the students were prepared, and they limited the possibilities of the students facing difficulties in the test with regard to the instructions and test design. The two teachers who did not complete the example test in class expressed that this was due to challenges with time. This is exemplified by one of these teachers. *"This year, I had too little time to complete the example test in class, but the students were given the link, and were encouraged to complete the test at home"* (my translation). In other words, these two teachers did not prioritize preparing the students for the NTE, but relied on the students to prepare on their own.

In addition to preparing by completing the example test, some of the teachers focused on motivating the students for the test, to ensure they took the test seriously. For example, two of the teachers told the students the results would be used as part of their overall assessment. One of the teachers exemplified this. *"Even if they do not get a grade, they were told the results would be used in their assessment. Therefore, I felt like they took it seriously and also*

*prepared at home*” (my translation). In this way, the teachers use outer motivation to ensure the students prepare for the test, and take the NTE seriously. Still, the two teachers who had told their students they would use the results in their assessment, presented a guilty conscience as they had not used the results, this will be presented in section 5.2.3.

Further, some of the teachers criticised the involvement of the school leaders in the preparation for the NTE, and also their involvement in general concerning the NTE. For example, the teachers from the schools without written requirements claimed they missed a more active involvement from the administration to ensure they prepared correctly, and also to show there was interest for the NTE. One of the teachers stated this *“There are no written requirements that I have read. Therefore, I do not know what the administration expects, but I do know they are very interested in the score”* (my translation).

In other words, most of the teachers prepare the students by completing the example test, and some spend time motivating the students for the NTE. Yet, they do this based on their own conscience related to the students, not because of expectations from the school leaders as they feel the school leaders are not enough involved, and the teachers call for defined requirements concerning the NTE.

### 5.2.3 Using the Results from the NTE

In this subsection, the topic is the different aspects related to the teachers’ use of the results from the NTE. As it is the teachers’ responsibility to analyse the results, use the results in their teaching, and include the results as part of the students’ formative assessment, the findings concerning these topics are interesting, and these are presented in the table below

Teachers	School-parent communication	Feedback on results	Further mapping	Results on reading	Feed forward	Self-assessment
Teacher A1	X	X	X			
Teacher A2	X	X				
Teacher B1	X	X				
Teacher B2	X	X				
Teacher C1	X	X				
Teacher C2	X	X				
Teacher D1		X	X			

Table 11: Teachers’ use of the results from the NTE,



Table 11 is an illustration of the different aspects of the work the teachers do, or not do, based on the results from the NTE. As we see, all the teachers agree that they give feedback to the students with information on their results. Further, six of the seven teachers also provide this information to the parents. The teacher who stands out in this context did not provide information to the individual student. He did, however, present the group results at a parents' meeting.

Equally interesting as what the teachers do is what the teachers claim not to do. As shown in Table 11, the teachers, as opposed to the school leaders (Table 7), are not as concerned with further mapping of the students. Only two of the teachers said they view the results from the NTE as valuable for further mapping of the students who achieve levels 1 and 2. Moreover, and also worrying, neither of the teachers focus on the results on reading. Similarly, neither focused on feed forward, with comments to the students on how they can improve, nor did they focus on implementing self-assessment in relation to the results.

In other words, the teachers view the NTE's scores and levels of mastery but do not use these in their teaching. One can say they treat and use the results on a group level as they are aware of their students' overall achievements. They know the students' scores and levels of mastery, but they do not know, and do not get acquainted with how they achieved these scores, as illustrated by one of the teachers. *"To analyse each task for each student is too much work, it is intricate and inconvenient. When you see the score and the levels, you know where the students are, related to their achievement, therefore I do not do the unnecessary work of analysing the results"* (my translation). The teachers do not evaluate each student's test, and thereby they cannot offer the students essential feedback on the test. Some of the teachers provide ideas on how to use the results, but these are also on a group level. It is apparent that the teachers do not see the value in this test as a mapping tool for the individual student, but only as a mapping tool for the class as a whole. Other teachers do not see the value in the NTE at all, as exemplified by one of the teachers. *"For me, the test is merely a registration. I do not feel that it gives me more than my own assessments. I know which students who struggle with what"* (my translation).

Concerning the results on reading, as the teachers do not analyse the students' individual results, they have no opportunity to relate to these results. Surprisingly, two of the teachers did not know that the NTE tests the students in reading; they were under the impression the test was more related to vocabulary and grammar. One also thought the NTE tested the

students in writing. As mentioned, the teachers had not gotten fully acquainted with the guidance material, and related to these findings, we can see how their lack of knowledge affect their comprehension of what the NTE is. The teachers also differ in their opinions of whether they feel the results on reading would have utility value for them. One of the teachers expressed *“We are supposed to use the results in our teaching, to help the students reach the next level, to help them become better readers, but I do not know how. I cannot find the necessary information to do this”* (my translation). Whereas another teacher said *“I read with my students, but I do not focus on different forms of reading, I do not explain to the students why we read in this way or that way. Therefore, the results have no value for me”* (my translation). As a result, we can conclude that there are two reasons for why the teachers do not relate to these results. The first is because they do not know how, which can be explained by the teachers not acquainting themselves with the guidance material, and not understanding PAS, and the second is because they do not have an interest for the results. Therefore, it would seem that both the teachers’ knowledge and attitudes need improvement.

Another interesting aspect is that all the teachers value formative assessment, this is exemplified by one of the teachers *“Formative assessment is valuable to assess how the students’ progress, and whether the students have a positive or negative development”* (my translation). Still, neither of the teachers focuses on the NTE as part of the students’ formative assessment. However, even if they claim not to link the NTE to formative assessment, they still use one principle of formative assessment in their preparation before the NTE, the principle of aims and criteria, when they complete the example test. Also, feedback is partly used, when they inform the students of their scores and levels of mastery. Yet, the two final principles, feed forward and self-assessment, are not mentioned by the teachers, and they do not see how these could be implemented. However, all the teachers, and also the school leaders want to retest the students in the NTE in the ninth grade. If this were to be introduced, the teachers said they might be more motivated to use the results as they would want the students to show progression.

To sum up, the teachers do not work with the results from the NTE, partly because they do not know how, and partly because they do not see the usefulness of using the results to do so. Yet, the teachers do view the scores and the levels of mastery, and by this they get an overview of their group’s achievement. Still, without analysing each student’s result, they will have difficulties with linking the results from the NTE to formative assessment.

### 5.2.4 Thoughts About Improvement

The teachers proved to be less concerned with their own improvement than the school leaders were. Even if more of the teachers said they were not satisfied with their own work with the results from the NTE, they presented more thoughts on the administration's improvement, than their own. In addition, they presented thoughts on improvement concerning the test, the guidance material, and the tools for the analysis of the test. The teachers acknowledged more varied attitudes towards the test than the school leaders did. The teachers, as well as the school leaders, consider the NTE a mapping tool; a test that give them an overview of their classes' level of achievement, but as none of the teachers take the time to analyse the students' results, most of them do not see the value in the NTE. This is illustrated in Table 12:

Teachers	Thoughts on own improvement	Thoughts on improvement concerning the NTE	Positive attitudes to the NTE	Negative attitudes to the NTE
Teacher A1		X		X
Teacher A2	X	X		
Teacher B1		X	X	
Teacher B2	X	X	X	
Teacher C1	X	X		
Teacher C2	X	X	X	
Teacher D1				X

Table 12: Teacher's attitudes and thoughts about improvement

Table 12 shows more variation in the teachers' answers than what the school leaders presented (Table 8). Still, a majority of the teachers presented thoughts on own improvement, and most teachers presented thoughts and opinions concerning improvements related to the NTE. Moreover, three teachers were positive to the NTE, two teachers claimed to have outright negative attitudes to the NTE, whereas the final two teachers were neither positive nor negative, they considered NTE a compulsory test they had to complete.

The teachers' thoughts on improvement within the administration were mostly related to the school leaders' involvement in the work with the results. In many cases, they used the lack of involvement from the administration as an excuse for not working with the results, as illustrated by a quote from one of the teachers: *"I feel they are more interested in the score and the publication than the work with the results. If they want me to do something extra with these results, they must communicate this"* (my translation). In this utterance, there are two elements that need attention. First, the teacher says the school leader is mainly interested in

the score and the publication, which implies that the teacher has negative attitudes to the publication, or at least negative attitudes towards the administration's view on publication, which refutes the school leader's belief that the publication increased the teachers' motivation. Second, the teacher refers to analysing the results as "something extra", when in fact this is expected from the teachers. In other words, the lack of requirements from the administration, and the teachers' lack of knowledge concerning the NTE have led to the teachers' believing that the work with the results is an optional, additional effort they might choose to do.

Related to the NTE, the teachers provided opinions on improvement, and one potential for improvement stands out. As with the school leaders, most teachers wanted the NTE in the ninth grade, and they used the same argument as the school leaders, as exemplified by this quote from one of the teachers: *"There should be a National test in English in the ninth grade, in order to measure progression, to see if the student has developed in a positive or negative direction"* (my translation). However, the teacher who did not want the NTE in the ninth grade said this was because he saw no value in the NTE: *"I do not use the results. To me, my own assessments are sufficient. I have other tools for mapping the students' progression; therefore I do not need another test. In fact, I do not need the NTE at all"* (my translation).

With only three of seven teachers claiming to be positive to the NTE, resulting in four of the seven teachers being either indifferent or negative, it is not surprising that the empirical data shows little work is being done with the results. As attitudes can be linked to motivation, and motivation can be linked to the interest of working with the results, and the teachers in addition feel they are not obliged to working with the results, they apparently choose not to do it, without being left with a guilty conscience. One of the teachers argues why she is not positive to the NTE. *"The results have no utility value when they arrive in November. If we were given the results immediately after the test, they would be more valuable, at that point we do not know the students as well as we do in November"* (my translation). As with the other teachers, she views the NTE as a mapping tool on a group level, and said that when the results arrive in November, she had already gotten to know her students and their level of achievement, and she found the NTE useless as she did not know how to analyse the results.

Nevertheless, some of the teachers portray more positive attitudes to the NTE, and one of the teachers had the opposite opinion than the teacher who felt the test had no utility value. *"In the eighth grade, we know nothing about the students; therefore it is good to map what they*

*master, what they partly master, and what they do not master*” (my translation). However, as neither of the teachers has been able to do this mapping, this appears as wishful thinking, rather than a portrayal of what they actually do. In fact, none of the three teachers who claim to be positive to the NTE have taken the time to figure out how to analyse the results. That the teachers are positive on one hand, while on the other hand do not use the results, do not correlate.

### **5.2.5 Summing up: Teachers’ Interviews**

As with the summary of the school leaders’ section, this too will serve to give an overview to this section’s overall question: To what extent do the teachers use the results in English as part of the students’ formative reading assessment?

The teachers gave more varied answers than the school leaders, but as a whole, we can conclude the teachers are not as positive to the NTE as the school leaders. Further, the findings show the teachers only work with the results on a group level. A reason for this is by some explained as PAS being too difficult to understand, and that the guidance material is too inaccessible. In relation to PAS and the guidance material, the teachers’ answers vary the most; some are very negative, whereas others are more positive. Moreover, none of the teachers uses the results on reading to a more detailed extent than the scores and levels of mastery. Furthermore, the teachers have positive attitudes to formative assessment, but none has used the NTE as formative assessment. The teachers also presented thoughts on improvements, but were hesitant to elaborate on their own improvement.

As a result, one can say the answer to the main question of this section is that the teachers do not use the results from the NTE as part of the students’ formative assessment, at least not if one views formative assessment as including constructive feedback to each individual student. However, if one views formative assessment also to involve working on a group level, where the levels of the whole class is considered, the answer might be partly yes.

## **5.3 Comparing and Contrasting Perspectives of the Leaders and the Teachers**

In this section, I compare and contrast the answers from the school leaders and the teachers. I value the differences in opinions concerning the NTE to be one of the most interesting

findings in my study. The school leaders proved to agree as to what they do, what they want to do, and what they do not do concerning the NTE. The teachers, on the other hand, proved to have somewhat more varied opinions, still, they can generally be said to be in agreement concerning what they do, what they want to do, and what they do not do concerning the NTE. The most striking finding is not the differences found internally with the teachers or the school leaders, but the differences of opinions between the teachers and the school leaders, and this will be the focus in this section.

### **5.3.1 Attitudes towards PAS and the Guidance Material**

With regard to the school leaders' and the teachers' attitudes towards PAS and the guidance material, Table 5 in section 5.1.1 and Table 9 in section 5.2.1, suggest apparent differences between the school leaders and the teachers. While the school leaders claim to have read the guidance material provided by the Directorate, only two of the teachers state the same. As mentioned, the school leaders are responsible for making sure the teachers have read and understood the guidance material. All the school leaders claimed they had provided the teachers with this material, either through links to the Directorate's homepage where the material can be found, or in printed form. However, all but one school leader had presented expectations to the teachers that they read and familiarised themselves with the content of this material. The last school leader had this presented as written requirement. Still, all the school leaders trusted the teachers to uphold these requirements. However, one of the school leaders implied she knew the teachers did not take complete responsibility for the NTE: "*We have not reached our goal until the teachers, on their own initiative, without being reminded, work with the results*" (my translation). The teachers confirm this, but claim not to know about these expectations. This conflict between the school leaders' trust and expectations and the teachers' understanding of these expectations is a recurrent issue between the school leaders and the teachers, and will be referred to as: *the communication issue*.

The school leaders and the teachers are more in accordance in their opinions about PAS. Again, however, it is the school leaders' responsibility to ensure the teachers understand PAS. However, instead of the school leaders presenting the issue with PAS as a need for training in order to learn, they present the PAS confusion as an excuse for the teachers' difficulties with the NTE results. This is also confirmed by some of the teachers, who use this excuse as a valid reason for not working with the results. Some school leaders and teachers, however, did

address the notion that PAS should be simplified, or that they should be offered training in its use, but neither of the school leaders had taken any action to provide such training.

### ***5.3.2 Preparations Before Taking the NTE***

How the school leaders and the teachers prepare for the NTE, is illustrated in Table 6 in section 5.1.2 and in Table 10 in section 5.2.2. We see that most of the school leaders and teachers agree concerning aims and criteria, when discussing the example test, and the need for the students to complete this example test before conducting the NTE.

Further, concerning the communication with the parents before the NTE, we can see that there is mainly agreement between the teachers and the school leaders. In the schools where the teachers say they do not inform the parents before the NTE, we see that the school leaders do this, and vice versa. However, at one school neither the teachers nor the school leader claim to communicate with the parents before conducting the NTE. It might be that this was done even if it was not discussed in the interview session, or it might be another example of the communication issue.

In other words, there are few disagreements between the school leaders and the teachers concerning the preparations before the NTE. However, disagreements will appear in the next section, when presenting the comparing and contrasting perspectives concerning the use of the results.

### ***5.3.3 Using the Results from the NTE***

When comparing and contrasting the school leaders' and the teachers' opinions concerning the use of the results from the NTE, we find both agreements and disagreements. The use of these results is presented and illustrated in Table 7 in section 5.1.3 and in Table 11 in section 5.2.3. From the two tables, we see the school leaders and the teachers are in complete agreement concerning feedback to the students. However, it is important to note that the school leaders believe the teachers do more work with the results than the teachers admit to doing, and in this relation the school leaders might believe the students receive more elaborate feedback than solely the scores and levels of mastery, which is the feedback the teachers provide to the students. Therefore, there is a communication issue concerning this feedback, even if the tables seem to portray agreement. This communication issue is illustrated by a

quote from one of the teachers: *“It would be nice to get more precise requirements from the administration on what to do with the results, a clearer management toward the use of the results* (my translation).

Nevertheless, the agreement between the school leaders’ and the teachers’ is justified in the answers concerning communication with the parents. The school leaders believe and expect the teachers to inform the parents of the students’ results, and this is with all but one of the teachers upheld. Yet, concerning further mapping of the students, which was presented as a wish from the school leaders related to the students who achieved levels 1 and 2, we see that the teachers do not fulfil this, neither do they value the opportunity for further mapping. Only two of the teachers discussed further mapping, and this is not related to what they do, but rather that they acknowledge further mapping is possible, based on the results.

Regarding the results on reading, there is a more apparent communication issue than what can be understood from Tables 7 and 11. The two school leaders who are marked in the table are certain their teachers relate to the reading results, and use them actively in their teaching. The other two school leaders presented thoughts and beliefs that the teachers used these results, but without the same certainty. The teachers, however, do not use these results, as illustrated by a quote from one of the teachers. *“Until now, I have not used the results enough, not previous years, nor this year. Especially related to reading comprehension, I have not used the results related to reading”* (my translation). As mentioned, some of the teachers did not know the NTE tested reading, others had no interest in these results, or did not know how to analyse the results. They could not, even if they wanted to, relate to the reading results as one of the teachers said. *“I have just used the results statistically. To see where the students are, and that is that, but I want to use them more, and we want to use them in our teaching, but I cannot find the necessary information to do this. I have not found it yet”* (my translation). As a result, the communication issue is apparent.

In the final two aspects, feed forward and self-assessment, the school leaders and the teachers are in agreement in the fact that they do not use the NTE results in this respect. Still, one school leader reflects on the aspect of self-assessment. *“It can be a part of illustrating for the students what they master, and what they must work more on”* (my translation). By this, she implies it could be possible to use self-assessment in relation to the results from the NTE. However, this is no more than an idea, and as the teachers do not analyse the results, the aspect of feed forward is by no means possible.



### 5.3.4 Thoughts About Improvement

The school leaders' and the teachers' answers concerning improvements and attitudes proved to give both comparing and contrasting perspectives as illustrated in Table 8 in section 5.1.4 and Table 12 in section 5.2.4. As with the other topics, the school leaders agreed internally, and the teachers varied more in their answers. The answers, again, illustrated a disagreement between the school leaders and the teachers.

First, concerning thoughts on own improvements, the school leaders were more willing to discuss improvement than the teachers. However, the teachers primarily suggested improvement on the school leader's part, and the school leaders eagerly discussed expected improvement on the teachers' part. This is illustrated by these two utterances:

One of the school leaders: "*We have not reached our goal before the teachers on their own initiative... work with the results*" (my translation).

One of the teachers: "*It would be nice to get more precise requirements from the administration on what to do with the results*" (my translation).

These quotes suggest that neither wants to discuss own improvement as both want the other to be the first to improve and they are thereby trapped in a vicious circle, where the ones suffering, are the students. Still, it is the school leaders' responsibility to follow up the teachers' work, and the teachers explicitly state they will not do more with the results until the school leaders are more involved, and provide requirements for their expectations from the teachers' work.

Second, concerning improvements with the NTE, the school leaders and the teachers agree they want the NTE in the ninth grade. Both present similar arguments; they want to measure the students' progression from the eighth grade to the ninth. The school leaders also focus on the monitoring of the teachers' work, which the retest would provide.

Third, the school leaders and the teachers are not in agreement concerning attitudes towards the NTE. The teachers are more negative to the NTE than the school leaders, of which all four present positive attitudes to the NTE. Still, both the teachers and the school leaders refer to the NTE as a mapping tool, however, the teachers say it *could* be a useful mapping tool, whereas the school leaders say it *is* a good mapping tool, yet another example of the communication issue.

All in all, the school leaders and the teachers agree when it comes to suggested external improvement concerning the NTE, but when it comes to internal improvements, both parts have more opinions related to the other's improvement than their own. Finally, there is an apparent difference between the school leaders' attitudes and the teachers' attitudes towards the NTE.

### **5.3.5 Summing up**

The school leaders and the teachers are mainly in agreement in their answers in terms of the work with preparation, communication with the parents, improvements concerning the NTE, and to a certain degree feedback and PAS. They differ, however, in their relations to the guidance material, and in their opinions of how the work with the results is, and should be, conducted. The school leaders tend to believe the teachers do more in the work with the results than the teachers actually do. Also, the school leaders and the teachers differ in their attitudes to the test, and in their opinions of improvements within the schools. In relation to the four principles of formative assessment, most of the teachers uphold one, *Measurement for Learning* and partly uphold feedback. The other two principles are not mentioned, and considered by neither the teachers nor the school leaders to be relevant for the work with the NTE.

## **5.4 In this Chapter**

In this chapter, I have presented and interpreted the school leaders' and the teachers' answers from the interviews. From these answers, three important dilemmas have emerged: 1) the teachers, and to a certain degree the school leaders, do not get acquainted with PAS and the guidance material provided by the Directorate. 2) The teachers and the school leaders have different points of view to what is being done in the work with the results, and 3) the results are not used in accordance with their intention. These findings will serve as foundation for my discussion in the following chapter. There the findings are discussed in light of the theoretical backgrounds concerning reading, assessment and information related to the NTE provided by the Directorate.

## 6 DISCUSSION

The conflict between the school leaders and the teachers concerning the NTE, as presented in chapter 5, is on an overall level related to communication. Communication issues reflect on several topics that I presented in chapter 5, concerning both school leaders and teachers, as a recurring issue related to their work with the NTE. The different ideas and opinions concerning the NTE that create these conflicts between the school leaders and the teachers first and foremost involve how they work with the results and their attitudes towards the NTE. Furthermore, the informants presented fairly disparate opinions about the use of the NTE for formative assessment.

In this chapter I discuss how the communication issue can be solved, or at least minimized, as I believe this is imperative for the NTE to work as intended. This is relevant for the four schools in my study, and quite possibly for other schools as well. The discussion below will focus on two main questions; 1) How can the perspectives of the leaders and the teachers meet concerning the NTE? And 2) What does it take for the NTE to be used as formative assessment?

In the first section I present the differences between the school leaders and the teachers, and give suggestions to how these different perspectives might meet, in order for the teachers and the school leaders to see the same reality concerning the work with the NTE results. In the second section, I discuss potential suggestions as to how the results from the NTE can be used for formative assessment. In the third and final section, I discuss the validity of this study.

### 6.1 How can the Perspectives of the Leaders and the Teachers Meet?

My findings have shown that the school leaders and the teachers have more contrasting than common perspectives concerning the work with the NTE. A main conflict of perspectives is what the school leaders believe the teachers do with the NTE results, as opposed to what the teachers report to actually do. It might be sufficient to say, with these confusions and disagreements, that it is rather unbelievable the test is even completed.

The purpose of this section is to try to give solutions to how the differences in opinions between the teachers and the school leaders can be solved. Therefore I first discuss what the

teachers do and not do, in addition to explanations for the elements they do not uphold. Next, I discuss what the school leaders do and not do. Finally, the disagreements between the teachers and the school leaders are discussed and suggestions for solutions are presented.

### **6.1.1 The Teachers' Do's and Don'ts**

First, as presented in the previous chapter, the teachers do not acquaint themselves with the guidance material. The first step to attaining knowledge of what to do, what the NTE is, and to know the intention, would be to read the guidance material. Therefore it is worrying that several of the informants apparently only have skimmed through the guidance material, or not opened it at all, especially when they on one hand state they want to work with the results, whereas on the other, they do not read the provided information to secure the understanding of this work.

The informants' knowledge concerning the guidance material is also described by Ljønes (2012). In her master's thesis she found that all her informants knew of the guidance material, but that only half of her informants used it. However, in NIFU's (2013) recent study, they presented findings that are contradictory to mine and Ljønes'. In their survey, they found that almost all teachers had knowledge of the guidance material. However, when the teachers were given the opportunity to elaborate, NIFU's findings showed that some of the teachers found the guidance material overwhelming, difficult to navigate in, and that too much responsibility is placed on the teachers. Hence, their findings are partly similar to what my informants mentioned.

Second, the teachers do not analyse their students' results. Without this analysis, they cannot use the results as formative assessment, and they cannot attain knowledge of their students' actual competencies. As mentioned, the NTE is intended to serve as part of the students' assessment for learning. Black and Wiliam (2002) define assessment for learning as "any assessment for which the first priority in its design and practice is to serve the purpose of promoting students' learning" (p.10). As mentioned, none of the informants linked the NTE to formative assessment. However, they did claim to find the levels of mastery useful for adapted teaching, even if they do not link adapted teaching to formative assessment, and in addition, they found the results, with the scores and the levels of mastery useful for getting an overview of the class' achievement. This is exemplified by one of the school leaders. "*The results are useful for the teachers and for the school, in relation to mapping the students and*

*thereby adapting the teaching*” (my translation). By this they indirectly imply they relate the NTE to formative assessment. As a result, we can determine that the teachers to some extent use the NTE as formative assessment.

However, related to formative assessment, the work with the NTE should also be placed in context with the four principles of *Assessment for Learning* (Udir, 2012b). Yet, my findings showed only two of these principles were upheld by the teachers: Measurement for Learning and Feedback.

Concerning *Measurement for Learning*, five of the seven teachers said they use the example test in class, both by letting the students complete the example test individually, and by going through the example test with the students, explaining instructions and answering questions. The two teachers who did not do this in class still encouraged their students to complete the example test before taking the NTE. This is mentioned by one of the school leaders: “*As a teacher, I would never give my students a test for which they were not prepared. For me, this is no different. This is not about achieving high scores; this is about not placing the students in a situation where they are not prepared*” (my translation). The teachers’ use of the example test is also confirmed by NIFU (2013) who found in their survey that 66% of the teachers in lower secondary school provide their students with practice material presented by the Directorate. In addition, more of the teachers said they motivated the students before the test, for example by explaining what the test is, and also that the results from the test would be a part of their assessment. This is also in accordance with the instructions in the guidance material provided by the Directorate. However, the teachers who had told their students that the results would be used in their assessment revealed a guilty conscience, as they had not followed up on this promise, since they claimed that they did not know how.

Concerning *Feedback*, all the teachers gave feedback, both to the students and to the parents. Hence, the teachers also attend to this formative assessment principle. Ljønes (2012), Chavannes, Engesveen and Strand (2011), and NIFU (2013) also found in their studies that the results are communicated to the parents, as well as the students. However, with this principle, the teachers have room for improvement. As they do not analyse the students’ results, the feedback only contains information about the students’ score, levels of mastery, and from some of the teachers, the descriptions of the general student following each level of mastery. If they were to analyse the results, the two principles that are currently not used by

the teachers, Feed Forward and Self-Assessment, could be included in their practice related to the NTE.

The goal of formative assessment is to give the students the opportunity to progress, as stated in the Education Act (2009): “Formative assessment shall be used as a tool in the educational process, as basis for adapted teaching and shall contribute to the student ... enhancing his or her competence within the subject (§3-2, my translation). To help the students in their progression, *Feed Forward* is an important tool. None of the teachers had the possibility to use feed forward in relation to the NTE, as they did not analyse the students’ results.

However, the informants in the NIFU (2013) study also commented on that feed forward was difficult in their work with the results from the NTE, which implies that the Directorate perhaps need to clarify in their guidance material how they picture using feed forward in relation to these results.

Concerning *Self-Assessment*, none of the teachers used this in relation to the results from the NTE. Still, one of the school leaders reflected on the possibility of combining the NTE with self-assessment, as she felt the results would give the students an awareness of their own achievement. Yet, one cannot assume the students will use the results for self-assessment on their own initiative. This self-assessment depends on the teachers’ work with the results, and the teachers’ attitudes towards the test. The teachers would have to break down and explain the scores in order for it to be a part of the students’ self-assessment in the subject.

Another intention of the NTE is that the results should lead to individually adapted teaching. This is directly linked to the principles of feedback and feed forward. Adapted teaching is not only related to the students with individual subject curriculum (IOP), all students in a classroom have the right to get teaching adapted to their level. As the NTE is concerned with reading, which is an important part of the English subject, the results should provide a basis for the teachers to adapt their teaching of reading, and also choose what texts and tasks related to texts, that should be given to each student. However, this again depends on the teachers’ analysis of the results. None of my informants could provide information on adapted teaching based on the results, as the teachers had not analysed their students’ results.

### **6.1.2 Possible Explanations for the Teachers' Don'ts**

Still, there are some explanations to the teachers "don'ts". First, it is understandable the teachers to some extent might give less priority to the formative assessment of the individual student on the basis of the results from the NTE. The teachers' time and effort must be taken under consideration, and in many cases it is more feasible to work with formative assessment with a group as a whole, rather than with the individual student. Nevertheless, this does not excuse the teachers from analysing the individual students' results, merely that the follow up of these results can be placed in the context of the group, especially if there is a possibility for generalizing the students' results. For example if more students have the same difficulties. Yet, some students will always need individual adapting, to ensure they can cope, and that they do not get excluded from the teaching, if the teaching is placed on a level that is too difficult for them to follow. This adapted teaching is a demand, and in order for the teachers to secure the adaption, the results must be analysed.

The teachers' "don'ts", might also be due to a *confusion of terms* with regard to formative assessment. When the teachers were asked directly, none of the teachers said they used the NTE as formative assessment, and more of them could not see a link between the NTE and formative assessment at all. Still, the teachers to some extent use the NTE as formative assessment, when they provide their students with aims and criteria in the form of the example test before the actual test is taken, and when they give their students feedback on their scores and levels of mastery. This might imply the teachers do not have sufficient knowledge concerning formative assessment, and that a training might be useful. If they were to use the NTE as formative assessment, their first priority should be on feedback and feed forward. As Black and Wiliam (1998b, p.6) states, "Feedback to any pupil should be about the particular qualities of his or her work, with advice on what he or she can do to improve, and should avoid comparisons with other pupils". It should be self-evident the teachers provide the students with valid feedback and feed forward from the test. When a test situation presents an opportunity for formative assessment, the teachers should feel required to use it as such.

In addition to a confusion of terms being an explanation for the teachers' lack of understanding concerning the work with the results, the findings also showed the teachers need *guidelines* in order to work with the results from the NTE. As one teacher stated, "*I feel they [the school leaders] are more interested in the score than the work with the results. If*

*they want me to do something extra with these results, they must communicate this*” (my translation and clarification). As shown in this statement, the teachers are not satisfied with the school leaders’ involvement in the work with the results, or rather, the lack of involvement from the school leaders in the work with the results. It is apparent from my findings that the guidance material provided by the Directorate is not enough for the teachers to work with the results from the NTE; they also need guidelines and requirements from the school leaders.

### **6.1.3 The School Leaders’ Do’s and Don’ts**

The school leaders are intended to follow up the teachers’ work with the NTE. They are obliged to knowing the content of the guidance material, and in addition, knowing and understanding PAS. Both with the guidance material and with PAS, the school leaders are supposed to be a support for the teachers, if the teachers face difficulties. Also, the school leaders are responsible for providing the teachers with the guidance material, and to make sure they read it. Finally, the school leaders are responsible for the completion of the test, and the information to the parents both before and after the NTE (Udir, 2012c).

As my findings showed, the school leaders do not uphold all these requirements. They claim to provide the teachers with the guidance material, but as most of the teachers claim not to have read the material, it is apparent the school leaders do not follow up that the teachers read the guidance material. In relation to communication with parents, my findings showed that this responsibility in many cases was given to the teachers and that the school leaders could not confirm whether this had been done or not. However, most of the teachers said that they were in communication with the parents, at least after the NTE was taken to provide information about the students’ scores.

In relation to being a support for the teachers, if the teachers face difficulties, my findings showed that the school leaders had not acquired a full acquaintance of the guidance material related to the NTE. Also, three of the four school leaders admitted to finding PAS confusing. In other words, they do not have the possibility to be a support for the teachers. However, it seemed the teachers did not seek the school leaders for help with their difficulties.

More of the school leaders were more eager to discuss the National test in reading (L1), rather than the NTE (L2), as they claimed to have more requirements and a systemised relation to



the results from this test. This is exemplified by one of the school leaders. “*We have not used the guidance materials [in English], as English has not been prioritized; therefore I have not read them thoroughly*” (my translation and clarification). In relation to the reading test (L1), the school leaders claimed to have a better understanding of the guidance material, and additionally, they had a closer relation to the results, as the results from this test is assessed manually by the teachers. As a result, two of the school leaders said they had introduced a reading course offered to the students that achieved levels 1 and 2 on the reading test (L1), where the focus was on reading as a basic skill, and reading strategies. However, English (L2) was not used in this course, and the school leaders defended this by saying that the students’ would only be confused if English (L2) was included in this context. This might be justified, as Grabe (2009) explains, the transfer from L1 to L2 might sometimes be affected by interferences, and these interferences most often appear in the light of linguistic difficulties, as Alderson (2000) also describes. Therefore, including English in the reading course might have negative outcomes instead of positive, as the teachers do not know whether the students’ struggle is with language, or if it is with reading. Nevertheless, the reading course might benefit reading in English (L2), if the students manage to transfer what they learn on different forms of reading and how to use different reading strategies.

The school leaders portrayed mostly positive attitudes towards the NTE, both in relation to it being a valuable mapping tool, and in relation to the publication of the scores. However, it is my impression that the school leaders’ positive thoughts on the publication of the results do not improve the teachers’ motivation, as one of the school leaders believed. Instead, I get the impression the teachers feel the focus on the publication, presented by the school leaders send the message that the scores are more important than the work with the results.

#### **6.1.4 The Disagreements: How to Solve Them**

As mentioned, there is a large gap between the school leaders’ ideas of what is being done with the results, and what the teachers actually do. This might be because the school leaders think the teachers do not need direct guidelines in order to work with the results from the NTE, whereas the teachers feel the school leaders are not enough involved. Therefore, *communication* would be the first step to solve this issue. If the school leaders want the teachers to work with the results from the NTE, it is my understanding, based on the interviews with the teachers, this must be communicated far more clearly, and the school

leaders also need to spend more time following up the teachers' work with the NTE. Unfortunately, it would seem the teachers need written guidelines and requirements in order to do this work. That there are different opinions among school leaders and teachers are also implied by NIFU (2013). In their study, they found that most school leaders either stated they worked with the results, or that they wanted to work with the results. The teachers, on the other hand, implied that analysing the results was time-consuming, and therefore not all results were analysed. The teachers also stated that the work with the results was mainly up to each teacher. To enhance the possibility of the results from the NTE are used as formative assessment, the school leaders need to have a clearer picture of how they want the work with the results to be done, and they need to communicate this to the teachers, through guidelines and demands. This might lead to the teachers analysing the students' results, which again might lead to formative assessment. In addition, it might lead to the school leaders having more control of what their teachers do in relation to the NTE.

Also, it is important that the teachers and the school leaders acquaint themselves with the purpose of the test and the guidance material provided by the Directorate. As it is the school leaders' responsibility to provide the teachers with the guidance material, making sure the teachers have read the guidance material, and be a support if the teachers have difficulties with the guidance material, the school leaders need to get acquainted with this material. To have knowledge of what the test is, and how to work with the test, will ensure the test serves as more than a statistic score on a school's achievement. All tests a student is obliged to complete should be a part of their formative assessment, including the NTE. If the teachers and the school leaders use the test to its full potential, it will serve as a valuable tool for assessment.

The teachers also need to communicate their difficulties. To ensure the results from the NTE are used as formative assessment, the teachers need to voice their difficulties, in order for the school leaders' to know where the teachers face challenges. This could result in the teachers being in a position where they understand PAS, and thereby could analyse the results. If these results were analysed, they could use them in the formative assessment. If they in addition read the guidance material, they would know the NTE tests the students in grammar, vocabulary, and most importantly, reading.

The attitudes to the NTE should be addressed by all three groups, the teachers, the school leaders and the Directorate. The school leaders are far more positive to the NTE than the

teachers, and the teachers' bad attitudes will most likely lead to bad motivation, and are almost a guarantee that the work with the results will not be done, at least not without specific guidelines from the school leaders. That the school leaders are positive to the NTE was also found by Eriksen (2011), who had school leaders as informants. Most of his informants stated they had positive attitudes to the National tests, and this is also confirmed by NIFU (2013) who found that school leaders were positive to the National tests. The differences in attitudes might be due to the fact that the teachers are the ones who are supposed to do the work with the NTE, whereas the school leaders have the superior responsibility without actually acquainting themselves with the NTE. Still, there might be a need for an attitude campaign to improve the teachers' attitudes to the NTE, as only a minority of the teachers stated they were positive to the NTE.

Related to thoughts about own improvements, the school leaders and the teachers differ in their answers. As irony has it, both are more concerned with the other's improvement than their own. The school leaders want the teachers to work more on their own initiative, and the teachers want the school leaders to be more involved in the work with the NTE. However, both need to improve their work with the NTE.

There is also a difference in the school leaders' statements that they provide the teachers with expectations for the work with the results, but the teachers do not seem to know these expectations. As a result, it would be beneficial if the school leaders provided the teachers with written guidelines, as one school has done, to ensure the work with the results from the NTE. However, in addition to providing these written guidelines, they should also focus more on the follow up of the teachers' work. To ensure the NTE will be a part of the students' formative assessment, the teachers and the school leaders must have the same perspectives on their expectations for what is to be done with the results. Therefore, the guidance material is important, the school leaders' communication is important and an understanding of PAS is important.

### **6.1.5 Summing up**

In other words, how the school leaders and teachers can meet the same perspectives concerning the NTE could in fact be summed up in one word: communication. In addition, the teachers need to take more initiative in working with the NTE, and the school leaders need to improve their follow-up of the teachers' work. Still, there are some difficulties that neither

the teachers nor the school leaders can control, which is where the Directorate should offer some help, for example with PAS. If a technical difficulty is a hindrance in the work with the results, the Directorate should either simplify PAS, or offer the schools training in PAS. However, the teachers need to communicate their difficulties with PAS to the school leaders, and the school leaders need to take action in providing this training, for example by contacting their leader. Also, both the teachers and the school leaders need to get acquainted with the content of the guidance material. In the following, section, how the NTE can serve as formative assessment is discussed.

## **6.2 What does it take for the NTE to be used as Formative Assessment?**

In this section, I focus on the theoretical backgrounds of assessment and reading, and place these in a context with the NTE and the informants' answers. Suggestions for how to enhance the work with the NTE as formative assessment is provided.

### **6.2.1 The NTE as Formative Assessment**

As mentioned, the intention of the NTE is that the results should be used by the teachers in their formative assessment of the students. However, my findings have shown that this only to a minor extent is done by the teachers and the school leaders. To use the NTE as formative assessment is emphasized in the guidance material to the teachers provided by the Directorate:

Assessment for learning involves using information on your students to adapt the teaching and give the students advice on their progression. The results from the National tests can be used in this relation if the results are analysed and used in the teaching by the teacher and the students (Udir, 2012b, p.7, my translation).

That the NTE should be used as formative assessment is also signalled by the moving of the time of the test, from the spring in the seventh grade, where it was placed when the test was first introduced, to the autumn in the eighth grade, as it is today. As a result, the NTE has changed from being a summative to a formative assessment, and is supposed to serve as formative assessment between primary school and the lower secondary school, in addition to providing the teachers with results concerning their students reading comprehension. As

mentioned in the previous section, the Directorate intends that the work with the NTE should be placed in context with the four principles of assessment for learning: Measurement for Learning, Feedback, Feed Forward and Self-Assessment (Udir, 2012b).

*Measurement for Learning* is the first principle of assessment for learning, and it involves that the students need to have an understanding of what to learn and what is expected of them, by being provided with aims and criteria before an assessment situation. This principle is also emphasized by Black and Wiliam (2002, p. 14). “Students can achieve a learning goal only if they understand that goal and can assess what they need to do to reach it”. Related to the NTE, Measurement for Learning is used to ensure that the students understand *what* is being tested, *why* it is being tested and *how* it is being tested. Therefore, the teachers should explain the purpose of the test, in addition to letting the students complete the example test provided by the Directorate. As discussed in the previous section, most of the teachers uphold this principle.

The second and third principles of assessment for learning, *Feedback* and *Feed Forward*, are closely related and often intertwined. Both concern providing the students with information on competence. The first about what competencies they have, and the second about what they need to master in order to improve (Brevik, 2012). Related to the NTE, feedback can be seen in relation to providing the students with information about their scores and levels of mastery. However, for the teacher to really be able to provide the students with valuable feedback and feed forward, the students’ results must be analysed, in order for the teachers to attain knowledge of what the students actually master. As Bernhardt (2011) states, “Practitioners have generally lamented that the scores ... have little immediate and practical value, because no matter how lengthy and complex a test, the score says little more than “the score” (p.103). By analysing the students’ results, the teachers will be able to provide the students with advice on how to improve. However, my findings showed that the teachers do not analyse the students’ results from the NTE. As stated by Black and Wiliam (1998a, p.25), “The quality of the feedback [and feed forward] provided is a key feature in any procedure for formative assessment” (my clarification).

The fourth principle of assessment for learning, *Self-Assessment*, is important in order to achieve the students’ feeling of influence, their development of responsibility and reflections related to learning (Udir, 2009). The importance of self-assessment is also emphasized by Black and Wiliam (1998b, p.7). “For formative assessment to be productive, pupils should be

trained in self-assessment so that they can understand the main purposes of their learning, and thereby grasp what they need to do to achieve”. Self-assessment can also be related to the NTE. If the students participate in self-assessment, it might lead to them having a more conscious relation to their own competence with the topics tested in the NTE. The students’ participation in self-assessment related to the results from the NTE is stated by the Directorate. “You should involve the students in the work with the follow up from the test...After the results have been presented, it might be useful to let the students be a part of reflecting on own results and plan what they need to do to improve” (Udir, 2012e, my translation). Again, however, this is a principle not upheld by the teachers in their work with the results from the NTE.

### ***6.2.2 The Justification of the NTE as a Valid Test***

There are several elements concerning the NTE that justifies the use of the results, and thereby makes the NTE results suitable in the assessment for learning. First, related to what the NTE tests. As more of the teachers and school leaders said, there are few available standardized mapping tests in English, and therefore the school leaders value the NTE as useful. In addition, the teachers said that they did not test the students’ reading, apart from continuous assessment when the students read aloud in class. Therefore, the results from the NTE would be valuable, as the teachers by no other means get overviews of their students’ reading comprehension.

Second, the test is completely objective in its assessment. As the test comprises of multiple-choice tasks, the results are objective and reliable in that no subjective interferences have affected the assessment. As Simensen (2007) states, “Objective rating is impossible, or at least very difficult, in test types such as essays, conversations, or listening/reading comprehension tests with *open* answers” (p.253). As a result, the assessment of the reading comprehension will portray the students’ actual competence, of course depending on the construct validity of the test scores as a test of reading.

However, one limitation must be introduced in this context, even if the results are accurate in portraying the students’ answers, the students’ motivation for giving the answers might affect the results. The teachers do not use the results, and this is in many cases communicated to the students, therefore the students do not have the outer motivation to do their best in this test. As Manger (2010) presents, the test will not have any instrumental value in the form of a

grade, and therefore the teachers must rely on the students' conscience and inner motivation related to the NTE. Therefore, to ensure the students give their best on the NTE, the teachers should inform the students beforehand that the test will be used as part of their formative assessment, and later, follow through with this.

Moreover, the results from the NTE are suitable for formative assessment as the teachers have the guarantee that the assessment of the test is systematic, and that the test has substantive grounding. These terms are presented by Bachman and Palmer (2010), and we can say that the assessment of the test is systematic as it is "designed and carried out according to clearly defined procedures that are methodical and open to scrutiny by other test developers" (p. 20), and that it has substantive grounding as it is "based on a recognized and verifiable area of content, such as a course syllabus" (p.20). The design of the test is a careful process, which includes several instances to ensure its' validity. In addition, the test is based on some of the competence aims in English from the seventh grade, and thereby the grounding for the test is substantive.

Yet, even if the test validity is proven, and the results would be valuable in the formative assessment, my findings showed that the teachers do not use the NTE in relation to formative assessment. One reason for this might be that the teachers do not know the NTE is intended to be used for formative assessment. In order for the teachers to work with the results in light of formative assessment, they need to attain this knowledge. Still, both the school leaders and the teachers present a common wish that the NTE should be introduced in the ninth grade, and through this wish, they indirectly link the NTE to formative assessment, as their argument for having the NTE in the ninth grade is for them to see whether the students have had progression. Also, some of the teachers said that if the students were retested in the NTE in the ninth grade, it might motivate them to work more with the results, as they both would want the students to progress, and also that they did not want their students' results to reflect badly on their work if their students did not progress. In other words, there is a possibility that by introducing the retesting of the NTE in the ninth grade, the teachers would use the results from the NTE for formative assessment, as it seems the teachers need to see a concrete effect of using the results in order for them to work with these results. Therefore, introducing the test in the ninth grade might be a suggestion to enhance the possibility of the NTE being used as formative assessment.

As mentioned, the teachers seemed not to know the intention of the NTE, and in addition, they did not know what the NTE tests. Two of the teachers did not know that the NTE tested reading, whereas the others knew reading was tested, but not what forms of reading the NTE tests. As a result, for the teachers to have the opportunity to work with the results from the NTE as formative assessment, they need to know what the NTE measures, and when they have attained this knowledge, they should purposefully work with this continuously through the school year. However, this teaching should be related to assessment for learning, in other words, that they use the results to adapt the teaching and focus on what the students need to work more on in order to progress, after the results are published. Before the results are published, they should focus on the reading the students will face in the NTE. However, this teaching should not be viewed as teaching to the test, but rather as a continuous process to help the students improve, both before and after the NTE is taken.

### **6.2.3 Reading in the NTE**

As presented in chapter 3, the NTE is mainly a reading test. The reading tasks in the NTE are more related to higher-level reading processes than lower-level reading processes, and therefore the teachers should focus on the first in their teaching of reading related to the NTE. Higher-level processing is the part of the interactive reading process that focuses on the meaning-making process the reader enters when he or she elaborates on the text with own experiences and prior knowledge, whereas the lower-level processes comprises of components that often are unconsciously integrated in the reading, for example word recognition, syntactic parsing, meaning preposition encoding, and working memory, as described in section 2.2 in chapter 2.

Still, as Alderson (2000) and Bernhardt (2011) claim, in relation to L2 reading, the difficulties the students face are more often linked to linguistic difficulties than reading difficulties. Bernhardt (2011) presents in her compensatory model of second-language learning, that there are three main elements affecting L2 reading.

- 1) That 20% of L2 proficiency can be explained by L1 literacy
- 2) That 30% of L2 literacy can be explained by L2 language knowledge
- 3) That 50% of L2 reading refers to unexplained variance



By analysing the students' results, the teachers could get knowledge of the elements affecting their students' reading comprehension, and use this information to adapt their teaching.

As the process of reading is an interactive process, both the lower-level processes and the higher-level processes are included in the NTE. The higher-level processes, as mentioned, are mostly present in the reading tasks, which amount for 50% of the test, whereas the lower-level processes are mostly present in the vocabulary and grammar tasks, which together amount for the other 50% of the test (Table 2, Matrix of reading types). Nevertheless, both processes are always present, but they are focused on to varying degrees in the three different parts of the test. For the teachers, it is important to analyse the students' results, to discover whether the students' challenges are with the reading tasks, in other words, the higher-level processes, or whether their difficulties are with the grammar or vocabulary tasks, the lower-level processes. By analysing the results, the teachers can attain knowledge on whether the students have linguistic or reading difficulties. This is one of the most important reasons for analysing the results.

By not analysing the results, but merely use the students' scores, levels of mastery and the descriptions of the general student on each level in the feedback to the students, this feedback might be misguided. This is because the descriptions of the general student on each level might be wrong. As the test is divided in three parts, with 50% for reading, 25% for vocabulary and 25% for grammar, a student who for example achieves level 3 might in *theory* have correct answers on only grammar and vocabulary, and not on reading. As a result, the descriptions would be wrong as they provide feedback that the student has some form of mastering within all the three parts of the NTE (Table 3, Levels of Mastery). Therefore, it is important for the teachers to remember that these descriptions describe the *general* student, and that students in reality are never general, and additional information and comparison with other assessments are imperative to ensure valid feedback to the students.

When the teachers work with reading, both based on the results from the NTE, and the work with reading in general, the teachers should use reading strategies. Grabe's (2009) eight reading strategies, and the four main comprehension strategies, as presented in section 2.4 in chapter 2, are valuable tools the teachers can use to focus on the students' reading comprehension. Related to reading, the four main comprehension strategies, Memorizing, Elaboration, Organization, and Control, are concerned with the students' working procedures. What the students do when they are trying to understand the content of a text (Strømsø, 2007).

However, in the teaching, the teachers might find it helpful to use more specific strategies. In that case, the eight specific reading strategies presented by Grabe (2009) would be more relatable to the teaching. These eight strategies are: 1) Summarizing, 2) Forming questions, 3) Answering questions and Elaborative interrogation, 4) Activating prior knowledge, 5) Monitoring comprehension, 6) Using text-structure awareness, 7) Using graphic organizers, and 8) Inferencing. These eight strategies can all be linked to one or more of the four main comprehension strategies. The use of reading strategies is also emphasized in the guidance material to the NTE provided by the Directorate, where it is stated: “You can help them [the students] by consciously develop strategies that make them capable of coping own reading. The students must be encouraged to use different reading strategies” (Udir, 2012b, p.22, my translation and clarification). In other words, learning to use strategies are important in order to enhance the students’ reading comprehension, and should therefore be consciously used by the teachers as a valuable tool.

#### **6.2.4 The Guidance Material and PAS**

My findings showed that a majority of the teachers I interviewed claimed to not have read the guidance material provided by the Directorate related to the NTE. The teachers said the guidance material was too extensive, and that they therefore did not take the time to read it. A suggestion for solving this problem might be to develop two different sets of guidance materials for the teachers related to their work with the NTE. The first guidance material should include all the teachers need to know in the preparation for the NTE, what they need to know while the test is taken, and an explanation of PAS and how to analyse the results. It should also be clear on the teachers’ responsibilities concerning the NTE. The second set should be more focused on teaching, with teaching plans related to the results from the NTE, tips on how to use reading strategies, and the guidance material should focus on how to work purposefully with the topics from the NTE through the whole school year.

As it is today, these two sets of guidance materials are combined as one extensive document comprising of almost 30 pages. Based on my findings, it is my impression that this has an overwhelming effect on the teachers, and instead of acquainting themselves with the content, or reading the relevant parts when they need them, the teachers give up before they have even opened the guidance material, and claim the time-issue to be a valid excuse for not reading it.

As a result, they have limited knowledge of the NTE, both concerning what the test measures, and what the intention and purpose of the NTE is.

Another excuse the teachers present, related to why they do not work with the results from the NTE, is that they find PAS confusing and difficult to understand. Some of the teachers seemed to have completely given up on PAS, and had decided that PAS is impossible to use. Others, however, had taken the time to understand PAS, and therefore had a better understanding of the system. Nevertheless, it is worrying that in one way or another all the informants claim PAS to be difficult, as an understanding of PAS is necessary to work with the results from the NTE.

These reports on PAS signal that there might be a technical difficulty that actually excuses the teachers in their work with the results. As mentioned, all informants either implied or stated that PAS is difficult and not easy to understand. More of the informants also claimed that PAS was the reason why they did not work with the results. This is exemplified by one of the school leaders. *“PAS is not intuitive, the reports and other documents are not made available enough. It is an obstacle for the teachers, which results in them not using the results”* (my translation). If this really is the case, then both the school leaders and the Directorate must take part of the blame for why the results from the NTE are not used, and solutions in form of training must be made.

### **6.2.5 Summing up**

In this section, I have discussed the intention of the NTE, and the four principles of assessment for learning related to the NTE. In addition, I have discussed how the teachers should relate to the results on reading from the NTE. Further, both the guidance material and PAS were discussed. In addition, suggestions have been made in relation to how the issues the teachers and the school leaders face can be solved, and how the Directorate can be involved in this solving.

## **6.3 The Validity of this Study**

The study presented in the present thesis has strong sides, as well as clear limitations. The study has used a qualitative approach and a semi-structured interview guide. I have collected my empirical data through interviews, where the informants have given their thoughts and

opinions concerning the topic. In this study I have given the teachers and the school leaders the opportunity to voice these opinions, and the goal has been to compare and contrast how the teachers and the school leaders relate to, and use the results from the NTE. I feel that the choice of method has ensured that I have researched what I set out to research: to what extent teachers and school leaders in my limited sample use the results from the NTE as part of the students' formative assessment.

A number of studies can, in part, confirm my findings, such as Ljønes (2012), Chavannes, Engesveen and Strand (2011), Eriksen (2011), and NIFU (2013). However, while these have some of the same findings as this study, their findings still differ in the fact that they have not focused on the subject English, but more on the National tests as a whole, or the National test of reading (L1). However, some of their findings also confirmed my findings, which strengthen the validity of this study.

Still, there are a number of limitations to my study. Most important, it comprises of only eleven informants from four schools in four municipalities, which makes it too limited to allow for any claims about external validity. Still, as I have compared the teachers and the school leaders' answers, this strengthens the internal validity of the study, despite the fact that there are few informants.

However, it is not necessarily the number of informants that affects the empirical data, but how well the interviews were conducted. Nevertheless, I could have broadened my field of informants. For example, I could have included informant schools from other parts of the country. All my interviews were conducted in municipalities in the eastern part of southern Norway, and the informant schools were all rather similar.

Nevertheless, my informants were fairly consistent in their answers, especially concerning the main topics of my research, such as how they use the results. In this case, the school leaders were in agreement and the teachers were in agreement, but the two groups of informants were not in agreement with each other. Still, I find it valid that the two groups are not in accordance, as the teachers and school leaders have different roles concerning the work with the NTE, and I view it more important that the groups are in agreement internally. As a result, this signals the transferability of my study.

In the following, the concluding words of this study is given, along with thoughts for further research, and an emphasis on the most important findings.

## **7 CONCLUSION**

To conclude this study, I will briefly comment on my most important findings, give my thoughts about further research that in my opinion would be interesting to pursue, and finally, round off with some concluding words.

### **7.1 The Most Important Findings**

The findings of my study revealed three distinct dilemmas in the current use of the NTE. First, the school leaders and the teachers do not get fully acquainted with the guidance material or PAS, which means they cannot work properly to make use of the results. Second, there are apparent conflicts between the teachers and the school leaders, based on communication issues related to who is responsible for what concerning the test and the results. In fact, the school leaders believe the teachers work more with the results than the teachers actually do. Third, the school leaders and the teachers do not fulfil the intention of the NTE with regard to following up the four principles of assessment for learning provided by the Directorate. These three findings suggest that the NTE is at present not used to its' full potential, and therefore further research would be both useful and interesting.

### **7.2 Further Research**

First, it would be interesting to do a quantitative study of how teachers and school leaders relate to and use the results from the NTE, which would also make it possible to generalize the results. For me, it would be interesting to see whether a follow up study would confirm or disprove my findings.

Further, it would be interesting to include the students' thoughts and ideas concerning the NTE, perhaps with a study involving both interviews and observation. In this study one could either compare the students' answers to the teachers', or combine the students' answers with those of their parents.

It would also be interesting to research how the communication functions between all the levels involved with the NTE, from the political level and down to the student/parent level. As issues concerning communication have been one of my key findings, it would be

interesting to discover whether communication is an issue on more levels than the school leader – teacher level.

Moreover, comparing the work with the NTE to the work with the National test of reading might be interesting. In this study, I received several signals that more work was done with the National test in reading (L1) than the NTE (L2), and it would be interesting to see if this really is the case.

## 7.3 Final Words

This study has had as its purpose to give insight into how school leaders and teachers in four schools within four municipalities experience the work with the results from the NTE. My goal has been to reveal how this work is conducted, and to what extent the results from the NTE are used as part of the students' formative assessment. The empirical data has shown that there is much room for improvement concerning this work. Indeed, when the results from the test are not properly analysed and or actively followed up by the teachers, completing the NTE stands out as a waste of time. Therefore, my title sums up my feelings towards the NTE; the test is important, but as it is today, the work being done with the NTE is not enough, and it is far from being used to its full potential. As I introduced this study by saying, in my opinion, all tests we require of the students, should in one way or another benefit the students. Sadly, the teachers' work with the results from the NTE does *not* benefit the students.



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# Appendix 1: Examples of NTE tasks

## 1) Click Picture

 Utdanningsdirektoratet





IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 1

Read the text. Click on the correct picture.

The Kiwa hirsuta was discovered in 2005 in the deep darkness of the South Pacific Ocean. The creature was found at a depth of 2,200 meters. It is thought to be blind. Its legs and claws are covered with silky "fur", and it is beige in colour. The people who found it called it the "Yeti crab".




← Forrige oppgave Neste oppgave →

1 51

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

## 2) Click Text

 Utdanningsdirektoratet

IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 9

Read the question. Click on the correct text.

Who says that some people are lying? Click on the correct person's note.

I think that adults should care more about the environment. They drive their big cars everywhere, even when they could walk or use their bicycles!

Bill

I think that my classmates should stop gossiping. Some of them talk about others all the time, and what they say is often not even true!

Tony

I think that our school should have its own cafeteria. I'm tired of eating packed lunches. Every morning I have to make it myself, and it takes a lot of time!

Christian

I think that my parents should give me a dog, but they don't want to. All they care about is the extra work it would involve! It makes me really mad!


Adam

← Forrige oppgave Neste oppgave →

1 9 51

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

### 3) Click and Drag

 Utdanningsdirektoratet



IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 5

Read the text.  
Click and drag.

A hurricane passed the farm last night and my bike landed on the barn roof. Put the item in the correct place.




[← Forrige oppgave](#) [Neste oppgave →](#)

1 5

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

51

### 4) Gap-filling

 Utdanningsdirektoratet

IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 13

Read the text. Click on the correct word.

My brother's name is Brian. Sometimes  ask him to play with me.


[← Forrige oppgave](#) [Neste oppgave →](#)

1 13

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

51

## 5) Gap-filling

 Urdanningsdirektoratet

IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 15

Read the text. Click on the correct word(s).

A horse that had been frightened by a dog became really wild and fell on top of the instructor who was trying to calm him down. The horse Sky Star, weighed 450 kilos. Sky Star soon  up again without  injuries, but the instructor had problems standing afterwards. He  his knee and needed surgery. Even so, he was lucky because the accident could have caused serious injuries.

← Forrige oppgave

Neste oppgave →

1

15

51

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

## 6) Multiple Choice (Short)

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 16

Read the text. Click on the correct answer.

All children should be able to walk to school safely, but for one group of kids in Wales, that was almost impossible. Their route to school was along a road with no pavements, fast cars and tight bends. Not a safe option! So they campaigned to get their local council to build a footpath - and they won!

© BBC MMX

**What did the children want?**

- ☐ A local school near their homes
- ☐ A new road for the heavy traffic
- ☐ A less dangerous school route
- ☐ A fast way to get to school on time

← Forrige oppgave

Neste oppgave →


1

16

51

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

## 7) Multiple Choice (story)

 Utdanningsdirektoratet

IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 22

HARRIET TUBMAN & ROSA PARKS - QUESTION 1/5

Read the text. Click on the correct answer.

Harriet Tubman was born into slavery in Maryland in 1822. In 1849 she escaped with her brother to Philadelphia. She couldn't stop thinking about her mother, father and other siblings though. She decided to go back and free them as well, and did exactly that. But it didn't stop there; for eleven years she kept returning to Maryland, rescuing around seventy slaves in total. She became an activist and her work helped to put an end to slavery. After the abolition of slavery, she started working for women's rights in America. Many schools have been named after her. She died in 1913 at the age of 91, having become an African American icon of freedom. In 1999, hip-hop artist Rah Digga dedicated an entire album to her life work, with the title "Dirty Harriet".

Another African American icon was born in 1913. Rosa Parks spent half her life fighting for the rights of African Americans. In 1955 she refused to give up her seat on a bus to a white passenger. At that time there was a colour line on buses. African Americans had to sit in the back and others up front. Her arrest for this 'crime' led to the Alabama bus boycott, which lasted for almost six months. The boycott meant that white sympathisers and African Americans refused to use the buses. In November 1956 a court ruling permitted African Americans to sit anywhere they wanted on buses in Alabama. Parks continued to fight for civil rights and received many awards for her work. She died in 2005 at the age of 92. Several songs have been dedicated to her, including "Rosa Parks" by the hip-hop duo Outkast.

**What is true about Harriet Tubman that is not true about Rosa Parks?**

☐ She was a very brave woman.

☐ She lived to be over 90 years old.

☐ She received many awards.

☐ She freed herself from slavery.

1

22


51

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

← Forrige oppgave

Neste oppgave →

## 8) Click Word

 Utdanningsdirektoratet

IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 33

Read the text. Click on the correct word.

Click on the word that means almost the same as "trips".

Rainy afternoons, long car journeys, double maths... Everyone knows what it's like to be bored out of your skull. The minutes seem like hours and you soon start feeling frustrated.

Ditt svar:

1

33

51

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

← Forrige oppgave

Neste oppgave →



## 9) Who Could Say?

### Oppgave 27

#### FRIENDSHIP - QUESTION 1/6

Read the text. Click on the name of the person or animal that could be speaking.

**Who could say: "I was older than him, but he was my best friend"?**

Joey was a beautiful young horse, who lived on a farm in Devon, England. He was red, with four white socks, and a white cross on his forehead. His owner was a 13-year-old boy called Albert, and he trained Joey to pull the plough on the farm. Then the First World War started, and Albert's father sold Joey to the army. *War Horse* is the story of Joey, and what happened to him during that terrible war.


Joey tells his own story. He trains to be an army horse with the help of kind Captain Nicholls. He learns not to be scared of the noise of guns. Then he is put on a ship to France and goes to the very middle of the fighting. He pulls ambulance wagons for the British soldiers, and carries heavy guns for the German soldiers. He realises that there are good and bad people, both French, English and German. He misses Albert, but his best friend is an older horse called Tophorn, who looks after him.

The story about Joey and the Great War is not all sad. It is happy as well - it is also about friendship. Friendship between horses, between men, English, French and German, and between a man and his horse. The night Captain Nicholls is killed, Tophorn helps Joey: "Tophorn stood over me that night. We looked out together over the moonlit valley, and I longed for home. The guns were silent at last. Tophorn sank down beside me and we slept."

Who wrote *War Horse*? A famous English writer called Michael Morpurgo. His children's stories, for young and old, are very popular. But adults love his stories, too. *War Horse* is now a play in London, and a film is coming soon.

Is the story of Joey true? Well, there is a picture of Joey in a church Hall in Devon, England. It was painted in 1914 by Captain Nicholls.

## 10) Write Word

 Utdanningsdirektoratet

IKKE PÅLOGGET

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

Oppgave 41

Complete the sentence using the correct form of the verb **"to do"**.

Neil likes skiing a lot, but he  not like ski jumping.

← Forrige oppgave

Neste oppgave →

1

41

51

2012 - 8 - Hovedprøve

## 11) Move Paragraph

### Oppgave 51

Read the paragraphs below. Click on the arrows to put the paragraphs in the correct order. The first paragraph is given.

**Beatrice has a very busy schedule today. She woke up early and started to think about everything she has to do.**

Finally, she has football practice. The football field where her team plays is not very far from her grandmother's, so Beatrice will not go home first. Hopefully she'll be able to run after a big meal!

Ned  
↓

When Beatrice has been to the dentist, she is going to visit her grandmother. Beatrice has promised to run some errands for her. In return, Grandma is going to make Beatrice's favourite dinner, roast chicken, and she is really looking forward to that!

↑  
Opp

Ned  
↓

After school she has a dentist appointment. Beatrice is worried that she may have a lot of cavities because she's eaten so much candy lately! Still, she's been careful to brush her teeth, so it may not be too bad.

↑  
Opp

Ned  
↓

First there is school, of course. She is going to have a very important math test and her teacher has told them to be prepared for questions on everything they've learned so far this year. It is going to be quite tough!

↑  
Opp

← Forrige oppgave

Lever prøve

→

1

51

## Appendix 2: Information letter

### *Forespørsel om deltakelse i masterarbeid om bruk av resultater fra nasjonale prøver i engelsk*

#### BAKGRUNN OG HENSIKT

I forbindelse med mitt mastergradsarbeid innenfor engelsk didaktikk ved Universitetet i Oslo ønsker jeg å undersøke læreres og skoleleders arbeid med resultater fra nasjonale prøver i engelsk. De nasjonale prøvene i engelsk måler elevers oppnåelse av kompetansemålene i engelsk for 7.trinn i forhold til leseforståelse, vokabular og grammatikk. Hensikten med dette masterarbeidet er å kartlegge læreres og skoleleders arbeid med resultatene fra disse prøvene. Jeg ønsker å finne ut hvordan disse resultatene behandles av nevnte parter i dag, samt eventuelle ønsker om forbedringer rundt dette temaet. Dette er en forespørsel til deg som lærer/skoleleder om å delta i dette prosjektet. Temaene som ønskes besvart er:

- Hvordan forholder lærere og skoleleder seg til resultatene fra nasjonale prøver?
- Hvordan følges og behandles resultatene på undervisningsnivå, skolenivå og politisk nivå?
- Hvordan ønsker lærere og skoleleder ideelt at en slik oppfølging skal foregå?

#### HVA INNEBÆRER MASTERARBEIDET?

I dette masterarbeidet ønsker jeg å gjøre intervjuer ved fire skoler. På hver skole ønsker jeg å intervju med 1-2 engelsklærere på 8. trinn, samt skoleleder. I arbeidet vil jeg gjennomføre en samtale hvor temaene ovenfor står i fokus. Jeg ønsker å gjøre intervjuene i to omganger. Første intervjurunde ønsker jeg å ha med skolelederne i september. Andre intervjurunde ønsker jeg å ha med lærerne i november/desember. Samtalene vil vare i om lag én time og vil bli tatt opp på lydbånd og skrevet av. Alle informantene og skolenes navn vil være anonymisert og ikke mulig å identifisere.

Jeg håper dere ønsker å delta i mitt masterarbeid. Er det spørsmål i forbindelse med henvendelsen, kan jeg nås på 930 66 542, eller e-post: [mnsibber@student.uv.uio.no](mailto:mnsibber@student.uv.uio.no)

Eventuelt kan dere også kontakte min veileder, Lisbeth Brevik på [l.m.brevik@ils.uio.no](mailto:l.m.brevik@ils.uio.no).

Med vennlig hilsen

Marthe Sibbern

# Appendix 3: Interview guide: School leader

## SAMTALEGUIDE SKOLELEDER

### BRIEFING

- Fortelle litt om formålet med intervjuet og hva lydopptakeren skal brukes til osv.
  - o *Formålet med intervjuet er å kartlegge skoleleders bruk og ønsker i forhold til resultatene fra nasjonale prøver. Mitt mål er å kartlegge både situasjonen slik den er i dag, samt ønsker for forbedring både hos lærere og skoleleder.*
- Informanten skriver under samtykkeerklæring
- Spør om informanten har noen spørsmål før intervjuet begynner
- Spør om informanten foretrekker å gjøre intervjuet på norsk eller engelsk

### NASJONALE PRØVER

**Hvordan har skolen, og du som skoleleder, lagt opp til arbeid med nasjonale prøver dette skoleåret?**

- Kan du fortelle meg litt om dine tanker rundt bruken av resultatene på nasjonale prøver?
- Hva gjør du som skoleleder for å føle opp resultatene fra nasjonale prøver?
- På hvilken måte tror du resultatene kan være et verktøy i undervisningen?
- Hvordan mener du dine lærere bør forholde seg til resultatene?
- Oppfordrer du, som skoleleder, dine lærere til å arbeide med resultatene? (I så fall, på hvilken måte?)

### INNDELING AV KLASSE

**Har du noen erfaring med å dele inn klassen i grupper på bakgrunn av resultatene?**

- Føler du at de nasjonale prøvene kunne vært et nyttig verktøy i forhold til en slik gruppedeling?
- Tror du dine lærere legger opp til differensierte oppgaver på bakgrunn av resultatene?
- Er for eksempel laget lesegrupper på ulike nivåer?
- Føler du at lærerne har tilgang til materiell som tillater en slik inndeling?

## ØNSKER

**Nå har vi snakket en del om praktisering og behandling av resultatene på nasjonale prøver. Ideelt sett, hva skulle du ønske at resultatene ga?**

- Synes du resultatene er enkle å arbeide med? Kunne de blitt presentert på en annen måte?
- Føler du at oppfølgingen av resultatene er enkelt, eller kunne det vært gjort på en annen måte?
- Kunne du på noen måte fått bedre utbytte av disse resultatene?

## AVSLUTNING

Er det noe annet du tenker vi ikke har vært inne på i løpet av denne samtalen som du gjerne vil si noe om eller spørre om før vi avslutter intervjuet?

Avslutningsvis vil jeg gjerne spørre deg om hvordan du har opplevd denne intervjusituasjonen?

Er det i orden for deg at jeg eventuelt kontakter deg igjen dersom det er noe jeg lurer på etter jeg har hørt og lest gjennom intervjuet? (andregangskontakt)

# Appendix 4: Interview guide: Teachers

## SAMTALEGUIDE LÆRER

### BRIEFING

- Fortelle litt om formålet med intervjuet og hva lydopptakeren skal brukes til osv.
  - o *Formålet med intervjuet er å kartlegge læreres bruk og ønsker i forhold til resultatene og kartleggingen som nasjonale prøver gir. Mitt mål er å kartlegge både situasjonen slik den er i dag, samt ønsker for forbedring både hos lærere og skoleleder.*
- Informanten skriver under samtykkeerklæring
- Spør om informanten har noen spørsmål før intervjuet begynner
- Spør om informanten foretrekker å gjøre intervjuet på norsk eller engelsk

### NASJONALE PRØVER

**Kan du begynne med å fortelle meg litt om dine tanker rundt bruken av resultatene på nasjonale prøver?**

- Hvordan forholder du deg til resultatene?
- Hvordan behandler du kartleggingsresultatene?
- Har du gjort noe i forhold til resultatene?

**Resultatene fra nasjonale prøver deler elevene inn i fem nivåer. Har du brukt mestringsnivåene i din undervisning? (Ja – hvordan?, nei – hvorfor?)**

- På hvilken måte tror du disse nivåene kan være et verktøy i undervisningen?
- Hvordan forholder du deg til beskrivelsen av «den generelle eleven» innenfor de forskjellige mestringsnivåene?
- Føler du at beskrivelsene er et hjelpemiddel i arbeidet med resultatene?

**Synes du veiledningsdokumentene fra udir er nyttige hjelpemidler i arbeidet med resultatene?**

- Hvordan bruker du disse veiledningsdokumentene?

**Hvordan liker du PAS?**

- Hva finner du av informasjon i PAS?

**Har skolen retningslinjer for arbeidet med nasjonale prøver?**

- Opplever du at skoleledelsen er engasjert og involvert i arbeidet med de nasjonale prøvene?

## LESING OG LESESTRATEGIER

**Har du ved bruk av resultatene satt deg inn i ulike lesemåter hos elevene dine?**

- **Ja – hvordan? Nei – hvorfor?**

*De nasjonale prøvene har en statistisk behandling av resultater i forhold til poeng og nivå, som vi har snakket om, men dersom man går inn i hver enkelt oppgave kan man også finne ut noe om elevers lesemåter. Er dette noe du har fokusert på?*

- Resultatene viser ulike evner hos elevene, for eksempel evne til å finne informasjon, evne til å reflektere over innhold og evne til å finne hovedpunkter i tekstene. Ut fra dette kan man lese elevers svakheter og styrker og dermed legge til rette for videre arbeid. Hva er dine tanker rundt dette?
- Jeg tenker for eksempel på ulike lesestrategier, benytter du deg av dette i differensiert undervisning?
- *Aktivering av forkunnskaper, skumlesing, skanning, tolke innhold ut fra tittel også videre. Tilrettelagt til elevers svakheter, målt i prøven.*

## FORMATIV VURDERING

**Hva er dine tanker rundt formativ vurdering (Underveisvurdering)?**

- Hvordan bruker du formativ vurdering i din undervisning?
- Opplever du at de nasjonale prøvene kan være en del av den formative vurderingen?
- Er formativ vurdering i fokus på denne skolen?

**(Har du noen erfaring med å dele inn klassen i nivådelte grupper på bakgrunn av resultatene?)**

- Har du lagt opp til differensierte oppgaver på bakgrunn av resultatene?
- Har du for eksempel laget lesegrupper på ulike nivåer?
- Føler du at du har tilgang til materiell som tillater en slik inndeling?
- Er de generelle beskrivelsene av elevene et hjelpemiddel i en slik inndeling? (*Evt. Ha med oversikten over inndelingen dersom lærer er usikker på dette*) I forhold til valg av materiell og arbeidsoppgaver?
- Er differensiert undervisning i fokus på denne skolen?)

## ØNSKER

**Nå har vi snakket en del om din bruk av resultatene på nasjonale prøver. Hva skulle du ønske at resultatene ga deg?**

- Synes du resultatene er enkle å arbeide med? Kunne de blitt presentert på en annen måte?
- Føler du at oppfølgingen av resultatene er enkelt, eller kunne det vært gjort på en annen måte?
- Kunne du på noen måte fått bedre utbytte av resultatene?
- Hva tenker du om at det ikke er nasjonale prøver i engelsk på niende trinn?
- Hva er dine tanker rundt at leseprøven er på papir, og de to andre prøvene er digitale?
- Er du fornøyd med ditt eget arbeid med de nasjonale prøvene?

## AVSLUTNING

Er det noe annet du tenker vi ikke har vært inne på i løpet av denne samtalen som du gjerne vil si noe om eller spørre om før vi avslutter intervjuet?

Avslutningsvis vil jeg gjerne spørre deg om hvordan du har opplevd denne intervjusituasjonen?

Er det i orden for deg at jeg eventuelt kontakter deg igjen dersom det er noe jeg lurar på etter jeg har hørt og lest gjennom intervjuet? (andregangskontakt)



# Appendix 5: Primary consent



## Samtykkeerklæring

Jeg samtykker med dette å delta i masterstudien «The English National Test as Formative Assessment: To what Extent do School Leaders and Teachers use the Results to Improve English Teaching?». Jeg er kjent med hva studien går ut på og at jeg når som helst kan trekke meg fra studien uten at det får konsekvenser for meg.

Dato/Sted:...../.....Navn:.....

## Appendix 6: Secondary consent



### Samtykke til andregangskontakt

I forbindelse med masterstudien «The English National Test as Formative Assessment: To what Extent do School Leaders and Teachers use the Results to Improve English Teaching?». samtykker jeg at student Marthe Sibbern, kan kontakte meg igjen på et senere tidspunkt for eventuell ny samtale.

Dato/Sted:...../.....Navn:.....

## Appendix 7: Coding scheme: Findings

Material from the Directorate for Education and Training	Preparations before the National test in English	The use of the results	Attitudes and thoughts about improvement
Read material ☒ Not understood material ☒ Confused by PAS ☒	Aims and Criteria* School-parent communication#	School-parent communication ☒ Feedback on results* Feed Forward* Self-Assessment* Results on Reading #☒ Further Mapping of students ☒	Thoughts about own improvement ☒ Thoughts about improvement concerning the NTE ☒ Positive attitudes to the NTE ☒ Negative attitudes to the NTE ☒

\* Terms collected from the Directorate for Education and Training's principles on assessment for learning

☒ Terms that have turned up during the interviews

# Terms presented by the Directorate for Education and Training in their guidance material to the NTE